

For discussion
on 8 March 2021

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Support for Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence

This paper briefs Members on the support services provided for victims of domestic violence and sexual violence by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

Relevant Laws on Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence

2. The current legal framework dealing with domestic violence is made up of various pieces of legislation, imposing criminal sanctions on acts of violence, or providing civil remedies to victims of domestic violence. For the criminal legislation, the Offences Against The Person Ordinance (Cap. 212) imposes criminal sanctions on murder, manslaughter, attempts to murder, wounding or inflicting grievous bodily harm, exposing child whereby life is endangered, ill-treatment or neglect by those in charge of child or young person, causing bodily injury by gunpowder etc., assaults occasioning actual bodily harm and common assaults; while the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200) imposes criminal sanctions on acts of intimidation, arson, destroying or damaging property and sexual offences including rape, incest, indecent assaults etc.

3. The civil legislation includes the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (Cap. 189), which provides civil remedies to minors affected by domestic violence and offers victims of domestic violence relief from molestation. They are protected irrespective of whether they are residing with the perpetrators. The Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance (Cap. 213) empowers the court to grant a supervision order or appoint a legal guardian in respect of a child or juvenile who is in need of care or protection.

Multi-disciplinary Model

4. The Government has long been committed to combating domestic violence and sexual violence. To this end, under the scope of social work, the SWD has adopted a cross-disciplinary model as well as a multi-pronged intervention approach to support the victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and needy families through a wide range of preventive, supportive and remedial services. In addition, various mechanisms for regular communication and liaison among different sectors and disciplines are in place at the central, district and frontline levels.

Central level

5. The Committee on Child Abuse (CCA) and the Working Group on Combating Intimate Partner Violence and Adult Sexual Violence (WGCV) both chaired by the Director of Social Welfare and comprising representatives from the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police), Education Bureau (EDB), Hospital Authority (HA) and NGOs, etc. have been set up at the central level to map out strategies to tackle the problems of child maltreatment, domestic violence and adult sexual violence.

6. To assist the personnel concerned (e.g. police officers, social workers, medical and school personnel) in handling cases involving child maltreatment, spouse/cohabitant battering and sexual violence in a professional and effective manner, SWD has drawn up, in collaboration with relevant bureaux/departments, NGOs and related professionals, the “Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation”, the “Procedural Guide for Handling Intimate Partner Violence Cases” and the “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Adult Sexual Violence Cases” for reference and use by the personnel of the government bureaux/departments and NGOs, including social services units, the Police, HA, Department of Health (DH), Legal Aid Department (LAD) and schools, etc. who have chance to contact children in carrying necessary assessments, investigation and follow-up plans, etc.

7. To monitor the trend and understand the characteristics of domestic violence cases in Hong Kong, two central information systems, namely the “Central Information System on Spouse/Cohabitant Battering Cases and Sexual Violence Cases” and the “Child Protection Registry”, are maintained by SWD to capture statistical information of spouse/cohabitant battering cases, sexual violence cases and newly registered child protection cases reported by different parties (including the Police, HA, casework units, etc.) The statistical information are reported to CCA and WGCV and shared with relevant departments/organisations regularly. Moreover, the statistical figures on reported domestic violence cases will be uploaded on SWD’s website quarterly for information of the general public. The relevant statistical information in the past five years is appended at Annex for reference.

District level

8. There are “District Coordinating Committee on Family and Child Welfare” and “District Liaison Group on Family Violence” under each of the 11 SWD Districts, with the participation of representatives from various government departments, NGOs, local organisations, community leaders, etc., to coordinate the provision of support services for victims of domestic violence and to consolidate effort in combating domestic violence at district level.

Frontline level

9. In case handling, the Administration has adopted a three-pronged strategy to combat domestic violence, i.e. provision of preventive, supportive and specialised

services.

Preventive Measures

10. SWD and subvented organisations have been promoting the message of prevention of domestic violence and sexual violence as well as encouraging those in need of help to seek assistance through various media and platforms. To strengthen the publicity message on prevention of domestic violence, SWD has launched the Facebook Fanpage/Instagram named “Heart and Hut” in November 2020 to encourage the family members cherish each other and avoid using violence to solve problems. Public education activities of “Strengthening Families and Combating Violence” are also organised from time to time by the District Social Welfare Offices. SWD also produces promotional leaflets and launches websites of support for victims of child maltreatment, spouse/cohabitant battering and sexual violence to help the victims understand their right, legal protection as well as the social services provided in the community. To encourage victims of minorities to seek help, it is highlighted that the support services are provided regardless of their gender, race and sexual orientation.

