

**Citizens Party
Response to

the
Initial Report
by the Hong Kong
Special Administrative Region
on the
Convention on the on Elimination of
All Forms of Discrimination against
Women**

7 December 1998

CONTENTS

General Observations of the Initial Report	Page 2
Recommendations	3
Article 5:28-35 <i>Protection to Women against Violence</i>	5
Article 10 <i>Equality in Education</i>	7
Article 11:78-108 <i>Equality in Employment and Labor Rights</i>	10
Article 11:109-113 <i>Childcare Facilities</i>	13
Article 12 <i>Equality in Access to Health Facilities</i>	15

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF THE INITIAL REPORT

“The Convention impinges on a wide range of policy areas - education, employment, health, welfare, security, to name a few. Its implementation requires efforts of literally all policy bureaux in the HKSAR Government. Some commentators have suggested that a Women’s Commission be set up to provide a focal point to address matters of concern for women. The Government considers it neither necessary nor desirable as at the top level of the Administration, the Policy Groups chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and attended by senior representatives of the bureaux concerned, already provide the necessary co-ordination among various bureaux. In addition, the Equal Opportunities Commission - an independent statutory body - is in place to promote equal opportunities between the two genders and implement the Sex Discrimination Ordinance.” (Article 3:19)

The Hong Kong Government asserts in the Initial Report that certain legislation, the Equal Opportunities Commission, and coordination between various government bodies effectively uphold the ideals of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. However, the system has gaps which fall under neither the jurisdiction of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), nor the direct responsibilities of the different government bureaux.

The Citizens Party recommends that the Government consider the need for a Commissioner of Women’s Affairs within the civil service, reporting directly to the Chief Secretary for Administration. This Commissioner’s responsibility is to advise the Government on women’s affairs and to act as a coordinator of plans between the government and the community, including the EOC.

Numerous social problems still reflect the rift between implementation and vision of recently enacted ordinances against discrimination. For instance, in the section on “Equal Employment Rights and Opportunities,” the Government states:

“From the employers’ perspective, there appears little economic rationale to deliberately turn away prospective job applicants just for the sake of sex discrimination, as this will only limit their source of manpower supply. Furthermore, through years of public education and promotion, most employers have now built up the attitude and concept of according the same employment opportunities to both men and women.” (Article 11:81)

But in truth, employers have not yet built up that concept and attitude. Embedded gender stereotypes and biases still pervade culture and society, but the Initial Report does not fully address those issues.

Often, gender discrimination in Hong Kong traces its roots to a lack of consciousness of equal opportunities. Statistics document gender disproportion in the labor force, employment opportunities, and the educational system. In addition, women do not have full and affordable access to facilities and services for healthcare and childcare. Those suffering from abuse and domestic violence do not receive adequate support for mental recovery and prevention of future violence. These are all critical issues which confront Hong Kong women today.

Education and effective implementation of legislation against sex discrimination requires a Commissioner specifically assigned to monitor and promote women rights. This submissions aims to supplement information and make recommendation in five policy areas: violence, education, employment, childcare, and healthcare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We place an emphasis on education and long-term learning for political awareness and individual empowerment - at all stages of life. In addition, a regular monitoring mechanism is crucial to identifying and eliminating sex discrimination in various sectors of society. Appointment of a Commissioner of Women's Affairs within the Government will ensure that equal opportunity standards are implemented, while education will reconstruct social perceptions of gender dynamics at the grassroots level.

ARTICLE 5:28-35

PROTECTION TO WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE

- Set up more shelters for victims of abuse at accessible locations.
- Education law enforcement officers/agencies to better understand sexual and domestic violence.
- Revise the Domestic Violence Ordinance.
- Promote public education on domestic violence.
- Focus on immigrant women from the mainland.

ARTICLE 10

EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Primary and Secondary

- Eliminate gender-specific school uniforms.
- Develop gender awareness program in training educational professionals.
- Promote gender balance in topics in curriculum and enrollment decisions.
- Start a regular sex education class in the Hong Kong secondary curriculum.

