

**For discussion
on 9 December 2019**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Providing Crisis Support for Sexual Violence Victims

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the crisis support services provided for victims of sexual violence.

Procedural Guidelines

2. To facilitate the interface of the departments and organisations concerned in handling sexual violence cases, a set of multi-disciplinary guidelines and procedures—the Procedural Guidelines for Handling Adult Sexual Violence Cases (revised 2007) ("the Guidelines")—has been worked out by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), Hospital Authority (HA), Department of Health, Hong Kong Police Force (the Police), Department of Justice (DoJ), Legal Aid Department and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The Guidelines aim to enhance cooperation and coordination of relevant departments and organisations, so as to ensure that different needs of the victims of sexual violence (victims) are met in the most appropriate and effective manner. SWD will update the Guidelines from time to time with inputs from relevant professionals.

“One-stop” Service Model

3. Since 2007, SWD has launched a “one-stop” service model for handling sexual violence cases. The “one-stop” service puts emphasis on a "people-oriented" principle, in which designated social workers will provide 24-hour outreach service to victims. Social workers will also coordinate and arrange continuous support and follow-up services for victims, including medical care, forensic examination, statement-taking, emotional counselling, social work support, service information, etc. According to past experience of cases handled, those victims who have gone through different ordeals may have different needs, and the services they need or the venues to provide the services will vary depending on individual victims. The objective of the “one-stop” service is to provide victims with the necessary services in a convenient, safe, private and supportive environment in the company of, and with coordination by

social workers with a view to minimising the necessity for victims to repeat accounts of their unpleasant experience.

CEASE Crisis Centre

4. To enhance the support for victims, SWD has commissioned the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals to operate the CEASE Crisis Centre (CEASE) to provide the aforementioned “one-stop” crisis intervention and support services for victims and their families in Hong Kong. In accordance with the principle of “one-stop” service, the CEASE adopts a multi-disciplinary service model in handling cases of sexual violence.

5. Under the “one-stop” service model, a social worker of the CEASE will be assigned as the “case manager”. When a new case is received, the case manager will provide immediate outreaching/crisis intervention service for the victim in need on a 24-hour basis at a location convenient to the victim for conducting risk assessment and counselling. Referrals to the relevant social/medical service units will be made as early as possible for completing the necessary procedures, which include immediate medical service (e.g. post-coital contraception as well as screening and prophylactic treatment of sexually transmitted diseases), reporting to the Police and statement-taking, conducting forensic examination and other legal procedures. Short-term accommodation¹ will also be provided immediately if needed. The location of the centre is kept confidential for the safety of service users.

6. Victims of sexual violence may seek help from the CEASE through referral by the medical personnel, social workers, Police or other relevant professionals, or approach the CEASE direct through its 24-hour hotline. The CEASE will provide follow-up services for victims for at least six months. To help victims address their stress and emotional problems, the CEASE will provide them with individual and/or group counselling and developmental programmes. The CEASE will make use of appropriate counselling approaches to help victims deal with their post-traumatic negative thoughts and emotional responses, such as self-blame, anger, shame, loss of self-confidence and trust on other people, so that they can regain their self-confidence and ability in dealing with their lives in the future. The CEASE will also provide different types of group therapy and developmental activities of various formats and contents, such as mindfulness training groups to strengthen their self-understanding and acceptance, art therapy groups to help manage their emotions, adventure-based training to enhance their self-confidence and life skills, as well as volunteer training for helping other victims of sexual violence. These could

¹ Normally short-term accommodation of not more than two weeks will be provided. The length of stay may be adjusted in a flexible manner on individual case merits.

help widen their personal support network as well as strengthen their self-image and self-reliance, thereby facilitating their reintegration into the community.

7. The CEASE will also provide victims with other necessary support/assistance, including financial assistance, accompanying them to go through the Police enquiry and court hearings, and where necessary referring them to relevant services, e.g. medical follow-up (including medical treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, other gynecological and AIDS treatment), clinical psychological service, etc. In the process of providing the services, social workers of the CEASE will maintain close liaison with other social workers and professionals concerned to jointly follow up the clients' situations.

