



Hong Kong Unison Limited

香港融樂會有限公司

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In 2014, 6.2% (242) of the total spouse/cohabitant battering cases recorded by the Social Welfare Department (“SWD”) and 3.8% (99) of the total spouse/cohabitant battering cases served by the Family and Child Protection Services Unit (“FCPSU”) of SWD pertained to ethnic minority victims, including Indonesians, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese and Thais. The fact that ethnic minorities account for 6.38% of the population in Hong Kong according to the 2011 Population Census, the above figures are significant and the situation demands urgent attention. More importantly, the reported numbers do not reflect the dire reality. According to a recent research (Kapai, 2015)ⁱ, ethnic minority victims typically under report abuses. Due to cultural, racial, and socio-economic attributes, they often are reluctant or lack the ability to seek assistance. Coupled with language limitations and the lack of effective support and sensitivity from frontline responders, ethnic minority victims may lack the confidence to seek external assistance that is generally available. Hong Kong Unison is concerned about the situation and noted a few factors that deter ethnic minority victims from seeking external help when they face domestic violence.

Not all frontline responders are “prepared” to handle ethnic minority cases

Frontline responders, especially caseworkers, are frequently held back when they encounter ethnic minority victims, due to perceived racial, cultural and religious differences. Some hesitated and do not “know” how to provide immediate support. Instead, they seek out to ethnic minority service agencies that do not have the expertise to handle domestic violence cases. Social workers and other relevant professionals in handling domestic violence and sexual violence cases (including social welfare service units of the SWD, relevant NGOs, the Police, Department of Health, Legal Aid Department, the Hospital Authority, and schools) should follow the “Procedural Guide for Handling Child Abuse Cases”, “Procedural Guide for Handling Intimate Partner Violence Cases”, and “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Adult Sexual Violence Cases” regardless of race and ethnicity of the victims as these guidelines are applicable to all, including ethnic minorities with different backgrounds and needs.

Lack of understanding and cultural sensitivity of frontline responders

Language, ethnicity, culture, and immigration status often complicate the help-seeking behaviors of ethnic minority victims. Frontline responders should be equipped with more sensitivity when responding to ethnic minority victims. They should first understand the



victims' situation and provide clarification on unique circumstances, preferably through a professional interpreter if language is a barrier. Often ethnic minority victims do not wish to report domestic violence for fear of deportation, especially for dependent visa holders. If the couple divorces, the dependent visa holder would have to leave Hong Kong, and be separated from her children who are locally born. Such separation is very devastating to any mother. Moreover the victim would likely be subjected to ostracism and stigmatism because complaint about husbands and divorce may be culturally unacceptable. Hence, when handling domestic violence cases of ethnic minorities, responders from multi-disciplines should be culturally sensitive to provide appropriate preventive, supportive and remedial services that suit the needs of victims; for example, divorce should not be the only option available in the short term.

Recommendations

According to the SWD, 23 training courses on ethnic minorities were organized in 2014-15 by the Staff Development and Training Section, which aimed at enhancing front-line social workers' knowledge of the service needs of ethnic minorities. Such courses should not be limited to the social work field. Training in cultural sensitivity should be mandatory and a regular refresher course required for government officials, civil servants, NGO staff, teachers, doctors, and other professionals, regardless of whether their portfolio of work entails proximate work with ethnic minorities or the issues that impact them, as ethnic minorities are a part of life in Hong Kong. This is of particular significance for police, lawyers, judges, immigration and customs officers, healthcare and social work personnel, etc.

However Hong Kong Unison believes that these half day/full day introductory and refresher courses do not suffice to increase sensitivity towards cultural attributes of ethnic minorities. In fact, according to the research (Kapai, 2015), frontline service providers, social workers, and health-care providers in Hong Kong for domestic violence victims do not consider themselves culturally competent and adequately equipped to handle or are well informed about the needs of ethnic minority victims. Cultural sensitivity and competence should be made mandatory during social work training so that social work students are sensitized early on to understand minority cultures. This is conducive to addressing clients' specific needs and building trust and confidence with the clients.

ⁱ *Status of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong 1997 – 2014*, Puja Kapai, The University of Hong Kong, 2015.