

# Lessons learned from research into child maltreatment in China and the Asia-Pacific Region

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**UNICEF (2012) and Fry et al (2012) summarised the findings from a comprehensive review of all published data on child maltreatment in the Asia Pacific region**

Further recent analyses reveal the full range of estimates of child maltreatment, (Fang et al, 2015a, 2015b; Ji et al, 2013; Moore et al, 2015)



# Research in China



# The Evolving Evidence Base for Child Protection in Chinese Societies

Michael P. Dunne, PhD, Jing Qi Chen, MD, PhD,  
and Wan Yuen Choo, PhD

Child maltreatment is a substantial public health problem worldwide. Although extensively studied in Western countries, it

## The burden of child maltreatment in China

Xiangming Fang,<sup>a</sup> Deborah A Fry,<sup>b</sup> Kai Ji,<sup>c</sup> David Finkelhor,<sup>c</sup> Jingqi Chen,<sup>d</sup> Patricia Lannen<sup>e</sup> & Michael P Dunne<sup>f</sup>

## Literature reviews

**Objective** To estimate the health and economic burdens of child maltreatment in China.

**Methods** We did a systematic review for studies on child maltreatment in China using PubMed, Embase, PsycInfo, CINAHL-EBSCO, ERIC and the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure databases. We did meta-analyses of studies that met inclusion criteria to estimate the prevalence of child neglect and child physical, emotional and sexual abuse. We used data from the 2010 global burden of disease estimates to calculate disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) lost as a result of child maltreatment.

**Findings** From 68 studies we estimated that 26.6% of children under 18 years of age have suffered physical abuse, 19.6% emotional abuse, 8.7% sexual abuse and 26.0% neglect. We estimate that emotional abuse in childhood accounts for 26.3% of the DALYs lost because of mental disorders and 18.0% of those lost because of self-harm. Physical abuse in childhood accounts for 12.2% of the DALYs lost because of depression, 17.0% anxiety, 20.7% problem drinking, 18.8% illicit drug use and 18.3% self-harm. The consequences of physical abuse of children costs China an estimated 0.84% of its gross domestic product – i.e. 50 billion United States dollars – in 2010. The corresponding losses attributable to emotional and sexual abuse in childhood were 0.47% and 0.39% of the gross domestic product, respectively.

**Conclusion** In China, child maltreatment is common and associated with large economic losses because many maltreated children suffer substantial psychological distress and might adopt behaviours that increase their risk of chronic disease.

# Meta-analyses of Chinese research (Ji and Finkelhor, 2015 a,b,c)

- Ji, Finkelhor and Dunne (2013) and Ji and Finkelhor (2015) have drawn together all of the evidence published in Chinese and English regarding
  - sexual abuse, physical abuse
  - emotional abuse and child neglect
- The reviews provide the best estimates from all available research with Chinese people in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan

