

**For discussion
on 12 January 2016**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

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

Support Services for Victims of Elder Abuse

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on various support services for victims of elder abuse cases.

Current Situation

2. The Government has been preventing and handling the elder abuse incidents through multi-disciplinary collaboration. In 2001, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) set up a multi-disciplinary Working Group on Elder Abuse (the Working Group) which comprised representatives from the Labour and Welfare Bureau, SWD, the Hospital Authority (HA), the Department of Health (DH), the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police), the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to jointly examine the situation of elder abuse in Hong Kong and propose ways and work plans to address the problem. One of the major tasks of the Working Group is to develop, implement and update as appropriate the “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Elder Abuse Cases” for reference and use by personnel of the government departments and NGOs (including social service units, the Police, medical care institutions, the Housing Department (HD), etc.) who may come across elder abuse cases.

3. Currently, elderly persons are protected by laws governing criminal offences. Pursuant to the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (Cap. 189), they may apply to the court for an injunction order against molestation by their spouses, children or other persons as specified in that ordinance. If the elderly concerned is a mentally incapacitated person, the Guardianship Board is empowered to issue a guardianship order and appoint a guardian for the elderly person under the Mental Health Ordinance (Cap. 136). The guardian can make decisions in respect of the elderly person’s personal or healthcare matters, or hold, receive or pay a

specified monthly sum on behalf of the elderly person. This can further safeguard the interests of the elderly person under guardianship.

Early Identification and Support for Elderly Persons in Need

4. SWD implements a host of measures for early identification and provision of support for elderly persons in need (including victims of elder abuse cases). Details are as follows -

Elderly Centres

5. There are 210 subvented elderly centres throughout the territory which provide a series of support services to elderly persons and their carers. These services include visits, emotional support and counselling, assistance in managing simple personal needs and referral services, etc. Elderly centres also provide outreaching service for singletons and hidden elderly persons and maintain regular contacts with them through visits and phone calls to understand their needs and provide them with needed support and referral service.

Integrated Family Service Centres and Integrated Services Centres

6. The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) over the territory operated by SWD and NGOs provide a range of preventive, supportive and remedial services, including crisis intervention and counselling for victims of elder abuse cases and their family members. Social workers of the centres will conduct comprehensive needs assessment and provide appropriate services according to the strategies of early identification and intervention, service integration and partnership with stakeholders, so as to strengthen the positive functioning of family.

Family Support Programme

7. Early identification and intervention can effectively prevent family problems from deteriorating. As some families in need are reluctant to seek help, the IFSCs, ISCs, Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) and Psychiatric Medical Social Service Units (MSSUs) have implemented the Family Support Programme. Through telephone calls, home visits and other outreaching services, social workers will approach families with members at risk of domestic violence (including suspected elder abuse) or mental illness and those in social isolation, and

refer them to a host of support services. The service units also recruit and train volunteers (including those with personal experience in overcoming family problems or crises) to contact the families and encourage them to receive appropriate support services to prevent the problems from deteriorating.

Crisis Intervention and Short-term Accommodation

8. The Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre and the Family Crisis Support Centre provide multifarious services for individuals/families in crisis or in distress (including victims of suspected elder abuse and their family members). These services include 24-hour hotline services, crisis intervention, counselling and short-term accommodation, etc. Besides, emergency placements are available at some subsidised residential care homes for the elderly and nursing homes to offer temporary or short-term accommodation for elderly people with urgent care need (including victims of elder abuse cases).

Handling of Suspected Elder Abuse Cases

Referral for Support Services

9. The Government has been handling elder abuse cases through multi-disciplinary collaboration. Having regard to the circumstances and upon receipt of reports on elder abuse, staff of SWD, DH, HD, the Police, HA and NGOs will approach abused elderly persons as appropriate. After identification and assessment of the service needs of abused elderly persons, referrals will be made to IFSCs, ISCs, FCPSUs, MSSUs, District Elderly Community Centres, Neighbourhood Elderly Centres and/or relevant government departments for follow-up and provision of preventive, supportive and remedial welfare services for abused elderly persons and their families. Case managers will consider the circumstances and problems faced by the abused elderly persons involved so as to provide appropriate services and help them build a social network of mutual support.

10. The safety and well-being of abused elderly persons are of the primary consideration of the Police in handling elder abuse cases. Upon receipt of reports of elder abuses, frontline officers will safeguard the safety of abused elderly persons and arrange necessary medical examination and treatment for them. The officers will also check whether the persons involved have any previous records of involvement in cases of elder abuse, child abuse, domestic violence and missing persons etc. under the “Enhanced Central Domestic Violence Database” to more accurately assess the situation and take appropriate follow-up actions. Meanwhile, the Police will initiate

investigation and conduct statement-taking in a way most convenient for the elderly persons concerned. If there is sufficient evidence, the Police will arrest the abuser and pursue prosecution.

11. The Police adopt an inter-departmental and a multi-disciplinary approach in handling elder abuse cases. Whether or not the abuser is arrested or charged, police officers will give primary consideration to the abused elderly person's personal safety and assess whether it is still suitable for the elderly person to stay in his/her original residence. Transportation will be arranged as necessary to convey the abused elderly person to a safe accommodation. If the abused elderly person has no suitable place for temporary accommodation, emergency placement will be arranged with the consent of the abused elderly person through SWD or, in the event of a known case, the service unit concerned. If necessary, the Police will refer the abused elderly person to SWD or NGOs for support services with his/her prior consent.

