

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Welfare Services to Support
Victims of Domestic Violence and their Families

Purpose

This paper briefs members on the strategies as well as welfare services to tackle domestic violence and support the victims and their families.

Strategic Direction to Tackle Domestic Violence and Support the Victims

2. The Administration does not tolerate domestic violence. Adopting a multi-disciplinary model as well as a three-pronged intervention approach, the Administration has been making continuous effort to combat domestic violence and strengthen support for the victims and their families. Under this strategic direction, the Administration has been coordinating the joint efforts of all parties concerned and devoting additional resources to further enhance the existing welfare service systems.

Multi-disciplinary Model

3. The Administration recognizes the importance of coordinating the joint efforts of different departments, professionals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in preventing and tackling domestic violence. To this end, various mechanisms for regular communication and liaison among different sectors and disciplines are in place at the central, district and operation levels.

Central level

4. The Committee on Child Abuse (CCA) and the Working Group on Combating Violence (WGCV) chaired by the Director of Social Welfare and comprising representatives from the Police, Education Bureau, Hospital Authority (HA) and NGOs, etc. have been set up to map out

strategies to tackle the problems of child abuse, spouse/ cohabitant battering and sexual violence in Hong Kong.

5. With the advice of CCA and WGCV, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has drawn up two sets of procedural guidelines, namely the “Procedural Guide for Handling Child Abuse Cases” and the “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Intimate Partner Violence Cases” to facilitate front-line professionals in handling cases of child abuse and spouse/ cohabitant battering in a professional and effective manner. These guidelines will be updated on a need basis.

6. To monitor the trend and understand the characteristics of domestic violence cases in Hong Kong, two central information systems, namely the “Central Information System on Spouse/ Cohabitant Battering Cases and Sexual Violence Cases” and the “Child Protection Registry”, are maintained by SWD to capture information of domestic violence cases reported by different parties including the Police, Hospital Authority, schools, casework units, etc. The findings are reported to CCA and WGCV and shared with relevant departments/organizations regularly. Moreover, the compiled statistical figures on reported domestic violence cases are uploaded on SWD’s website quarterly for information of the general public.

7. SWD also established a standing child fatality review mechanism in June 2011 following the successful experience of a three-year pilot project to review child death cases. The main purposes of the mechanism are to identify the good practice, gaps and deficiency in related service systems; to suggest improvements in the direction of formulating preventive strategies; and to promote inter-disciplinary and inter-agency cooperation to prevent avoidable child deaths. The Review Panel comprises 20 professionals from different disciplines and parent representative.

District level

8. There are “District Coordinating Committee on Family and Child Welfare” and “District Liaison Group on Family Violence” in each of the 11 SWD administrative districts, with the participation of representatives from various government departments, NGOs, local organizations, community leaders, etc., to coordinate the provision of support services for victims of domestic violence and to consolidate effort in combating domestic violence at district level.

Operation level

9. A referral mechanism for domestic violence cases between SWD and the Police has been implemented since 2003. Under this mechanism, the Police can refer domestic violence cases to SWD promptly for crisis intervention, counselling and other assistance. As the nature of intra-familial or organised child sexual abuse cases is more complicated, the Police conducts joint investigation with SWD by forming a Child Protection Special Investigation Team so as to achieve better planning of action and better protection of the child victims.

10. To reduce the victim's stress and the trauma of repeating the account of unpleasant experience, the case manager approach is adopted in the crisis intervention process so that the victim only needs to interact with the case manager for most of the time. The key social worker handling the case would normally take up the role of a case manager to coordinate services provided to the victim and offers instant support to the victim so that the victim can go through the process in a convenient, safe, confidential and protected manner. The multi-disciplinary case conference has been established as an effective forum for social workers and other related professionals to exchange views on individual domestic violence cases and formulate appropriate welfare plans for the victims and their families.

Training for different disciplines

11. Various training programmes have been provided by SWD and other departments/organisations regularly to equip related professionals with knowledge and skills on how to work with different disciplines in the investigation and handling of domestic violence cases. For example, a training programme on child protection special investigation has been jointly organised by Police and SWD twice a year since 1995. In 2012-13, SWD plans to provide about 7,000 training places for social workers and professionals on a range of topics on domestic violence.

Three-pronged Intervention Approach

12. To tackle domestic violence, the Administration adopts a three-pronged approach, i.e. prevent domestic violence; protect the victims and provide them with support; and stop batterers' abusive behaviours.

Preventive Measures

13. SWD launches the "Strengthening Families and Combating

Violence” publicity campaign every year to organise territory-wide and district-based publicity and public education programmes to arouse public awareness on the importance of family solidarity and prevention of domestic violence and to encourage people in need to seek help. In recent years, publicity focuses on a number of specific areas, including strengthening family and individual resilience, promoting positive thinking, prevention of filicide-suicide, prevention of children and youth sexual abuse, and promotion of joint parental responsibilities of divorced parents. The messages have been widely spread to the public through various channels, such as TV docu-drama, radio programmes, TV and radio advertisements, posters, pamphlet, talks, competitions, etc. SWD has also set up a website of “Support for Victims of Child Abuse, Spouse/ Cohabitant Battering and Sexual Violence” to help victims understand their rights, protection provided by the law, and support services available in the community.

14. The Family Life Education Resource Centre of SWD provides a variety of multi-media resource materials to all related departmental units and social service agencies providing family education services with a view to promoting family functioning, strengthening family relationship and preventing family breakdown.

