

**ALEX PEACE-MAKING AND SOCIAL COHENSION PROGRAMME**

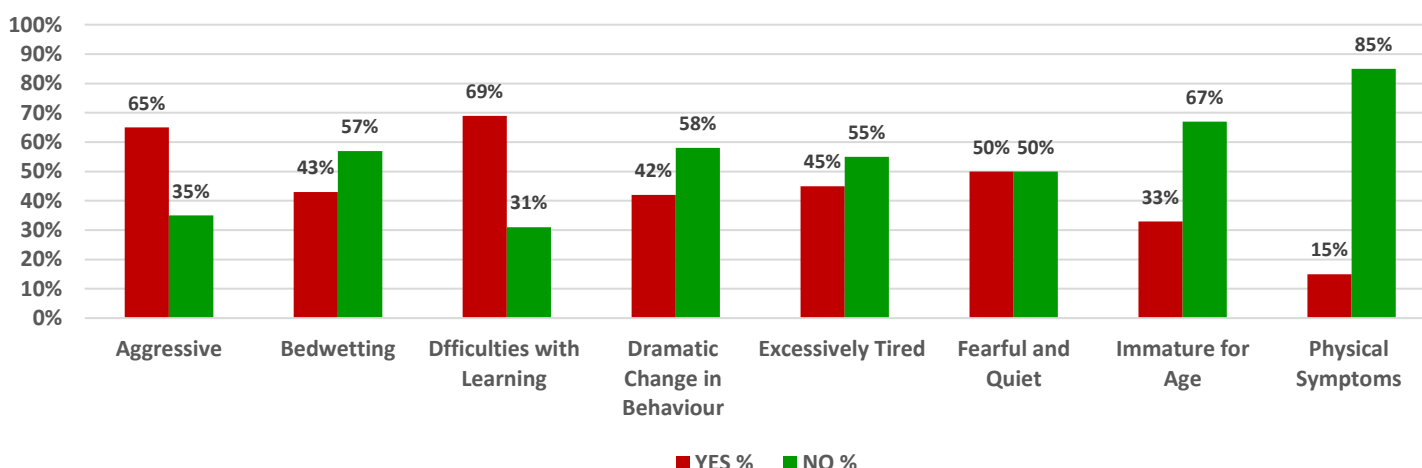
**QUESTIONS  
POSED TO  
CAREGIVERS**



**THE PROGRAMME**

Screening for children by caregiver participants from 53 early childhood development centres in Alexandra in November 2022, was done through a questionnaire focussing on behavioural changes, social and physical development, personality, and general health of children that may be concerning or possible indicators of domestic child abuse. Below are the findings from the participants' responses.

**RESULTS**



- Does the child behave aggressively? They may be disruptive, violent or damage property.
- Has the child recently begun to wet the bed, when they were previously toilet trained?
- Is the child demonstrating difficulties with respect to learning e.g., poor concentration, learning new concepts, delayed speech?
- Is there a dramatic change to the child's behaviour? Either from quiet and withdrawn to aggressive and disruptive, or vice versa.
- Is the child excessively tired? Either fighting sleep or sleeping excessively?
- Does the child appear to be clingy, anxious, unresponsive, significantly quiet or present with low self-esteem?
- Does the child behave younger than they are e.g., baby talk and generally immature behaviour?
- Does the child frequently present with physical symptoms such as tummy aches and/or headaches?

**DISCUSSION**

Findings show that caregivers observed most children to be demonstrating difficulties with respect to learning, appear to be clingy, anxious, unresponsive, significantly quiet and present with low self-esteem, and behave aggressively.

Some caregivers highlight they brought the behavioural concerns observed to parents' attention without avail regarding the information shared. They mention that parents usually seem surprised and respond by alluding that children behave quite differently and show no concerns at home. Caregivers also state that children may be going through direct or indirect traumatic experiences from home, this may include various forms of abuse such as witnessing violent and/or aggressive behaviour from parents or elders. As a result, this may negatively impact the children's behaviour, development, and personality in various ways; as some present with extreme withdrawal and isolation symptoms while others show signs of anger, act violently and aggressively towards their peers.

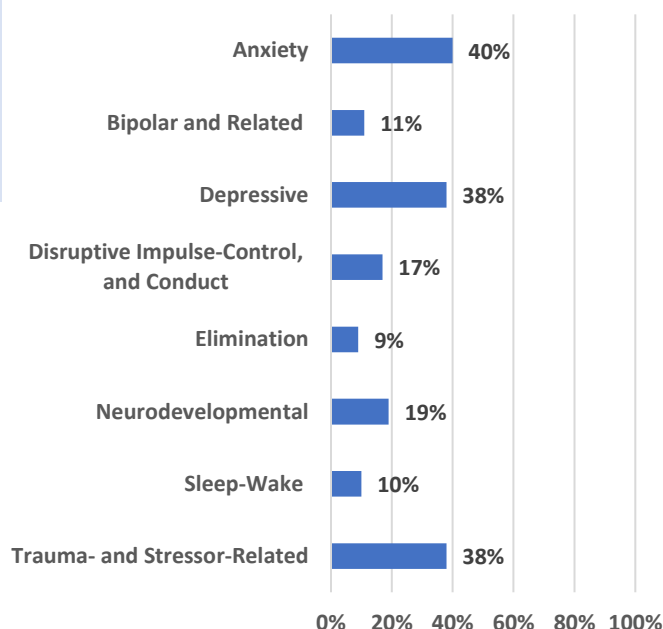
**RECOMMENDATIONS  
BY CAREGIVERS**

- Children get examined accordingly by professionals to receive necessary assistance and support.
- Caregivers should receive proper training, skills, and information to identify and respond accordingly to cases of child domestic violence at their centres, in contrast to their current utilisation of personal discretion and judgement.
- Every early childhood development centre should work closely with community social workers and local clinics to enable caregivers to refer cases that may involve indicators of child domestic violence.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

The symptoms are possible indicators of domestic violence, but it would be bias to assume that there is no other explanation(s) for the behaviour. Either way, the symptoms raise a red flag for the risk to the child's mental health and/or the development of a mental disorder(s).

Although the occurrence and prevention of domestic violence have to be addressed, it is imperative that the children be assessed and treated for possible mental health conditions as a result thereof. The child's behaviour, as reported, displayed possible symptoms of the following disorders, as per the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (published by the American Psychiatric Association, 5th edition):



American Psychiatric Association: Desk Reference to the Diagnostic Criteria From DSM-5. Arlington, VA, American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

**CONCLUSION**

It is evident that caregivers have concerns with regards to the behaviour and the holistic development of children in most early childhood development centres, which may potentially be indicators of child domestic violence. In response to the findings herein, it would be of paramount significance that necessary measures, as per recommendations, be taken.

**MENTAL HEALTH**

The overall wellness of how a person thinks, regulates their feelings, and behaves.

Sometimes people experience a significant disturbance in this mental functioning. A mental disorder may be present when patterns or changes in thinking, feeling, or behaving cause distress or disrupt a person's ability to function. A mental health disorder may affect how well you:

- Maintain personal or family relationships
- Function in social settings
- Perform at work or school
- Learn at a level expected for your age and intelligence
- Participate in other important activities

A diagnosis of a mental health condition (or disorder) may be made by a diagnostic assessment of symptoms by a mental health specialist. With appropriate support, the mental health condition can be identified, and one can receive appropriate treatment, such as medication or counselling.