

**HONG KONG FAMILY WELFARE SOCIETY**  
**SUBMISSION TO WELFARE PANEL ON FAMILY VIOLENCE**  
**11.3.02**

**Preamble**

HKFWS has been concerned for more than 20 years to help families which experience violence in relationships. While some women and children are protected in women's shelters, many still have to tolerate violence and suffer at home. This submission will explore their needs, highlight our observations, examine whether we have done enough and propose recommendations to tackle this social problem. We will also focus on the male perpetrators of violence and our approaches in handling their behaviour. It is our endeavor to promote an alternative to a violence culture in Hong Kong and turn the crisis for these violent families into opportunities for healing, growth and development.

**The Needs of Spouse Abuse Families in Hong Kong**

**I. Women and Children:**

Women and children may often be the victims of abuse. The needs of these women and children are varied as they handle such traumatic experiences. The following are the needs that must be addressed by the professionals who serve them.

<b>A. Safety</b> (安全性)	They need safety and protection from further abuse.
<b>B. Emotional support</b> (情緒支援)	It needs to be affirmed that the responsibility for violence lies with the abuser and not with the victim. Victims need to be helped with the impact of violence and the intense feelings of fear, anxiety, depression and confusion that accompany the trauma. It is equally important that the emotional needs of the children be addressed.
<b>C. Adjustment</b> (適應)	Victims need to make adaptation and changes in their life. Post traumatic stress disorders like flashbacks, nightmares, fears are frequent.
<b>D. The need to connect with others</b>	Victims need to have peer support and social networks ...
<b>E. Tangible needs</b>	They need assistance, financial and legal. Many would have accommodation needs and there are the schooling needs of the children.
<b>F. Decision making</b> (去留的決定)	They need to decide whether to stay or separate/divorce from their husbands. The decision may often be based on the interests of their children; the hope or possibility that the husband may change; whether they can live independently; whether there are external pressures such as financial concerns, the relatives' response or discrimination by others.
<b>G. Parenting</b> (管教方法)	Victims need to take care of their children and handle the issues and consequences staying or leaving .....
<b>H. Future plan</b>	They will have a lot of uncertainties, yet need to work out a future plan for self and children

## II. Abuser:

Even in a violent relationship, when the marriage is breaking down, the male abuser may want to keep his marriage intact. In this situation, he needs to be engaged in counselling and not to be isolated. When engaged, the following could be provided: support, advice, treatment for abusive beliefs. He needs to take responsibility for his abusive act, learn anger management skills (憤怒管理的技巧), parenting skills and perhaps have child care service. It is worth noting that some abusers are treatable i.e. to stop violence (of those who abuse family members only, about 70%) and some may not respond to counselling (usually exhibiting anti-social behaviour, personality problem etc, about 30%). Since most men are passive in help seeking and may not easily accept traditional counselling type sessions, newly designed groups and programmes may be needed.

### **Range of Services Provided by HKFWS**

NGOs have played a significant role in helping cases of family violence. Some run women shelters and provide psycho educational talks (心理教育講座) at a preventive level, while others run treatment groups for men, women and children, a men's centre for divorced men, stress management, counselling, group work etc.

In the past 20 years, HKFWS has helped to identify the phenomenon of family violence and to offer services for those in need.

early 1980	HKFWS carried out a marital study which identified the issues of family violence.
1985	The Society's Director convened meetings which lead to the formation of an agency, Harmony House, the first refuge for battered women.
Continuous effort	The Society provided Casework Counselling (個案輔導) for family violence families Family Life Education (家庭生活教育) for stress management (壓力管理), sex education...
1986 – present	Mental Health Group (健康身心小組) for people with stress
1995 – present	Started first treatment group for male abusers in Hong Kong
1998 – present	Started first parallel group (平行小組) for male abusers, women victim and children witnessing violence
1999- present	Treatment groups (治療小組) for mothers who abused their children
1999-present	Treatment groups for child abuse victims
2001	Family Education service (家庭生活教育服務) to outreach at risk families
2002	Advocates a White Ribbon Day (白絲帶) on 8th March to promote zero tolerance (對暴力零容忍度) of familial violence in Hong Kong

