

**For discussion on
8 November 2004**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES

An Update on Strategy and Measures to Prevent and Tackle Family Violence

PURPOSE

This paper updates Members on the Administration's strategy and measures to prevent and tackle family violence.

BACKGROUND

2. In June 2004, a Subcommittee was set up under the Panel on Welfare Services to study issues relating to the strategy and measures to prevent and tackle family violence. In July 2004, the Subcommittee submitted a report to the Panel vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 3083/03-04. They recommended the following measures for implementation by the Administration as a matter of priority-

- (a) the Social Welfare Department (SWD) should set up its own 24-hour hotline, preferably in each SWD district, to help people facing family violence;
- (b) experienced practitioners should be enlisted to provide up-to-date training to workers handling family violence;
- (c) eligibility criteria for providing housing assistance to battered spouse and family members in conflict should be relaxed;
- (d) workload of the Family and Child Protective Services Unit (FCPSUs) should be reviewed, including setting down the maximum number of cases which each unit should handle; and
- (e) appropriateness of having one social worker handling family violence taking up both the investigative and counselling functions should be reviewed.

The Subcommittee further suggested that the Panel should follow up the recommendations and other issues in the legislative session 2004-05.

3. At the meeting held on 12 October 2004, the Panel asked the Administration to update strategy and measures to tackle family violence.

UPDATED STATISTICS

4. The updated statistics related to family violence are set out below-
- (a) according to the enhanced Central Information System on Battered Spouse and Sexual Violence Cases, the number of newly reported battered spouse cases was 1 706 for the period between January and June 2004, of which physical abuse was the major type of abuse (involving 1 340 cases or 79%);
 - (b) according to the Child Protection Registry, 293 newly reported child abuse cases were recorded in the period between January and June 2004. Physical abuse was also the major type of child abuse (involving 162 cases or 55%), followed by sexual abuse (involving 86 cases or 29%); and
 - (c) according to the Central Information System on Elder Abuse set up in March 2004, as at 30 June 2004 there were 208 elder abuse cases.

Details of the statistics of 2002, 2003 and 2004 (January to June) are at Annex A.

GOVERNMENT STRATEGY AND MEASURES

THREE-PRONGED APPROACH

5. The Government has adopted a three-pronged approach to combat family violence and strengthen support for families, as follows –
- (a) specialized services and crisis intervention (such as Family and Child Protective Services Units, a Family Crisis Support Centre and refuge centres);
 - (b) supportive services (such as family services, housing assistance, financial assistance and child care services); and
 - (c) preventive measures (such as publicity and community education, and enhancing social capital).

Specialized Services and Crisis Intervention

Family and Child Protective Services Units

6. At present, SWD operates five specialized Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) to handle majority of the child abuse and battered spouse cases. They provide integrated services including outreaching, crisis intervention, casework and group work treatment, and statutory protection of children. Other support services such as financial assistance, legal aid, psychological assessment and treatment, housing assistance, child care services, etc. are arranged where necessary. FCPSUs also work with other organisations concerned in the investigation and intervention process whenever necessary.

7. Those Family Service Centres (FSCs)/Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also handle battered spouse cases. For complicated cases, such as cases involving statutory protection of children, NGOs may transfer such cases to FCPSUs for follow up.

Family Crisis Support Centre and Refuge Centres

8. Apart from FCPSUs, SWD has set up a Family Crisis Support Centre (FCSC) since 2002 to strengthen support to families in crisis on a 24-hour basis. The FCSC, operated by a NGO, provides time-out facilities and services to help people under stress or facing crisis to manage their emotions and seek positive solutions to family problems. Its integrated package of services include a 24-hour hotline, outreach and prompt emergency intervention, short-term overnight accommodation, public education programmes, etc. Additional resources have been allocated to FCSC since May 2002 to enhance its hotline. From April 2003 to June 2004, a total of 1 880 users had been admitted for temporary accommodation in FCSC.