Supportive Services

15. A wide range of services and assistance are available for victims of domestic violence to facilitate them to seek advice and assistance, and to help them tide over the difficult period, lessen the trauma associated with violence and lead a new life.

Hotline Service

16. SWD has enhanced its hotline service since 2008 to provide round-the-clock phone counselling, support and advice by social workers to individuals/ families in need, and arrange appropriate follow-up services. Refuge centres for women also provide a 24-hour hotline service for victims of domestic violence and their families.

Integration of Family Services and Launching of Family Support Programme

17. In order to address the different needs of families and to better detect family problems for early intervention, SWD has re-engineered the resources for family services and set up Integrated Family Service Centres over the territory to provide a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial services. The Family Support Programme has also been

launched to mobilise volunteers to reach out to families at risk and to encourage them to receive the assistance and services which they need. These initiatives can help prevent family problems from deteriorating into domestic violence.

Child Care Support Services

18. To support parents who are unable to take care of their children temporarily, particularly those children who are at-risk of abuse, a wide range of day and residential child care services are available. The Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, which provides services during late evenings, weekends and public holidays, was regularised and extended to all 18 districts in October 2011. Additional resources have also been secured to further increase the provision of places of residential child care service from 2012-13 onwards.

Housing Assistance

19. For victims of domestic violence with housing problems, social workers will offer them with appropriate assistance. In case the victims are public rental housing tenants, social workers may refer them to Housing Department (HD) for household splitting, housing transfer and other assistance according to their needs. Social workers may also arrange volunteers to accompany the victims to look for alternative accommodation in the private sector. If the victims have genuine, imminent and long-term housing problem which cannot be resolved by their own resources, social workers may recommend them to the HD for compassionate rehousing. Where appropriate, social workers will assist the victims to apply for charitable trust funds to cover the rental and removal expenses.

Financial Assistance

20. There are different types of financial assistance to assist victims of domestic violence to tide over their financial difficulty. Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme provides a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially. It is designed to bring their income up to a prescribed level to meet their basic needs. Charitable/Trust Funds provide relief in the form of direct and temporary grants to meet the need of individuals and families in special and emergency situations for which other financial assistance may not be applicable or readily available.

Specialised Services and Crisis Intervention

21. As domestic violence is a complex problem requiring specialised skills to deal with, the following specialised services have been provided.

Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs)

22. SWD has set up 11 Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) across the territories as specialised units to provide a co-ordinated package of one-stop service for victims of domestic violence, their families and batterers. It aims to prevent occurrence of child abuse and spouse/ cohabitant battering incidents, help the victims and their family members overcome the trauma brought by child abuse and spouse/ cohabitant battering, and assist the families restore normal functioning. In the past years, SWD has allocated additional resources to improve the manpower in FCPSUs. At present, there are altogether 168¹ social workers working in FCPSUs, an increase of 36.6% since 2005-06.

Clinical psychological service

23. There are altogether five Clinical Psychology Units (CPU) under SWD, and they are located in Kowloon Bay, Tsuen Wan, Quarry Bay, Tai Po and Tin Shui Wai respectively. The clinical psychologists of the CPUs provide assessment and treatment services to victims, batterers and/ or their children presenting psychological symptoms across the territory.

Refuge Centres and Crisis Centres

24. Individuals and families in crisis of domestic violence can seek temporary accommodation at emergency shelters. There are five refuge centres for women with a total capacity of 260 places. The Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre (named as CEASE) provides 80 short-term residential places to victims of sexual violence and individuals/ families facing domestic violence or in crisis while the Family Crisis Support Centre (FCSC) also provides 40 places of short-term accommodation to individuals and families in crisis or distress. In 2011-12, the average utilisation rate of the five refuge centres for women was 80% and that of CEASE was 90%. The FCSC, on the other hand, had provided assistance to all 601 eligible cases that were in crisis or distress during the year.

¹ The 11 supervisors of FCPSUs are not included.

Victim Support Programme

25. To strengthen support for victims of domestic violence, including those undergoing the legal proceedings, SWD has launched the Victim Support Programme for Victims of Family Violence (VSP) since June 2010. VSP provides emotional support and information on community support services including legal aid services, accommodation, medical and childcare services and the relevant legal proceedings to the victims concerned. If necessary, social workers or volunteers will accompany them to attend court hearings and go through the legal proceedings so as to alleviate their fear and helplessness.

Support to Witnesses in Domestic Violence Cases

26. In cooperation with the Police, SWD has been running the Witness Support Programme in which supporting persons are arranged to accompany child witnesses (including abused children) or mentally incapacitated witness to give evidence in Court through a live television link system upon the Court's permission. VSP provides similar witness support service to victims of domestic violence if they are arranged to give evidence in Court through a live television link system.

Batterer Intervention Programme & Anti-violence Programme

27. SWD has provided various types of counselling services to batterers so as to help them change their abusive attitude and behaviour. The Batterer Intervention Programme (BIP), which is a psycho-education programme with 13 sessions, has become a component of FCPSUs' counselling service since 2008. The Anti-violence Programme has also been introduced for batterers who are required by the courts under the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (Cap. 189) to participate in the psycho-education programme to change their abuse attitudes and behaviours. SWD will continue to develop other treatment models to suit the needs of different batterers, such as BIP for women.

Way Forward

28. The Administration would continue to adopt the multi-disciplinary model and three-pronged intervention approach to tackle domestic violence. The Administration would also keep under regular review the need to further enhance the welfare services to provide better support to the victims and their families.

Advice Sought

29. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
January 2013**