One of our approaches in the treatment for male perpetrators of violence is through therapeutic group work. Gathering 8 to 10 male perpetrators together and meeting weekly for eight sessions, the two group facilitators (experienced social workers) create a social environment for the abusers to self-disclose and examine their abusive beliefs. The treatment is mainly through the process of bringing abusive beliefs to awareness, highlighting difficulties of current beliefs, confronting them and

introducing alternatives. By changing abusive beliefs like "I have to be served", "my needs are more important than yours" etc.... abusive behavioural change is expected. Mutual support is an important element in enhancing mutual learning and changing perspectives in the group process. The format of the group is sharing, skills training and homework assignments.

In the mission to avoid tragedies and to stop the use of violence, for this crisis and at-risk target group, the groupwork-social worker's skills and sensitivity is very important. The trainings for workers should include engagement skills, risk assessment, understanding of violence, how to make safety plans, work with children's emotions and knowledge and skills in cognitive behavioural intervention for the change of abusive beliefs as well as anger control skills. Besides, the safety issue for the social workers and participants in the helping process is very important.

### **Our Observations**

Time of seeking:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● male batterers - when their wife and children leave home due to family violence</li> <li>● women- when they cannot tolerate the violence or are confused about how to react to the abuse</li> <li>● Concern for safety of children</li> </ul>
Account for violence before treatment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● male abusers often react with justifications, defense and minimization of their abusive behaviour. They usually blame their wives for causing them to be violent.</li> <li>● wife may feel that she has provoked her husband and she is the one causing the family breakdown if she is to leave home.</li> </ul>
Effective treatment mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● predominant way to treat family violence is individual case work while therapeutic group work may be more cost effective.</li> <li>● HKFWS's treatment group for male batterers shows that 78.6% of the members have stopped using violence (as compared to 54-60% in the States). Batterers also show a change of abusive belief, are more competent in anger control and have positive self image.</li> </ul>
Impact on children	Children are often overlooked. They are often doubly abused, firstly as witnesses to father abusing mother and secondly in being personally abused (research shows 50% of children who witness abuse were also abused).

### **The Limitations**

Safety	Most women are very afraid to let social workers contact their husbands, to avoid negative consequence. Husbands usually stop them from contacting the "outside world". They would rather keep quiet or hide away, they may divorce. However these men may remarry again and repeat violent acts. The abusive behaviour does not stop.
Men's perception on social worker	Most of the men come into contact with a social worker when their wife or children leave home. These men see social workers as the ones helping their wives to leave home. This makes engagement with male abusers very difficult.
Recruitment to the male batterer's treatment group	Treatment groups have proved to be effective, but there is great difficulty in recruiting members. Some men have long working hours, no time to attend. Timing is very important. When the critical stage of breakdown has passed, they will not come. Mandatory counselling (強制性輔導) is not available in Hong Kong, making encouragement for treatment difficult.

Trainings	Training for social workers, police, teachers, nurses, ... in risk assessment ..... is not enough
Anti-violence culture not established (非暴力文化)	No anti-violence policy and culture in Hong Kong. This has to be promoted. There are myths about control and care; right to use violence.
inter-disciplinary cooperation (跨部門合作)	Many, if not most, police are often reluctant to initiate referral of cases to the NGOs due to the Privacy Data Ordinance etc. They prefer clients to self approach us. However, many crisis cases are missed because of the lack of direct referral. Since this is a social problem, more should be done.

## Recommendations

### 1. Group treatment for male abusers

The reduction of violence would not be effective without treatment of the male abuser. It is believed that changes in the men will create more safety for the women, whether they want to stay home or leave the family. Treatment groups can help to stop violence.