9. In addition, a total of 162 places are provided by four refuge centres for women which provide temporary accommodation for women victims (and their children) of family violence, sexual abuse, or in immediate danger of violence with round-the-clock admission. A variety of services for men, such as men's hotlines and batterers' groups, are also provided by FCPSUs and NGOs operating refuge centres for women.

10. In the past three years, NGOs launched two pilot projects on prevention and handling of elder abuse. To facilitate the transfer/sharing of experiences to/with other organizations, additional allocation from the Lotteries Fund has been granted to extend the projects for one more year from April 2004 to March 2005.

Supportive Measures

Family Services

11. To meet the changing needs of families, SWD and NGOs concerned are now transforming all their FSCs/counselling units into IFSCs through service re-engineering. Each IFSC will comprise three components, namely a Resources Unit, a Family Support Unit and a Family Counselling Unit. A continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services will be provided. The transformation will take one year to materialise. By the end of 2004-05, there will be 61 IFSCs (40 operated by SWD and 21 by NGOs) covering the whole territory. So far, 23 IFSCs have commenced operation. The distribution of the 61 IFSCs is at Annex B.

Housing Assistance

12. To assist victims of family violence to resolve their housing problems, different forms of housing assistance are arranged for cases with genuine housing need and social/medical ground. Details are as follows-

- (a) in general, Compassionate Rehousing (CR) is made available to the victims provided that they meet the eligibility criteria for public rental housing. Under CR, the Conditional Tenancy (CT) Scheme can help those persons, including victims of domestic violence, who are on divorce proceedings and assuming the custody of the children, while awaiting the court decision on their divorce applications. Starting from November 2001, the CT Scheme has been extended to cover victims of domestic violence on divorce who have no offspring or bring along no dependent children;
- (b) in 2002, SWD revised the guidelines for CR to build in more flexibility to help certain needy groups, including single parents with dependent children striving for self-reliance; and
- (c) SWD also makes recommendations to HD for arranging other housing assistance such as transfer of Public Rental Housing (PRH), splitting of PRH households etc.

Financial Assistance

13. Financial assistance such as the Comprehensive Social Security Scheme (CSSA) and various charitable / trust funds are made available to families or individuals to tide over their immediate financial hardship. The seven-year-Hong Kong-residence rule for application of CSSA may be exempted for victims of family violence who are forced to leave the matrimonial homes with their young children on a case-by-case basis.

Child Care Services

14. A wide range of day and residential child care services are available to meet the various child care needs of parents, including victims of family violence. Additional resources have been allocated to expand foster care services from 580 places in 2002 to 765 places in 2004 (including 45 emergency foster care places). Moreover, 30 additional foster care places and 15 additional places in Po Leung Kuk New Comers' Ward are provided for a period of six months commencing August 2004 to cater for the sudden upsurge in demand.

Other Related Services

15. In addition, other supports are available to people from different walks of life in the community. The relevant service units include 56 Medical Social Services Units, 131 Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres, 484 school social workers and 40 Support Teams for the Elderly. All these service units are staffed with social workers, and in the course of delivering their core services, they can also give professional guidance to needy individuals or families or link them with dedicated specialized service units with a view to preventing or tackling family violence.

Preventive Measures

Publicity and Community Education

16. SWD has launched a large-scale publicity campaign entitled "Strengthening Families and Combating Violence" to enhance public awareness of the need to strengthen families and combat violence. "Prevention of Suicide" is also included as one of the themes in 2004-05. Major territory-wide programmes include, amongst others, radio programmes, a mural competition, a number of publicity materials (e.g. roadside banners and advertisements on public light buses), etc. At the district level, activities such as seminars, family camps, exhibitions and other family life education activities are held to echo the territory-wide campaigns.

