

**Bills Committee on
Occupational Deafness (Compensation)(Amendment) Bill 2002**

The Administration's Response -

Scope of protection under paragraph (za) of Schedule 3

Introduction

At the meeting held on 26 February 2003, the Administration was asked to consider expanding the scope of protection provided in the newly added paragraph (za) of Schedule 3 to cover all employees working in mahjong parlours instead of only those playing mahjong as their main duty. The Administration's response is provided below.

Occupations in mahjong parlours

2. In mahjong parlours, noise is largely generated during each inning when tiles are forcefully discarded on the mahjong plank and during the reshuffling of tiles when each inning is done.

3. Employees of mahjong parlours who might be exposed to the noise source are the attendants, substitute players and cashiers. The major duties of an attendant are to receive guests and serve them with tea and towels, while the job of a substitute player is to join in the game whenever there are only three guests round a mahjong table. It is a rule of the game that there should be four players for each table of mahjong. The cashier of a mahjong parlour usually works at a counter not in close proximity to mahjong tables.

4. As the job of mahjong playing by a substitute player requires skills, not all employees are entrusted with such duties in the mahjong parlours. It is also rare for attendants and cashiers to take up such duties, even temporarily.

Noise surveys conducted by the Labour Department (LD)

5. The Occupational Hygiene Division of LD has conducted detailed noise surveys in respect of attendants, substitute players and cashiers in

mahjong parlours to measure their personal daily noise exposure ($L_{EP,d}$). The noise surveys were conducted between mid 2000 to March 2001. The results of the noise surveys show that the mean daily personal noise exposure of substitute players corrected to eight hours is 91dB(A), while that of attendants and cashiers is 88dB(A) and 86dB(A) respectively.

6. It should be noted that the intensity of sound is measured in decibel by a logarithmic scale. A 3dB reduction of noise level is equivalent to a 50% reduction of sound intensity. As revealed from this “3-dB rule”, though the difference in the mean daily personal noise exposure between attendants and substitute players in mahjong parlours is only 3dB(A) in absolute terms, attendants are subject to only half the sound intensity than that of substitute players. On the other hand, the difference in the mean daily personal noise exposure between cashiers and substitute players is 5dB(A). Therefore, cashiers are exposed to sound intensity which is less than half of that of substitute players.

7. Substitute players are closest to the source of noise. As they take part directly in playing mahjong, they are directly exposed to the spurts of noise generated by tiles hitting the plank or one another during the game. Attendants and cashiers are farther from the source of noise and have lower noise exposure.

The Administration’s views

8. Hong Kong has followed the practice of most countries¹ in adopting 90dB(A) as the level in the control of noise at work. The level of daily personal noise exposure of 90dB(A) is also adopted in determining the list of specified noisy occupations for the purpose of occupational deafness compensation in Hong Kong.

9. According to the ISO 1999 of the International Organization for Standardization, a person at the age of 55 after having been exposed for 20 years to a daily noise level between 85dB(A) and 88 dB(A) will not be subject to excess risk of developing noise-induced hearing impairment of 40dB

¹ Countries such as UK, USA, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Malaysia, Thailand and India have set the level of daily exposure of 90dB(A) as the limit in the control of noise in workplaces.

averaged over 1,000, 2000 and 3000 Hz when compared with a person of the same age who has not been exposed to an equivalent noise exposure level at work for the same period of time. The ISO 1999 is the latest internationally accepted model available for determination of occupational noise exposure and estimation of noise-induced hearing impairment.

10. As the mean personal daily noise exposures of attendants and cashiers in mahjong parlours are 88dB(A) and 86dB(A) respectively, the Administration has no plan to expand the scope of protection proposed in paragraph (za) of Schedule 3 to cover posts other than those playing mahjong as their major duty inside the parlour.

Labour Department
March 2003