#### Reasons and service provision suggested:

- a. Drawing from overseas experience, therapeutic group treatment (治療小組) is more effective in helping men to stop using violence than individual therapy.
- b. Group work can take away the labelling effect, be more supportive and cost effective. Our clinical experience shows men can usually admit their abusive act in the first two group sessions while individual counselling usually takes longer.
- c. Suggestions: Intervention groups (治療小組) for male batterers in stopping violence. Supportive groups in the management of stress, should be extensively provided for men, also anger management, conflict management, grief work, groups for men facing divorce and for couples in marital conflict, for early and effective treatment.

### 2. Proactive outreaching services for families in crisis should be strengthened, especially for the male abusers

#### Reasons and service provision suggested:

- a. Stress leads to conflict and conflict leads to violence. At present, SWD's Family and Child Protective Services Unit (保護家庭及兒童服務課) are providing treatment to "cases" at the violence stage. Their effort is important and necessary in stopping violence. Further to that, the two intervention stages namely 'stress' and 'conflict' are also vital intervention points. Employment of proactive and outreaching services for these crisis families can add success to the preventive work.
- b. Traditional men's help seeking pattern is passive, and is so in our local culture. We need to actively "knock on their doors". Active promotion of tailor-made programmes and group work for men is necessary to attract them.
- c. Proactive contacts should be designed, to reach male batterers when their wives have left home. This ensures support is given to the abusers and not merely to "corner" them to prevent their further use of violence. It is a usual pattern for male batterers to employ violence or threat to their spouses/family to force them to return home. The more the wife hides away, the more the abuser wants to seek her, the more potential for abuser to use violence. The breaking of this vicious cycle is vital, by influencing the male abusers to use non-violent measures to handle an intimate relationship.

d. Development of assessment tools to identify at risk families to facilitate early identification.

**3. Strengthening of divorce mediation service (婚姻調解服務) in child custody work, especially when it is a child dispute case**

Service provision suggested:

a. Families with a spousal abuse history are especially vulnerable during divorce /separation period when the marital relationship is adversarial. Active follow up is needed in custody dispute cases. Supervised access and active follow service up with the abuser is urgently needed for mother and child protection.

**4. Establishment of team work between Police / Hospital and NGO to improve the referral process**

Service provision suggested:

a. According to a local study, women usually tolerate about 6 years in their marriage of being battered before they take action to leave. Early identification and intervention is thus important to prevent tragedies for the abuser, women and children. As seen in some cases, women may commit homicide or suffer depression following repeated abuse.

b. Policemen need training to assess the risk of family violence and to engage the batterer to gain consent for social worker's follow up. It is most ideal to work together as a team ... as in child abuse cases. According to observation, the chances of being able to invite the male abusers for initial interview are higher when they are referred by police.

c. Consider pairing up of social worker and police when a spouse abuse case is reported, for early assessment and engagement.

**5. Develop a range of Conflict Management Services (衝突處理服務) to handle conflict at work, at home, at school etc....**

Service provision suggested:

a. Early prevention is the key to minimize the problem of family violence. Services needed include therapeutic treatment, psycho educational programmes for preventive and educational purpose to reduce conflict in the community, and arousal of public concern to promote an anti-violence culture in Hong Kong. Community education is important in rectifying the myth of family violence, zero tolerance to violence etc. Ex-abusers may help to promote a new culture.

b. Proactive services need to be provided for this high risk population who may have low motivation to seek service. Since pre-violent cues are stress and conflicts, programmes, training, groups in the work place, school setting may be organized etc. There needs to be built in research to monitor service effectiveness etc.

**6. Promotion of White Ribbon Day for zero tolerance to violence (對暴力零容忍度)**

Reasons and service provision suggested:

a. Overseas a “White Ribbon Day” is organized to raise social consciousness (社會良知) about gender equality and to cultivate a culture of zero tolerance of violence.

b. HKFWS proposes the coming 8<sup>th</sup> March as a “White Ribbon Day” to promote zero tolerance of violence in Hong Kong.