Support Services

11. To facilitate early identification of families with risk of domestic violence (e.g. parents under parenting stress and couples in conflicts), and provide support and counselling services to reduce the occurrence of domestic violence, the Government provides various services and support for families with potential risk of domestic violence.

Integrated Family Service Centres and Integrated Services Centres

12. The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) across the territory operated by SWD and NGOs provide a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial services for persons being affected by domestic violence. Social workers of IFSCs/ISCs will assess the needs of individuals and families and assist those parents or children affected by domestic violence to tackle their personal or family problems including parenting, child care, housing and/or financial problems, etc. through the provision of comprehensive services, including counselling, outreaching service, group work, programme activities, service referral, family support programme, family life education and volunteer training, etc. to meet their needs.

Comprehensive Child Development Service

13. DH, HA, SWD and EDB jointly implement the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) which targets early identification of various health and social needs of children aged between 0 to 5 and their families, and provides the required service so as to foster the children's healthy development. CCDS identifies at-risk

pregnant women, mothers with postnatal depression, families with psychosocial needs, as well as pre-primary children with health, developmental and behavioural problems, etc. through the Maternal and Child Health Centres of DH, hospitals under HA, as well as other relevant service units (e.g. IFSCs, ISCs and pre-primary institutions). Children and families in need identified are referred to relevant service units for appropriate health and social service. In order to promote cross-sectoral communication and collaboration, HA, DH and SWD had set up a working group from 2014 to 2019 to jointly develop a "Manual of Parenting Capacity Assessment Framework" (0 to 36 months), for use by relevant professionals when making assessment on child care and parenting capacity of the parents/carers.

Strengthening the provision of social work service for school children and their families

14. In order to provide early assistance to the needy families, SWD has launched a three-year "Pilot Scheme on Social Work Services for Pre-primary Institutions" by phases in 2018/19 school year for about 150 000 pre-primary children and their families in more than 700 subsidised child care centres, kindergarten and kindergarten-cum-child care centres. Besides, starting from the 2018/19 school year, the Government has also provided more resources for public sector primary schools to implement, in light of their school-based circumstances, the policy of "one school social worker for each school", with a view to strengthening their social work and guidance services. Starting from 2019-20, the government has allocated additional resources to strengthen the manpower of social work in secondary schools, by providing two school social workers for each secondary school, and at the same time increasing supervisory support.

Hotlines Services

15. SWD has set up a 24-hour hotline (telephone number: 23432255) which provides phone counselling, support and advice by social workers who will also arrange appropriate follow-up to individuals/families in need. Outside the duty hours (including public holidays), callers can choose to transfer their calls to the Hotline and Outreaching Service Team operated by Tung Wah Group of Hospitals funded by the SWD for assistance from social workers.

Child Care Services

16. To support parents who cannot take care of their children (especially those under child abuse crisis), SWD has all along been subsidising NGOs to provide a variety of day child care services, including the services of aided standalone child care centres (CCCs) and aided CCCs attached to KGs for children aged below 3, occasional child care service, extended hours service and mutual help child care centres for children aged below 6, extended hours service and mutual help child care centres, as well as the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project that provides flexible care service for children aged below 9. Besides, to support children or youth with behavioural and/or emotional problems who cannot be adequately taken care of by their families, SWD has

all along been subsidising NGOs to provide various types of residential child care service free of charge, including institutional service, such as residential CCCs, children's home, boys'/girls' homes and boys'/girls' hostels, as well as non-institutional service, such as foster care service and small group homes.

Specialised Services

Family and Child Protective Services Units

17. SWD has set up 11 FCPSUs composed of experienced social workers across the territories as specialised units to handle cases involving child protection and spouse/cohabitant battering. Upon receipt of referral, the social worker of FCPSU will assess the situation and service needs of the case and provide a coordinated package of one-stop service for the victims of domestic violence, the family and the perpetrator. FCPSUs adopt a cross-disciplinary model to provide support for victims and their children to tide over the difficulties, and mitigate the trauma brought by the violence incident and help them restore a new living. FCPSUs also provide counselling to the perpetrators so as to alter their violent attitude and behaviors. The social worker of FCPSU will serve as the case manager to co-ordinate various services and assistances, including crisis intervention, short-term accommodation (e.g. the refuge centres or other crisis intervention centres), counselling service, clinical psychological treatment, medical services, housing assistance and financial assistance, etc. The social worker will also provide statutory protection for the child(ren) if needed.