Enhancing Social Capital

17. The Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) has been providing seed funding to support community-initiated projects that seek to, among others, foster better family relationship and encourage the building of networks among families, thereby strengthening their capabilities to deal with family violence. Cross-sectoral collaboration among the Government, business sector and the Third Sector is encouraged. Examples include the three CIIF projects focusing specifically on the Tin Shui Wai area, namely the "Project to promote family cohesion and more colourful family life", the "Star-bright Project" and the "Community Angels of Tin Shui Wai Project".

18. To sum up, over the past years, existing services are reviewed, re-engineered and re-focused while new initiatives are introduced to fill service gaps so identified.

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

19. The Government recognizes the importance of coordination of the joint efforts of different government departments, professionals and NGOs in preventing and tackling family violence. Well-established mechanisms have been put in place to ensure effective collaboration. They include three dedicated multi-disciplinary committees, including the Committee on Child Abuse, the Working Group on Combating Violence and the Working Group on Elder Abuse.

20. At the district level, 13 District Coordinating Committees on Family and Child Welfare comprising representatives from government departments, local NGOs, community leaders, etc. are in place to coordinate, among other family and child welfare services, service provision relating to family violence to meet the specific needs in each district. Besides, experience sharing is arranged among FCPSUs, the Child Abuse Investigation Unit of the Police and the Medial Coordinators on Child Abuse. Moreover, it is under planning that District Liaison Groups would be convened by the District Social Welfare Office concerned, with participation of FCPSUs, IFSCs, the Police and other relevant organisations as appropriate, to strengthen multi-disciplinary collaboration in handling family violence.

21. At the operational level, SWD and the Police have implemented a referral mechanism since January 2003 to strengthen timely professional intervention to family violence cases. Under the mechanism, such cases may be referred to SWD for follow-up services even in the absence of the consent of victims / alleged offenders subject to certain conditions being met. The Hospital Authority has enhanced its referral mechanism as well.

22. Moreover, the police information system for processing public complaints is being enhanced to enable frontline officers to retrieve previous reports on domestic violence when handling new reports involving the same personalities. The revision process is being actively pursued and a prototype of the system enhancement has already been devised. Also, steps are being taken to strengthen liaison during case referral process between the Police and SWD through the introduction of an acknowledgment system.

23. Furthermore, a number of other procedural guidelines have been developed or improved to tie in with the latest service development and strengthen protection of victims. They include the revised Procedural Guidelines for Handling Battered Spouse Cases (implemented since May 2004) and the multi-disciplinary protocol for handling elder abuse (implemented since March 2004). The Procedures for Handling Child

Abuse Cases (last revised in 1998) are under review.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUBCOMMITTEE

24. In their report to the Panel, the Subcommittee recommended the Administration to implement five measures. Our responses are set out below.

Recommendation (a): SWD should set up its own 24-hour hotline, preferably in each SWD district, to help people facing family violence

25. SWD operates a Departmental Hotline Service (DHS) based on an interactive voice processing system. The DHS comprises a Family Help-line to provide immediate counselling and assistance from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Monday to Saturday and from 1 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Sundays and public holidays. There is also a call transfer system to transfer callers dialling up DHS to the FCSC 24-hour hotline. The DHS and FCSC hotlines with backup support (including FCSC's backup facilities, SWD's after office hours outreaching service and the 24-hour Suicidal Crisis Intervention Centre) provide immediate support to families in crisis round the clock.

26. SWD considers that having one or two easy-to-remember number(s) with back-up support to the whole territory is more user-friendly to the callers, and more cost-effective than 13 district-based hotlines.

Recommendation (b): experienced practitioners should be enlisted to provide up-to-date training to workers handling family violence

27. SWD has continuously conducted different training programmes on handling family violence cases for social workers, the Police and other professionals. A paper on relevant training was submitted to the aforementioned Subcommittee in July 2004 vide CB(2)3119/03-04(01).