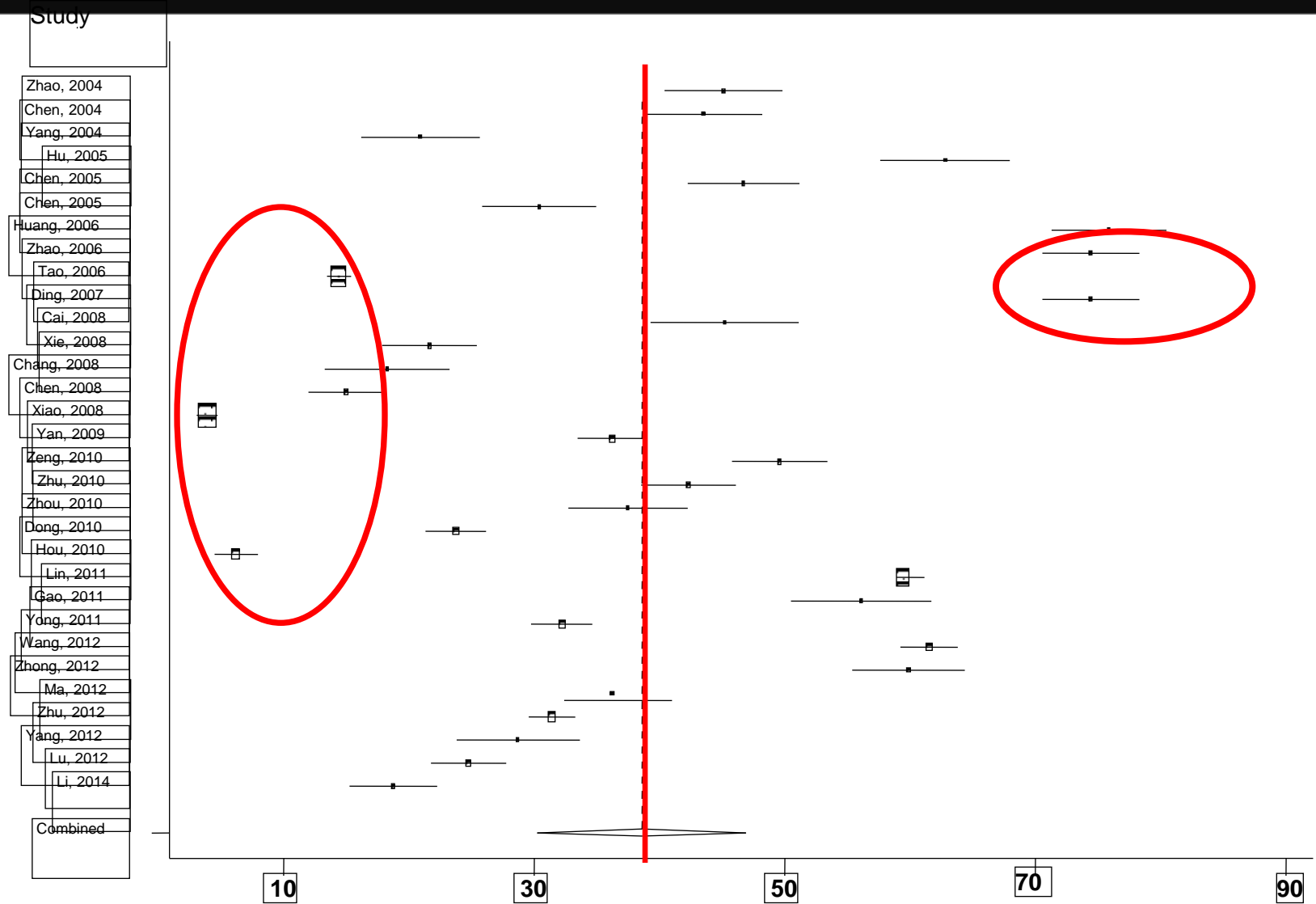
# How common is child abuse and neglect in China?

- Based on 68 studies reporting prevalence up to 2014, we found approximately:
- Physical abuse – 42%
- Emotional abuse – 37%
- Contact sexual abuse – 9%
- Neglect- 28%
- **These estimates are in the middle of wide international ranges, except CSA which is lower than most countries**

## **Overall, there is very wide diversity in estimates in China (and the Asian region)**

- The ranges of Chinese estimates are very wide -
- Emotional Abuse: 5% to 75%
- Physical Abuse: 5% to 95%
- Sexual abuse: from 2% to 20%
- *Historically, the breadth of estimates in the USA has been much the same*

