

Review of Hong Kong's poverty situation and setting of a target for poverty elimination

The Zubin Foundation is a think tank and charity committed to improving the lives of Hong Kong ethnic minorities by alleviating poverty and enhancing social inclusion.

Based on our work we like to share 5 specific issues faced by ethnic minorities (EM) in Hong Kong:

1. Ethnic Minority Families with Special Education Needs

These families usually suffer the most. Most of Ethnic Minority families have no idea what “Special Education Needs” mean. Majority of them are living in poverty with low education. They don’t have knowledge on how to handle issues facing their children. Parents are stressed out. NCS SEN children are faced with the “double whammy” of language pressure and special needs. There are no English as the medium of Instruction public special schools in HK. The only EMI special school is private – which they cannot afford. Most parents could not communicate with schools and have difficulties in supporting their children at home. As a result, the child’s situation is getting worse. We do not have means to help them get out from poverty.

2. Ethnic Minority Women

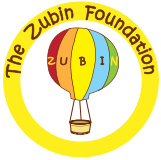
We have been working on a Call Mira helpline for South Asian women and girls. Most of our callers who can’t read or write any languages. When we ask them where they live, this is often the most difficult question. No matter how many years that they have been living in the same building, they can’t tell the name of the building. If these callers have no idea about social services, they have no idea about numbers. We urge the government to form special outreach teams, run by ethnic minority social workers who speak the language to reach out to these EM women.

3. Girl Education

The Zubin Foundation recently released a research on Dreams of Pakistani Children – with in-depth conversation with Pakistani girls. From these girls, we know that girls are discouraged from studying after age 14 and the typical age for engagement is 14 to 15. Education beyond Form 4 or 5 is typically constrained. What was perhaps the most surprising to us most is that these girls envision themselves in poverty in 10 years’ time.

There is a poverty cycle; girls get married in a young age and are unable to complete their education; are not able to find a decent job with career progression or are not allowed to work. The family ends up in poverty. By not addressing girls education, under the auspices of “this is their culture”, we are setting up families to fail and poverty to continue.

Global studies tell us that the key to ending poverty is to educate a girl child because when we do, we educate her family. The education and early marriage of girls in some communities needs to be seriously examined.



Also, we urge the government to monitor the movement of all children, coming in and leaving Hong Kong. This will allow us to understand if indeed some girls are being taken out of Hong Kong for early marriage. In addition, financial and other scholarships need to be put in place to encourage girls and their families to allow girls education to continue.

4. Pre-Kindergarten Nurturing

We conducted a research on kindergarten last year interviewing 36 kindergarten principals. Some of these principals are being very honest that they have difficulties in accepting EM children in their kindergartens, because these young kids don't have any access to Chinese. Studies from the University of Hong Kong said that EM children are 20,000 hours behind with Chinese at start of K1. Teachers are often frustrated in communicating with EM children and discipline them. Therefore EM students are often discriminated against at kindergarten and not welcome. Getting a good start in kindergarten is particularly important because decides the future of the student as it affects choice of choosing CMI primary schools or EMI schools.

5. EM Youth – where are their future

The Zubin Foundation did a research with 253 grassroots EM youth last year on their aspirations, challenges and identity. These youth see themselves as HongKongers, they see Hong Kong home. However, almost half would like to leave Hong Kong if they could choose because of language and discrimination in the society. We urge the government to start public education campaign to end racial discrimination and stereotyping of ethnic minorities.