

**For discussion
on 12 January 2016**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures
to Tackle Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence**

Provision of Services for Batterers of Domestic Violence

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on various services for batterers of domestic violence.

Principles

2. Domestic violence is a complex social problem. Tackling domestic violence effectively requires close collaboration between various sectors and professionals in the community. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been working with relevant government departments (including the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police), Department of Justice, Hospital Authority, Education Bureau and Department of Health, etc.), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and stakeholders to combat domestic violence, disseminate prevention messages, identify and assist families at risk, and provide protection and comprehensive support services for victims and other affected persons. Besides, counselling to help batterers realise the consequences and damage of domestic violence and change their attitude and behaviour is an important component of the overall strategy against domestic violence. The Government also attaches great importance to public education.

Identification of Families at Risk and Counselling for Batterers and High-risk Individuals

3. We emphasise the significance of early identification of families at risk, and provide support and counselling services for high-risk individuals (e.g. parents under stress by parenting duties and couples often at conflicts) with a view to reducing the occurrence of domestic violence as far as possible.

4. In close collaboration with stakeholders such as the Police, healthcare personnel, schools and NGOs, SWD has all along been proactively identifying

families encountering domestic violence and families at risk. Social workers assess the nature of domestic violence, risk level and the needs of the families identified, and then refer them to the Family and Child Protective Services Units of SWD or the Integrated Family Service Centres/Integrated Services Centres operated by SWD/NGOs in accordance with relevant procedural guidelines¹ for appropriate cross-disciplinary intervention. Through this arrangement, suitable counselling service is provided for various types of domestic violence batterers and high-risk individuals at an early stage to prevent deterioration of the situation.

5. Each batterer may be different in terms of backgrounds, motives for using violence, and forms and severity of violence used. In some cases, there could be one party abusing another, and in other cases (especially in domestic violence between spouses) acts of violence may be committed by both parties. In the light of their diverse characteristics and needs, SWD has been providing appropriate counselling services including casework counselling and group counselling to different domestic violence batterers.

(A) Casework Counselling

6. Provision of counselling for domestic violence batterers is generally casework-based, supplemented by intensive clinical psychological services and group counselling according to the needs of the batterers.

7. For a domestic violence case handled by SWD or NGOs, the responsible social worker serves as a case manager to provide counselling and all necessary support for the whole family, including the victim, the batterer and other affected family members. The case manager also refers the batterer to appropriate specialised services (such as psychiatric treatment, counselling for psychotropic substance abusers and gambling counselling, etc.) having regard to his/her condition, and co-ordinate cross-disciplinary intervention.

(B) Group Counselling

8. Social workers overseeing casework services arrange suitable group counselling services according to the needs of the batterers, including the Batterer Intervention Programme and the Educational Programme on Stopping Domestic Violence specially designed for batterers of intimate partner violence. Social workers

¹ These guidelines include Procedural Guide for Handling Child Abuse Cases, Procedural Guide for Handling Intimate Partner Violence Cases and Procedural Guidelines for Handling Elder Abuse Cases.

also arrange batterers to participate in the Anti-Violence Programme approved by the Director of Social Welfare as ordered under the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (Cap. 189) and monitor their attendance.

Batterer Intervention Programme

9. SWD implemented the pilot project of the Batterer Intervention Programme (Pilot Project) from April 2006 to March 2008 to provide 13 sessions of two-hour group counselling for persons who had battered their intimate partners but wished to keep the relationship. The Pilot Project aimed to help them stop the use of violence and improve relationship with their partners.

10. According to the findings of the Pilot Project, the provision of casework services together with group counselling services and the provision of casework services alone were both effective in changing participants' violent behaviour. As for enhancing participants' relationship with their partners, participants of the Pilot Project demonstrated more significant positive changes than people who only received casework counselling. The positive changes helped them continue to get along with their partners in non-violent ways. In this regard, SWD regularised the Batterer Intervention Programme in April 2008. From April 2008 to September 2015, a total of 492 male batterers attended the Batterer Intervention Programme. To meet the needs of female batterers, SWD started to provide group counselling designed for female batterers from 2010-11 on a trial basis. As at end September 2015, 54 female batterers were provided with group counselling services.

Educational Programme on Stopping Domestic Violence

11. To provide another option for batterers of intimate partner violence who are not suitable for or not willing to attend the Batterer Intervention Programme which is of a longer duration, SWD launched, in October 2013, the Educational Programme on Stopping Domestic Violence (EPSDV).

12. EPSDV is a 6-hour individual or group educational programme for batterers or potential batterers. It seeks to equip participants with the basic and practical knowledge and skills in handling anger and resolving conflicts with their partners so as to prevent the use of violence. It also helps participants cope with the crisis arising from their violent behaviour and improve relationship with their partners.

13. Target service users of EPSDV include people with different sexual orientations, non-Cantonese speakers and ethnic minorities. Interpretation service is

available. As at end September 2015, a total of 306 participants had completed the programme, of which 189 were male and 117 were female.

Anti-Violence Programme

14. The Anti-Violence Programme (AVP) is a counselling programme which the court, in granting a non-molestation order under the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance, requires the respondent to attend. Target users of AVP include persons acting in a violent or molesting manner to their (former) spouses/(former) cohabitants, children or other family members. Social workers implementing AVP provide participants with group or individual counselling (12 to 14 sessions of at least 90 minutes each) with a view to changing their violent/molesting behavior and attitude. Since the launch of AVP in August 2008 and up to September 2015, the court had referred a total of five cases, while one of them had subsequently been cancelled.

Other Group Counselling Services

15. Apart from the three specific counselling programmes mentioned above, other group activities are also organised by SWD, NGOs and other stakeholders according to the needs of different types of domestic violence batterers, to supplement casework counselling and assist the batterers in changing their behaviour. Topics cover parenting skills, emotion management, stress management, etc.

Public Education

16. SWD has been promoting the message and concept of “Strengthening Families and Combating Violence” to the public through various means and channels, so as to raise the awareness and concern of the whole community and consolidate the social mandate against domestic violence.

17. Since 2002, SWD has been effectively promoting prevention of domestic violence through various media, including docu-dramas and announcements of public interest (APIs) on television, education short films/animations on transportation systems/the Internet, posters at public venues and transportation systems, games and competitions launched on the Internet, and distribution of promotional leaflets and premiums. These efforts have brought home many impressive and positive messages to the public. For examples, in 2008, a television and radio bilingual API with the slogan of “Walk away? Lend a helping hand?”, and an API supplemented with posters with a slogan of “Is it worthwhile winning a fight at the expense of your family’s well-

being?” were broadcast through different networks including television, radio, railways and buses to disseminate the message of mutual neighbourhood support. In 2010 and 2013, SWD also produced two series of docu-drama jointly with the Radio Television Hong Kong, “The Moment”, for television broadcast. Each episode covers different family problems and guides the affected parties to look at the problem from different perspectives. It also encourages people around to provide timely support.

18. In 2014 and 2015, SWD continued to enhance public education on combating domestic violence through various media. A series of television and radio APIs and posters on “Don’t let you and your children become victims of domestic violence” were produced to highlight the lasting psychological damage of domestic violence to children. Large-scale publicity programmes and district activities (including broadcasts on television, radio, SWD website and Youtube, and banners displayed at MTR stations, bus stops and communities) were organised to promote to parents the importance of avoiding the use of violence on partners in order to safeguard children’s healthy development as well as the need to seek early assistance.

Advice Sought

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

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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