18. To ensure the safety of the victims and their families and provide timely support for them, in particular the victims, when a social worker or relevant personnel receive or identify a domestic violence case, he/she will conduct initial assessment on the risk of further harm in accordance with the initial information and make necessary arrangement if he/she needs emergency services such as medical check, etc. If the victims and children are considered to be at high risk of further violence, the social worker will take immediate action (subject to the victim's consent as appropriate) to arrange shelter, temporary accommodation or residential service for them. In case of need, social worker will also assist the victims to seek legal protection through application for an injunction order under the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (DCRVO) or initiating the application for a Care or Protection Order under the Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance (PCJO) to protect the children concerned. For cases suspected to involve criminal offence, the relevant personnel will report case to the police.

Refuge Service

19. SWD has set up five Refuge Centres for Women (RCs) operated by NGOs to provide short-term residential places to individuals/families facing domestic violence or in crisis. Currently, there are a total capacity of 268 places. On the other hand, the

Family Crisis Support Centre (FCSC) assists individuals and families in crisis or distress to handle family crisis at its early stage by providing 50 places of short term accommodation and counselling service etc. Moreover, the Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre (CEASE Crisis Centre), with provision of 80 short-term residential places, provides crisis intervention and support services and liaises with the relevant social and medical service units for victims of sexual violence and domestic violence as well as individuals/families who are in crisis or distress. To enhance the support for victims of domestic violence, SWD has provided additional manpower resources for RCs, FCSC and CEASE Crisis Centre in October 2019 and January 2020 respectively to strengthen the support services for families in need at night.

The Victim Support Programme for Victims of Family Violence

20. SWD has funded the Victim Support Programme for Victims of Family Violence (VSP) to enhance the support to the victims of domestic violence, including those undergoing judicial proceedings. Through the VSP, the victims will be provided with information on the legal proceedings and community support services (such as legal aid, accommodation, medical treatment and child care support, etc.). They will also be provided with emotional support and, if needed, company to go through the legal procedures.

Counselling Services for Perpetrators

21. FCPSU of SWD has specially designed for perpetrators of intimate partner violence the Batterer Intervention Programme (BIP) and the Educational Programme on Stopping Domestic Violence (EPSDV), as well as the Anti-Violence Programme (AVP) approved by the Director of Social Welfare as ordered under the DCRVO (Cap. 189). It seeks to equip participants with the knowledge on impacts of intimate partner violence (IPV), skills in handling conflicts in a non-violent way and to improve relationship with their partners.

22. Since October 2018, SWD has funded three NGOs to launch the Support Programme for Enhancing Peaceable Relationship (SPeaR) in five service regions in Hong Kong. The purpose of SPeaR is to provide an early and flexible intervention including individual counselling/group work and programme activities for perpetrators/potential perpetrators under IPV to prevent and stop violence as well as improving the intimate relationships. It also provides educational programmes for children and victims of domestic violence who have witnessed or been exposed to IPV.

Specialised Co-parenting Support Centres

23. In October 2019, SWD has set up a Specialised Co-parenting Support Centre (SCSC) operated by NGOs in each of the five regions in Hong Kong to provide one-stop child-focused co-parenting support services, including counselling service and parenting co-ordination service, structured co-parenting groups and programmes and children contact service for separated/divorcing/divorced parents and their children. It

aims to reduce the impact on the children due to custody or guardianship disputes under divorce, enhance the cooperation between parents and strengthen the parent-child connection so that the parents can carry out their parental responsibilities more effectively.

Support for Victims of Sexual Violence

24. The CEASE Crisis Centre funded by SWD, is to provide support services including short-term accommodation for victims of sexual violence (including sexual minorities). The victims can receive the services and go through all relevant procedures in a convenient, safe, confidential and supportive environment, and minimise the need for the victims to repeat accounts of their unpleasant experience. In accordance with the principle of “one-stop” service, the CEASE Crisis Centre adopts a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary service model in handling cases of sexual violence. When a referral of sexual violence case is received, the designated social worker will immediately attend to the victim’s location, including hospital and police station, to provide a spectrum of services, including 24-hour outreaching services/immediate support, counselling services, reporting to the Police, assistance in arranging medical treatment and forensic examination and accompanying the victims to go through all the necessary procedure.

25. To facilitate the victims of sexual violence in seeking medical treatment at the Accident and Emergency (A&E) of public hospital in accordance with their needs, HA has arranged one designated room and one back-up room in each of the 18 public hospitals providing A&E services throughout the territory for provision of “one-stop” service to the victims.

26. SWD together with HA, DH, the Police, Department of Justice, LAD and NGOs have worked out “The Procedural Guidelines for Handling Adult Sexual Violence Cases” (the Guidelines). The Guidelines aim to enhance collaboration of relevant departments and organisations, so as to ensure that different needs of the victims of sexual violence are met in the most appropriate and effective manner. SWD will update the Guidelines from time to time with inputs from relevant professionals. To ensure that relevant healthcare and professional staff members are familiar with the procedures of the one-stop service for better co-operation and enhancing the sensitivity among the frontline staff, SWD works jointly with HA, the Police and relevant departments to organise regular drill exercise on the procedures of the one-stop service starting from 2019.