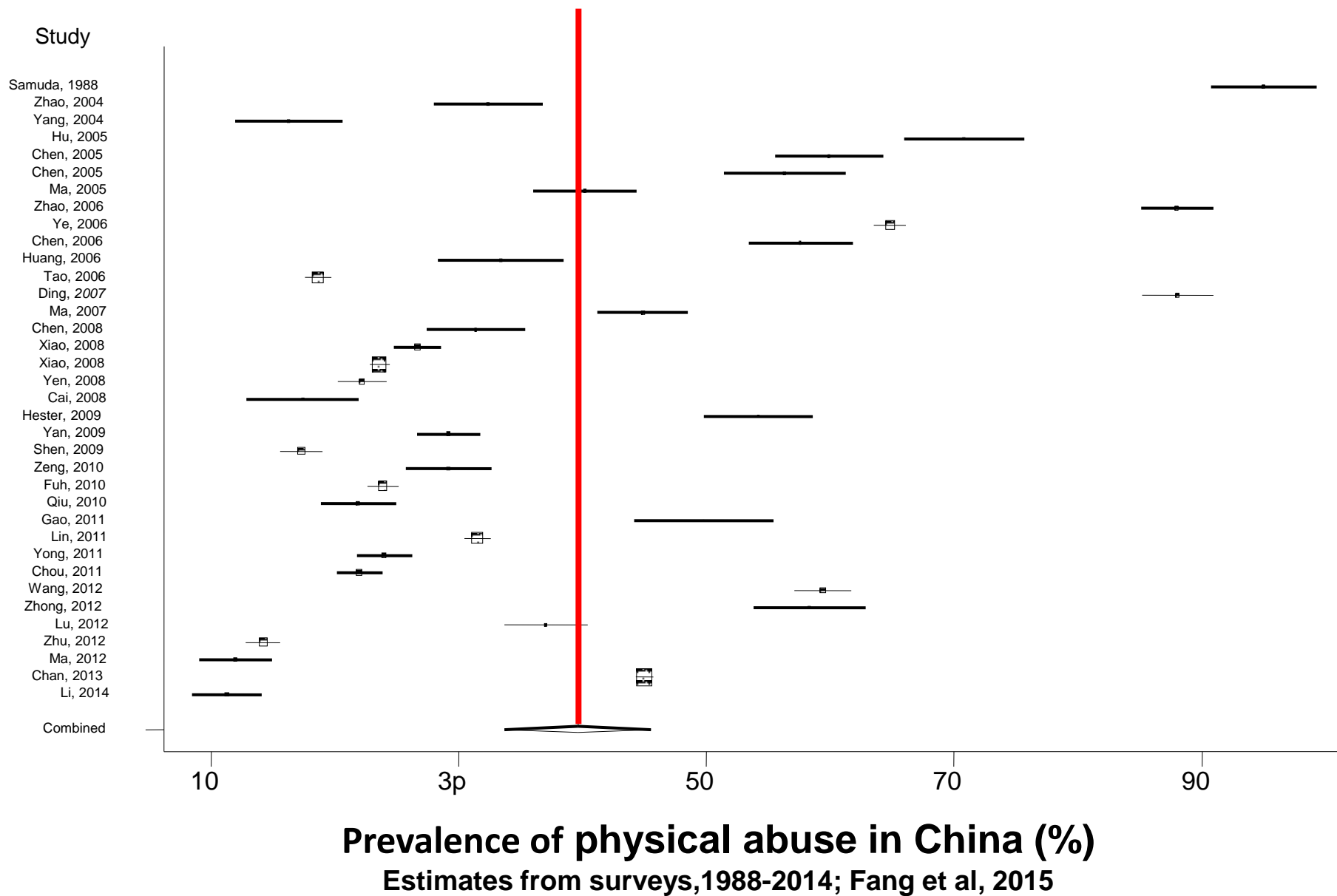
# Emotional abuse – estimates from Chinese surveys