8. At the same time, HA has arranged one designated room and one back-up room in each of the 18 public hospitals providing Accident and Emergency service over the territory so as to ensure that the victims can receive "one-stop" service and go through the necessary procedures in the same room as far as possible. SWD and HA regularly review the arrangement of the designated rooms, the operation and workflow, as well as conducting the drill operation of the "one-stop" service. The drill operation this year was conducted in September 2019. SWD will continue to work with the relevant departments and service units to organise the drill operation around once a year, so as to ensure that relevant healthcare and professional staff are familiar with the procedures of the "one-stop" service for better collaboration.

Training

9. On the training aspect, the Staff Development and Training Section of SWD regularly organises training courses on subjects related to sexual violence for the social work staff of SWD, NGOs and HA, in order to enhance their knowledge of the subjects concerned, their ability and sensitivity in handling cases of similar nature. On the other hand, to enhance frontline social workers' understanding of the situations and needs of different genders, ethnic minorities and sexual minorities, SWD has been providing relevant training in strengthening their skills and appropriate attitude in providing services for people with different backgrounds.

Protective Measures for Victim

10. For child and youth victims who need to assist in Police investigation or give evidence in court, there are protective measures to reduce the pressure on them in the process. The Police will arrange a video-recorded interview at a "Vulnerable Witness Interview Suite" if a statement is to be taken from a victim of sexual violence who is under 17 years old or who is mentally incapacitated.

If the victim of the sexual violence case under Police investigation is mentally incapacitated, video-recorded interviews for statement-taking will be conducted by clinical psychologists of SWD. Under the Witness Support Programme introduced by the Police and SWD, specially trained staff will be deployed to take up the role of support persons and provide support services as appropriate for witnesses (including victims of sexual violence) who are mentally incapacitated. The support persons will meet with the witnesses and escort them to visit the court before the trial, and accompany them in giving evidence to help reduce their anxiety.

11. In parallel, DoJ may apply for court approval for victims of sexual violence to give evidence via live television link or behind screen, or for adoption of other measures for protecting victims (e.g. use of special passageway, provision of witness support, etc.).

The Police's Handling of Sexual Violence Cases

12. Upon receipt of a report of sexual violence, the Police's priority is to ensure the personal safety of the victims, protect them from further harm and arrange medical treatment for them. The Police will also start the investigation and follow up the case. They will take statements from the victims as soon as practicable. When sufficient evidence is gathered, the Police will arrest the perpetrators.

13. To reduce the pressure on victims of sexual violence who are assisting in investigation, the Police will, with the victim's consent and where practicable, make immediate referral for the victim to seek the "one-stop" support services provided by SWD and the CEASE. According to the "one-stop" service model, statement-taking and forensic examination for a victim will be conducted in the same public hospital where the victim is receiving treatment as far as practicable. This will prevent victims from tiresome travelling among different locations and will expedite the investigation process. When attending Police interviews and forensic examination, victims can be accompanied by other suitable person(s) should they so desire. Besides, at the first contact with victims of sexual violence, Police officers will introduce to them the crisis intervention services for victims of sexual violence provided by NGOs. Referral can be made at once with the victims' consent.

Public Education and Publicity

14. SWD has set up a website of "Support for Victims of Child Abuse, Spouse/Cohabitant Battering and Sexual Violence" to educate the general public

on prevention of sexual violence, and provide information on support services for victims and how to seek assistance when necessary. SWD also promotes the message on prevention of sexual violence to the public on different social networking platforms at various times.

15. With effect from January 2020, SWD will allocate additional resources to an NGO to raise the awareness of domestic violence and sexual violence among ethnic minorities through community education programmes and other activities, and to encourage victims to seek help.

Other Support Services

16. With SWD's support, the Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women was granted funding by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to set up a sexual violence crisis centre named "the RainLily" in November 2000 (the centre has been funded by the Community Chest since 2006). This non-SWD subvented centre provides services for female victims of sexual abuse. In 2010 and 2014, funding from the Lotteries Fund was also granted with SWD's support for the reprovisioning and fitting-out works of the RainLily to enable continuation of its services.

17. The RainLily provides hotline service at specified period each day to handle the enquiries and requests for assistance from the public and the victims. Police, doctors, nurses, social workers and other professionals can also seek support through the 24-hour paging services provided by the RainLily. Upon receipt of a report, counsellors of the RainLily will provide immediate crisis intervention and counselling service, accompany the victim to give statements to the Police, attend forensic examination and relevant medical treatment, etc. Also, the RainLily will provide victims with emotional support and counselling services by case or in groups as well as other relevant services, including accompanying victims to give evidence in court or making referral to other professional services.

Advice Sought

18. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department**

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