Multi-disciplinary Case Conference and Welfare Plan

12. When the abused elderly person receives assistance from social service agencies, the case manager may, in light of the circumstances of the case, convene a Multi-disciplinary Case Conference (MDCC), which will include representatives from the Police, to discuss the elderly person's needs and formulate a welfare plan.

13. For an elder abuse case where the formulation and implementation of the welfare plan involves at least three service units, if the units concerned and the abused elderly person hold different views regarding the welfare plan, or if the case is complicated in nature, the case manager may convene a MDCC for the professionals concerned to share their professional knowledge, information available and concerns in order to formulate the welfare plan. Before the conference, the case manager will conduct a detailed social background enquiry on the abused elderly person and his/her family and assess a list of risk factors. The scope of assessment covers the abused elderly person's physical, mental and psychosocial conditions, self-care ability, history of abuse and request for assistance, relationship with the abuser, the family's ability to take care of the abused elderly person, and availability of support in the family network. If a MDCC is not required, the case manager will facilitate multi-disciplinary collaboration amongst relevant units through other modes to ensure the smooth formulation and implementation of a welfare plan for the abused elderly person and his/her family members.

Measures to Protect Mentally Incapacitated Victims of Elder Abuse Cases

14. Under the Criminal Procedure Ordinance (Cap. 221), if the victim of an elder abuse case is a mentally incapacitated person, his/her video recorded interviews can be used as the evidence-in-chief. For a mentally incapacitated person who is required to give evidence in court, the Police may apply to the court for permission to give evidence by way of a live television link and arrange witness support service. If it is disclosed that the abused elderly person is receiving regular medical or clinical psychological services, police officers will contact the attending doctor or clinical psychologist who is responsible for his/her follow-up care, so as to assess the mental condition or mental capability of the abused elderly person before deciding whether he/she is fit for giving evidence, and if so, in what way the evidence should be given. In case of emergency or if the abused elderly person has never received any relevant treatment, the Police can seek assistance from doctors of HA or clinical psychologists of SWD.

Central Information System on Elder Abuse Cases

15. SWD has set up the “Central Information System on Elder Abuse Cases” to collect, collate and analyse information on elder abuse cases reported by casework service units of SWD, NGOs, HA, etc. The information covers the types of abuse, particulars of the abused elderly persons, relationship with the abusers, data of the abusers, etc. The system facilitates better understanding of the situation and characteristics of elder abuse in Hong Kong, and provides statistical data for reference by professionals who provide services in preventing and handling elder abuse.

Publicity and Public Education

16. The Government has all along been raising public awareness about elder abuse through publicity and public education and will continue to adopt various prevention and intervention measures to provide appropriate support for vulnerable elderly persons. SWD has published a set of six leaflets on “Protecting Elderly Persons Against Abuse” to enhance the awareness of elderly persons and other members of the public about the problem of elder abuse, prevent the occurrence of incidents of elder abuse, and encourage abused elderly persons as well as their family members and friends to seek early assistance to remedy the situation. The leaflets are available in Chinese, English and some ethnic minority languages to enable wider dissemination of the message of preventing elder abuse. District-based service units also organise public education activities on prevention of elder abuse to enhance the

awareness of elderly persons and their families of the issue and encourage elderly persons in need and their family members and friends to seek early assistance.

17. The Police have been making active publicity and public education efforts to strengthen liaison with elderly persons and raise their awareness of seeking help when there is a need. The objectives are to reduce hindrance to abused elderly persons in seeking assistance owing to social isolation, concerns about family integrity or financial considerations. In this connection, the Senior Police Call Scheme was launched by the Police in February 2014 to strengthen communication with elderly persons and develop fight crime partnership with elderly persons, with a view to enhancing their protection and reducing their risk of falling prey to crime. Under this multi-agency scheme, the Police actively co-operate with SWD, NGOs and elderly service organisations in organising different activities, such as crime prevention talks, elderly fun day, workshops on visiting singleton elderly and anti-crime publicity campaigns. The Police also encourage elderly persons to serve as volunteers in different activities to enhance their social network and have a better understanding of their needs. In 2015, the Police organised jointly with SWD two thematic talks on prevention of elder abuse to inform elderly participants about the procedures for handling elder abuse cases and relevant welfare support services. To promote their awareness against elder abuse, the talks also encouraged elderly persons to pay attention to emotional and behavioural anomalies displayed by their peers and report any suspected elder abuse cases.

Training for Frontline Professionals

18. SWD regularly organises different training programmes for frontline professionals to enhance their knowledge of handling domestic violence, including child abuse, spouse/cohabitant battering, elder abuse, sexual violence and suicide etc., and strengthen their capabilities in risk assessment, violence prevention, post-trauma counselling, etc.

19. In 2014-15, a total of 330 professionals and frontline officers (including Care Workers and Health Workers) of SWD, NGO-operated and contract elderly service units, HA and private residential care homes for the elderly persons attended training programmes organised by SWD to enhance their knowledge and skills to prevent and handle elder abuse.

Advice Sought

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

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Hong Kong Police Force
Social Welfare Department**

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