Support for Ethnic Minorities

27. Considering the unique languages and cultural background of ethnic minorities (EMs), SWD has produced publicity leaflets on “prevention of child maltreatment” and “support services for victims of spouse/cohabitant battering” in six to eight EM languages, in addition to Chinese and English. The leaflets are available for collection by public at various venues and for download from the SWD’s website. SWD has

created shortcut icon on “Information for Ethnic Minorities” on homepage to facilitate easy access to relevant service information in different EM languages by the public. Messages on prevention of domestic violence and child maltreatment as well as positive thinking are also broadcasted in EM languages through radio. On the other hand, SWD has commissioned CEASE Crisis Centre to raise the awareness of EMs towards domestic violence and sexual violence and to encourage the victims to seek help through public education programmes and other activities since January 2020.

28. To enhance support for EMs, starting from March 2020, SWD has commissioned NGOs to set up three outreaching teams with employment of EM staff on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon and the New Territories respectively to proactively reach out to EMs and connect those in need to mainstream welfare services such as family, social security, elderly and youth services, etc.

Service Provision during the Pandemic

29. During the pandemic period, the RCs, FCSC and CEASE Crisis Centre subvented by SWD and operated by NGOs remain operating on a 24-hour basis in providing temporary accommodation and support services for individuals and families in crisis including victims of domestic violence. The Victim Support Programme for Victims of Family Violence continues to provide urgent support services to the victims. There was an increase in the number of calls received by the departmental hotline service in 2020 while the occupancy rate of five women’s shelters ranged from 44.9% to 73.7% during the period with marked increase from March to June 2020. Despite of the work-from-home arrangement in the SWD or NGOs IFSCs/ISCs, FCPSUs and Clinical Psychological Units, urgent and support services to the victims of domestic violence continue to be provided through various means, including contact through telephone and video communication equipment. With the pandemic situation being stabilised, all service units have gradually resumed normal operation, including the provision of therapeutic and mutual support groups.

Advice Sought

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

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
March 2021**

Social Welfare Department
Statistics on domestic violence cases and sexual violence cases

1) Child Maltreatment*(Source: Child Protection Registry)***Newly Registered Child Protection Cases**

| Type \ Year | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Physical harm/abuse | 378 | 374 | 493 | 430 | 389 |
| Neglect | 182 | 229 | 237 | 237 | 201 |
| Sexual abuse | 294 | 315 | 297 | 305 | 313 |
| Psychological harm/abuse | 10 | 5 | 11 | 8 | 10 |
| Multiple abuse | 28 | 24 | 26 | 26 | 27 |
| Total | 892 | 947 | 1 064 | 1 006 | 940 |

2) Spouse / Cohabitant Battering*(Source: Central Information System on Spouse / Cohabitant Battering Cases and Sexual Violence Cases)***Newly Reported Spouse / Cohabitant Battering Cases**

| Type \ Year | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Physical violence | 2 634 | 2 432 | 2 349 | 2 313 | 2 055 |
| Sexual violence | 19 | 21 | 23 | 20 | 21 |
| Psychological abuse | 397 | 410 | 353 | 311 | 276 |
| Multiple violence | 271 | 265 | 212 | 276 | 249 |
| Total | 3 321 | 3 128 | 2 937 | 2 920 | 2 601 |

3) Sexual Violence*(Source: Central Information System on Spouse / Cohabitant Battering Cases and Sexual Violence Cases)***Newly Reported Sexual Violence Cases** ^(Note 1)

| Type \ Year | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Rape/unlawful sexual intercourse | 101 | 122 | 130 | 159 | 146 |
| Indecent assault | 729 | 802 | 844 | 778 | 462 |
| Forced masturbation | 0 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 4 |
| Forced oral sex | 2 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 2 |
| Unlawful Buggery | 2 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| Others ^(Note 2) | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 33 |
| Multiple Abuse | 27 | 30 | 29 | 33 | 26 |
| Total | 861 | 967 | 1 020 | 979 | 674 |

(Note 1) Excluding the sexual violence cases involving spousal/cohabiting relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

(Note 2) In 2020, SWD has examined the sexual violence cases which were previously placed under “indecent assault” but without physical contact (including threats with nude chats/pictures on-line, forced photo-taking or threaten to broadcast the indecent photos/videos of the victim through internet, etc.) and re-categorised them into “Others”. Hence, there is a significant increase on the number of “Others” cases in 2020 when compared with 2019.