28. The recommendation of the Subcommittee is in line with our existing practice. Major progress is outlined below –

- (a) new training programmes on the handling of domestic violence have been introduced for both frontline and supervisory police officers since July this year. The training is conducted with the assistance of social workers and the need for sensitivity to complaints of domestic violence is emphasised through experience sharing from individuals previously involved in cases and a local professional in counselling. Since July 2004, over 7,000 police officers at the district level have received the training and the programme is ongoing. There will be other training courses delivered by overseas experts. Besides, topics of conflict management and victim psychology will be introduced in the training of new police recruits and serving police officers;

- (b) moreover, SWD, the Police and the Hospital Authority are jointly developing a basic training package to develop expertise in handling child abuse cases; and
- (c) furthermore, training on handling family violence cases has been further strengthened in 2004-05. About 20 such programmes for social workers and other professionals have been planned. By the end of October 2004, a total of nine training programmes have been organized. The trainers for the programmes include local and overseas experienced practitioners/specialists. Training materials will also be developed for their reference.

Recommendation (c): eligibility criteria for providing housing assistance to battered spouse and family members in conflict should be relaxed

29. The various housing assistance provided to the victims are described in paragraph 12 above. The Housing Department (HD) considers that flexibility has already been built into the PRH system to help the victims as appropriate.

Recommendation (d): workload of the FCPSUs should be reviewed, including setting down the maximum number of cases which each unit should handle

30. SWD has temporarily deployed more than ten social workers to FCPSUs since May 2004 to cope with the increasing number of cases. An additional FCPSU will be established in the North West New Territories in 2005-06 through redeployment of resources, and thus help alleviate their heavy workload.

Recommendation (e): appropriateness of having one social worker handling family violence taking up both the investigative and counselling functions should be reviewed

31. In addition to the recommendation of the Subcommittee, some NGOs have asked the Administration to arrange different social workers to handle the batterers and victims separately.

32. The Administration reiterates that the safety and welfare of individuals, especially battered spouses, children and other vulnerable persons, are always our paramount concern. According to the existing practice of FCPSUs, separate social workers will be arranged to handle the same case on a need basis having regard to the specific circumstances.

33. For instance, in a child abuse case where the abusive parent has developed strong antagonism towards the social worker during the latter's investigation, the case may be transferred to another social worker to render follow-up services. In situations where the batterer displays strong mistrust of the social worker, another social worker

may be assigned to work with the batterer separately. Besides, it is not uncommon for cases to be shared with clinical psychologists.

34. On the other hand, separating the investigative and counselling functions of a social worker or arranging separate social workers for the batterer/victim in all cases may lead to fragmentation of intervention. Some victims and their family members may be confused, and find it inconvenient having to repeat their stories to different parties. Such an approach may also inadvertently work against the resolution of differences.

35. Hence, SWD believes that flexibility and professional judgement should be the key in considering the appropriate approach to be adopted in the light of the situations of individual cases.

RESEARCH

36. SWD has commissioned the Centre for Criminology of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) to conduct a study on homicide-suicide in Hong Kong which started in November 2002. With preliminary findings on the profile of homicide-suicide cases in Hong Kong from 1989 to 2003, the study is still in progress. A screening tool for use by frontline social workers will also be developed. The study is scheduled for completion by early 2005.

37. HKU was also commissioned to conduct a study on child abuse and spouse battering in April 2003. Part one of the study analyses the prevalence rate of child abuse and spouse battering in Hong Kong and elements contributing to effective prevention and intervention, including the examination of existing legislative measures and feasibility of adopting mandatory treatment in Hong Kong, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2004. Part two of the study on the development and validation of assessment tools and related training is expected to be completed by April 2005.

LEGISLATION

Domestic Violence Ordinance

38. The HKU's study on child abuse and spouse battering would, amongst others, facilitate us to formulate detailed proposals to amend the Domestic Violence Ordinance. While the outcomes of part one of the study are expected to be available by end 2004, the Administration is simultaneously examining the proposals put forward by various parties concerned including Legislative Council Members, NGOs such as「關注家庭暴力問題聯席」and members of the Committee on Child Abuse and the Working Group on Combating Violence. Key aspects being examined include

feasibility of mandatory counselling for batterers in Hong Kong, definitions of domestic violence, injunction orders, etc. We will consider whether, and if so, how the existing legislative framework needs to be improved.