# 香港家庭福利會

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**HONG KONG FAMILY WELFARE SOCIETY**

(Incorporated with Limited Liability)



## **\*Abstract on “An Evaluation Study of Group Therapy for Male Abusers cum Intervention Strategies”**

In recent years, the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society has been paying more attention to preventive and therapeutic work. In order to identify effective domestic violence intervention strategies, the Society study male batterers from therapeutic groups under the IMAGO Project started in 1995.

### **Profile of Respondents**

1. From 1995 to 2000, the Society conducted 4 treatment groups and 34 male batterers were served and 17 men were interviewed.
2. The majority of them were referred by social workers from family service centres, school social work service and a refuge for battered women. 2 were self-referred.
3. They were aged from 30 to 55 years. The mean age was 43.5 years. 52.9% were primary school level, 23.6% secondary school level and 23.5% tertiary level.
4. They were of different occupations such as labourer, skilled worker, technician, salesman, businessman, policeman and correctional officer and teacher. 29.4% were unemployed. Most of their female partners were housewives (58.8%). All of them had children.

### **Reasons for Help Seeking**

Most of the respondents are unmotivated unless they have to face the following problems: Family breakdown, stress, unemployment, and economic hardship. The reasons for help-seeking were mainly: want wife back, Seeking support and approval, seeking advice, improving family relationships, learning skills in controlling anger and learn parenting skills

### **Types and Severity of Violence**

The types of abuse include verbal / psychological aggression (70.6% moderate to severe), physical assault (58.8% moderate to severe) and sexual abuse (5.9% severe). It can be identified that 70.6% of the respondents were severe abusers.

\* An Evaluation Study of Group Therapy for Male Batterers cum Intervention Strategies by HKU and HKFWS 10/01

### **Presentation of Self by Respondents**

Underlying the problems presented by the respondents, they revealed that their masculinity and self-esteem was challenged. They used violence mainly because of emotional instability, family breakdown and work-related stress.

## IMAGO Group

### **Objectives**

1. Anger control
2. Sharing of personal stress
3. Understanding abusive behaviours and identification of abusive relationship beliefs
4. Development of respectful beliefs and training in respectful listening
5. Preparation of peaceful separation

### **Effectiveness**

1. 78.6% effective in ending violence.
2. Report by respondents : change of abusive beliefs, more competent in anger control, and more positive self-image

## **Risk Factors for Spousal Violence**

### **1. Intrapsychic Factors**

76.5% respondents showed high stress levels from work and family. 23.5% were unemployed at the time of interview and 41.2% had immediate financial problems. 58.8% reported that they were emotionally unstable. 29.4% had witnessed family violence in childhood. 23.5% respondents reported habitual drinking.

### **2. Interpersonal Factors**

41.2% respondents seldom talked about family conflicts with peers. 76.5% reported frequent spousal conflicts. They recognized jealous of their partners (11.8%), felt insecure (29.4%) and lacked confidence (23.5%) in relating to their wives. 29.4% had in-law conflict.

## Risk Factors for Spousal Violence

	% (N=17)
<b><i>Intrapsychic</i></b>	
Stress	76.5
Emotional disturbance	58.8
Depression	47.1
Witnessed family violence in childhood	29.4
Drinking problem	23.5
Unemployment	23.5
Financial problem	41.2
Neglected in childhood	17.6
Conflict with other people	17.6
Gambling	11.8
Violence approval	0
<b><i>Interpersonal</i></b>	
Seldom shares with peers	41.2
“No one understands and supports me”	41.2
Spousal conflict	76.5
Lacking empathy	0
Male domination	17.6
Controlling	17.6
Insecurity	29.4
Lack of confidence	23.5
Jealousy	11.8
In-law conflict	29.4
Intimidation of partner to gain obedience	17.6
<b><i>Gender roles</i></b>	
Felt that female is overpowering	23.5
Masculine gender role stress	29.4
Gender hostility	5.9