Tertiary

- Appoint Equal Opportunities Officers on campus to monitor against discrimination in enrollment, curriculum, grading, and awards of grants and scholarships.
- Establish a unit to provide counseling and process sexual harassment cases on each campus.
- Provide more funds for Women's Studies programs and gender-related research.
- Counter sex discrimination in selection of lecturers, professors, and instructors.

Vocational Training

- Design vocational training program which addresses women's concerns in each profession.

ARTICLE 11:78-108

EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR RIGHTS

- Increase efforts to monitor gender discrimination in the private sector and the civil service.
- Report on income disparities between men and women.
- Increase research on gender-specific information.
- Focus on long-term skills demanded by the market in retraining; subsidize class fees and review the age limit for the Employee Retraining Scheme.
- Encourage general education for those who have not yet completed secondary education.

ARTICLE 11:109-113
CHILDCARE FACILITIES

- Conduct further research to assess the childcare needs of the community.
- Provide more government subvented or aided childcare centers.
- Extend hours of service to early morning and late evening.
- Carry out more rigorous inspection standards for childcare centers and childcare workers.
- Give more consideration to support services for mainland wives and single parents.

ARTICLE 12
EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO HEALTH FACILITIES

- Provide more comprehensive coverage of breast cancer and cervical cancer screening.
- Raise awareness of women's psychological health.
- Give more information about AIDS and other sexual transmitted diseases.
- Start a regular sex education program in Hong Kong curriculum.
- Conduct an annual study of women's health needs to develop health programs accordingly.
- Initiate neighborhood health clinics to dispense advice and therapy.

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The Hong Kong Government records only 491 cases of battered women in 1997,¹ but the incidence of abuse is likely to be very much higher than the official number.² Women continue to find extreme difficulty in reporting abuse and leaving their husbands. Many seeking refuge in shelters have already suffered from domestic violence for 5 to 9 years, some over ten. They remain in abusive relationships for years before seeking help. Their fear then reinforces male dominance. While the Initial Report claims that: “a wide range of services is offered by the HKSAR Government to victims of spouse battering” (Article 5:35), these services are somewhat limited.

The Commissioner of Women’s Affairs can delegate responsibilities in the relevant Government bodies to ensure that the necessary research, staff training, educational program, and services are conducted to carry forward progressive policies.

1. Shelters

Hong Kong’s three official shelters for battered women serve a total population of 6.7 million.³ They are regularly full, but there are no plans for more.⁴ While a few other NGOs also provide shelters, the public is not always well-informed about them. The Government should set up more shelters for battered women, or subsidize social organizations to expand their services to more locations. As reference - New Zealand has a population of only 3.6 million and some 56 safe houses. Sweden, with 8.8 million, has 70 shelters.

2. Police Training

The police treat domestic violence like all other crimes. Though maintaining impartiality, they fail to provide proper psychological and advisory support to victims. They are also unaware that domestic violence is often repeated and takes place over a long period of time. They need further education on treatment of these cases.⁵

¹ Harmony House Annual report 1997-98 (Harmony House is one of the three shelters for battered women in Hong Kong)

² Sweden, by contrast, has a population of 8.8 million and 19,093 reported cases of domestic violence in 1997.

³ 2.6 million includes women 16 year and older. Census and Statistics. “Monthly Digest of Statistics.” Nov. 1998.

⁴ As reference - New Zealand has a population of only 3.6 million and some 56 safe houses.

Sweden, with 8.8 million population, has 70 shelters.

⁵ According to the NGO Harmony House’s guidelines, only 5 police stations in Hong Kong deal with domestic violence properly. Harmony House provides shelter to women.

3. Differentiation in Law

Two aspects of the Domestic Violence Ordinance need to be reevaluated in respect to battered wives: application for an injunction order and the appropriate duration.⁶ Furthermore, the justice system needs to recognize domestic violence as a distinct form of crime. It does not yet sufficiently address or solve the problem of repeated offense. The state needs to reevaluate and revise certain sections of the Ordinance.

4. Public Education

Education concerning domestic violence is virtually non-existent in Hong Kong - it is still widely understood as a “family affair.” Public education needs to inform people about how to deal with domestic violence.