Legislation against Stalking

39. The Administration has studied the Law Reform Commission (LRC)'s Report on Stalking. The Administration is of the view that the legislative proposals to deal with the stalking problem recommended by LRC should be further considered with care. Other alternatives to deal with the specific problems and issues should also be explored. The Home Affairs Bureau is now re-examining the proposal from the perspective of protection of individuals from interference to their private lives.

Review Panel

40. A three-member Review Panel has been set up to look into the family services in Tin Shui Wai. A report will be made to the Director of Social Welfare shortly.

Post-event Review

41. SWD is examining the proposal of setting up post-event multi-disciplinary review committees on cases in which family violence has caused serious injuries or deaths, and whether and how such post-event committees could be convened without prejudicing the investigation conducted by the Police and any subsequent legal proceeding during the process.

WAY FORWARD

42. We would continue to adopt and where necessary strengthen the three-pronged approach to combat family violence. We would take into account the aforementioned studies and the report of the Review Panel to identify the future direction of prevention and intervention strategies.

Newly Reported Battered Spouse Cases in 2002, 2003 and 2004 (Jan to Jun)

Year	2002	2003	2004
Types of Abuse	(whole year)	(whole year)	(Jan-Jun)
Physical abuse	2 641	2 575	1 340
Sexual abuse	12	5	2
Psychological abuse	64	365	196
Multiple abuse	317	353	168
Total	3 034	3 298	1 706

(Source: Central Information System on Battered Spouse Cases and Sexual Violence Cases)

Newly Reported Child Abuse Cases in 2002, 2003 and 2004 (Jan to Jun)

Year	2002	2003	2004
Types of Abuse	(whole year)	(whole year)	(Jan-Jun)
Physical abuse	292	277	162
Neglect	17	20	19
Sexual abuse	179	150	86
Psychological abuse	11	4	5
Multiple abuse	21	30	21
Total	520	481	293

(Source: Child Protection Registry)

Distribution of Elder Abuse Cases as at 30 June 2004

Types of Abuse	2004
	(as at June 2004)
Physical abuse	107
Psychological abuse	37
Neglect	6
Financial abuse	5
Abandonment	1
Sexual abuse	0
Multiple abuse	52
Total	208

(Source: Central Information System on Elder Abuse Cases which is newly put in place in March 2004) –In our submission of 6 July 2004 to the Panel, the figure up to 25 June 2004 was 113. The difference of 95 was due to the fact that time was needed to collect and input the data for inclusion into the newly set-up system, and to include the data on the newly reported cases of spouse battering involving elder victims. The figure of 208 is the final data as at 30 June 2004.

Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSC)

<u>District</u>	No. of IFSCs			Total No.
	SWD	NGO		
		No.	Agency	
WTS/SK	5	2	Caritas – Hong Kong (Caritas)	7
			Hong Kong Family Welfare Society (HKFWS)	
TW/KwT	5	2	Caritas	7
			HKFWS	
YL	3	2	Caritas	5
			International Social Service Hong Kong Branch (ISS-HK)	
TM	3	1	Caritas	4
KT	4	2	HKFWS	6
			Christian Family Service Centre	
TP/N	4	1	Caritas	5
E/W	4	3	Caritas	7
			HKFWS	
			St James' Settlement	
ST	4	1	Caritas	5
SSP	2	2	HKFWS	4
			ISS-HK	
YTM	1	2	Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service	3
			Hong Kong Christian Service	
KC	2	1	Hong Kong Children and Youth Services	3
CW/I	2	1 ^{Note}	Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	3
S	1	1	Caritas	2
Total	40	21	9	61

Note On top of 1 NGO IFSC, there are two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) operated by the Neighbourhood Advice – Action Council and Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council serving specific boundaries in Tung Chung and some parts of the Islands.