**Prevalence of emotional abuse in China (%)**  
**Surveys from 1988-2014 (Fang et al, 2015)**

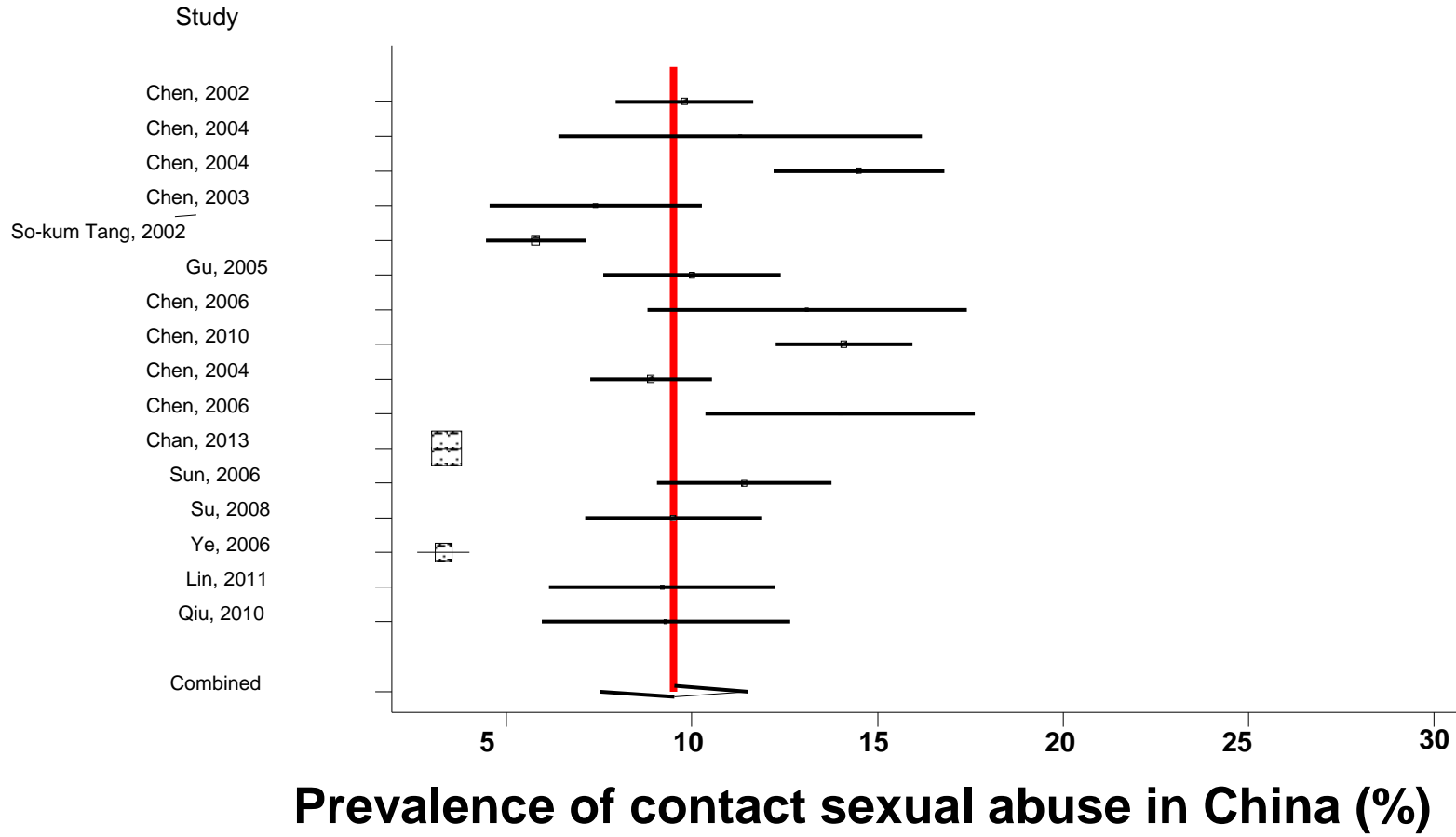


# Variation in estimates of child physical abuse in China



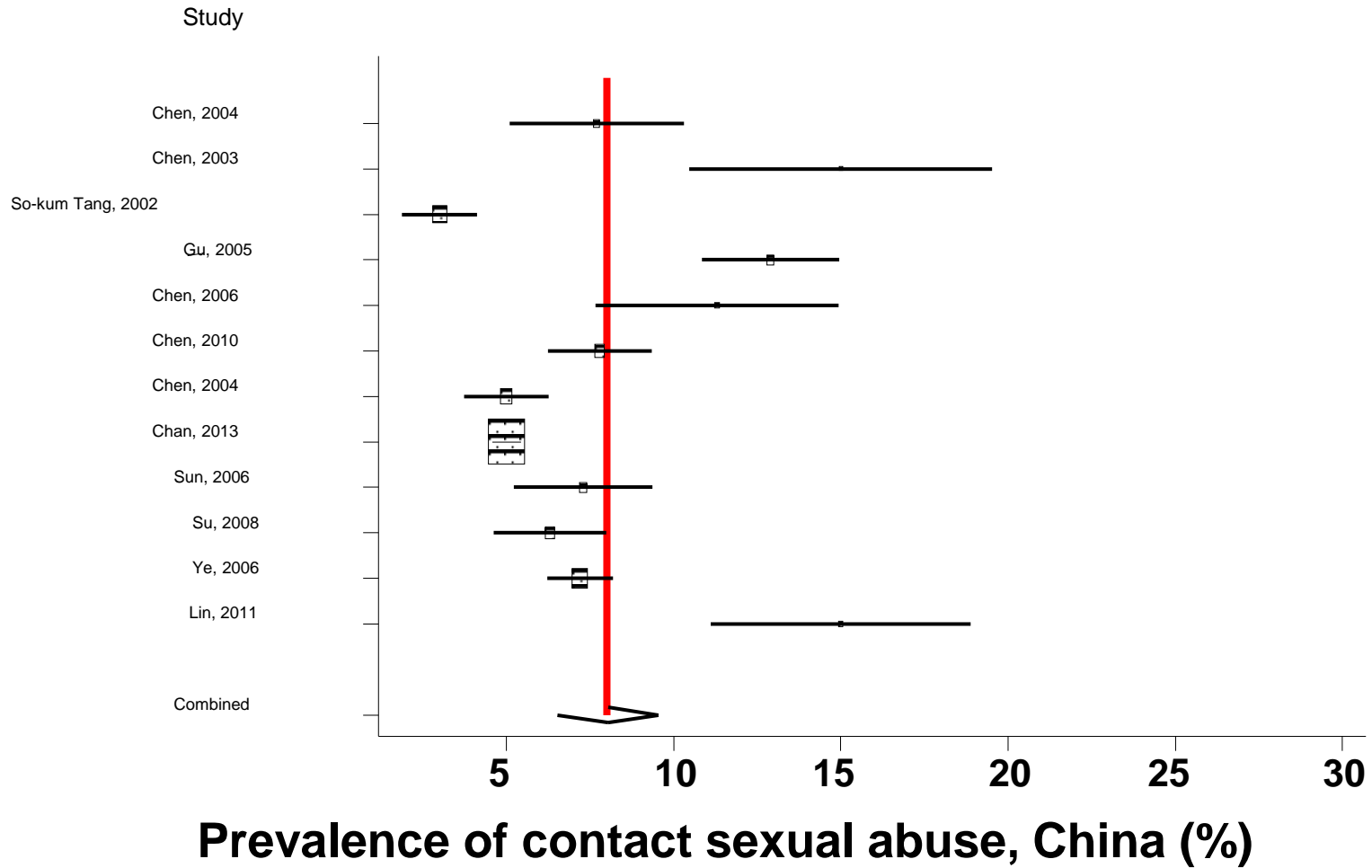
# Variation in sexual abuse estimates (Chinese females, from Ji et al, 2013)

## Females



# Estimates of CSA reported by males in China

## Males



# Several relevant implications for bullying research in Asia

Key points to consider in  
designing further studies

# 1. There is no “true” prevalence statistic that can be applied to a population


- (Dunne, Choo, Madrid, Subrahmanian, Rumble, Blight and Maternowska, *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health*, 2015).
- Our key purpose – for prevention and system intervention - **is to understand variation in risk**
- Risk varies considerably across provinces, cultural groups and social conditions.
- Some variation will be real across time, place and social groups; some is due to methodological factors
- We should not expect to find “the true prevalence” – all estimates depend on context

## 2. Interview mode has significant impact on estimates from children

In East Asian societies, in-home, face to face interviews may lead to substantial under-estimation of prevalence of CSA (Ji, Finkelhor & Dunne 2013)


Prevalence estimates are much higher in self-completion surveys (see also the UBS Optimus survey in China)

*Multiple modes of data collection may be the best approach*



Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Child Abuse & Neglect



Child sexual abuse in China: A meta-analysis of 27 studies<sup>☆</sup>

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ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To examine whether Chinese studies of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the general population show lower prevalence rates than other international studies, and whether certain features of these studies may help to account for variation in estimates.

### **3. The influence of gender in East Asia should be examined closely**

- Most research in East Asia shows gendered patterns in VaC and risk factors for violence that differ from other regions
- Most notable are the low CSA prevalence and apparent gender equivalence,
- Many violence-related risk factors also differ (e.g. Low drug and alcohol use, high parental control, same gender socialisation etc) that may protect females more than males

## **4. Include core indicators on bullying and VaC that are adaptable for localised research**

- The main questionnaire should have a short form (and a resource manual for data collection and analysis) so that localised research is comparable to this national study
- This will help to reduce the unacceptably wide variation in accumulated VaC social research that is caused by using tools and methods that are unstandardised



# Long term view

- Up to 2016, in all of Asia, there has not been a single published follow-up study of community-based or random samples that enables a time perspective on VaC and limited information on bullying change over time