5. “Mainland” Women

NGO statistics show that 64% of the battered women seeking shelter in 1997 were recent immigrants from Mainland China, an increase of 21% since 1991. Economic uncertainty, crowding, and family hardship contribute to violence at home. The Initial Report neglects the high incidence of battered mainland wives, indicating insufficient official concern for one of the groups most seriously affected. These women in particular have problems with social integration and require more support.

⁶

Injunction orders are costly and only granted for 3 months currently.

ARTICLE 10

EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

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- Eliminate gender-specific school uniforms.
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- Start a regular sex education class in the Hong Kong secondary curriculum.

Tertiary

- Appoint Equal Opportunities Officers on campus to monitor against discrimination in enrollment, curriculum, grading, and awards of grants and scholarships.
- Establish a unit to provide counseling and process sexual harassment cases on each campus.
- Provide more funds for Women's Studies programs and gender-related research.
- Counter sex discrimination in selection of lecturers, professors, and instructors.

Vocational Training

- Design vocational training program which addresses women's concerns in each profession.

Despite the Sex Discrimination Ordinance since 1995 (Article 10:62-63), numerous forms of sex discrimination persists in the Hong Kong educational system. The problems are embedded in general assumptions about female students. These assumptions in turn influence enrollment, curriculum, and professional aspirations. A Women's Commissioner could encourage the Education Department, private schools, and tertiary institutions to advocate gender equality in education, including enrollment and curriculum.

Primary and Secondary

1. Uniforms

Uniforms at most primary and secondary schools still limit girls to skirts. Hong Kong needs to abolish this policy, which hinders female mobility and reinforces gender stereotypes.

2. Gender Awareness Programs for Professionals in Education

An awareness of gender issues is crucial to dispelling stereotypes based on sex. Thus, a gender awareness program should be incorporated into regular training for teachers and staff members.

3. Curriculum

Though students have access to all subjects of the curriculum (Article 10:66-67), entrenched gender stereotypes remain. This gender divide between arts and sciences among students is reinforcing "a masculine image of science subjects, and a feminine image for the arts."⁷ Many teachers and school administrators still maintain the underlying idea that technology and science oriented subjects will prepare male students to be future breadwinners. In the professional world, women are regarded the less

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Tracy, pg. 112. For every female student choosing History, Chinese Literature, and Geography (the "soft" sciences), the respective ratio for male students have been 0.47, 0.41, and 0.54. By contrast, for every female student studying Physics, Chemistry, Additional Mathematics, and Biology (the "hard" sciences) - there were respectively 2.09, 1.98, 1.95, and 1.58 male students.

competitive of the two sexes.⁸ The educational system needs to devise workshops and programs which encourage all students to explore options in diverse career and academic fields.

4. Standards in Enrollment

Since the implementing of universal basic education (aged 6-15) in 1978, the educational level of girls has risen (Article 10:64). The Equal Opportunities Commission has received complaints that enrollment for university is not always gender-neutral.⁹ The Education Department, under the supervision of a central Commissioner of Women's Affairs, can further promote awareness of subtle forms of discrimination in enrollment decisions.

5. Sex Education at Secondary Level

Though the Government claims to incorporate sex education in numerous subjects (Article 12:131),¹⁰ the educational system does not devote classes, workshops, or programs specifically for sex education. Parents and school administrators are in fact reluctant to discuss sex, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and prevention. In particular, knowledge about AIDS is very limited in comparison to other industrialized countries.¹¹ School sex education covers the basic physiology, but fail to discuss applicable practices relating to pregnancy and sexual transmitted diseases. A regular course should be compulsory to all secondary school students.

Tertiary Education

1. University Equal Opportunity Officer

An Equal Opportunities Officer should be appointed to each tertiary educational institution to guard against gender discrimination, promote awareness of relevant issues, and process cases and complaints. The following are major areas of concern.

Standards in Enrollment:

At the tertiary level, there is still a small gap between female and male enrollment.¹² Admissions offices tend to give greater leverage to secondary school graduates from the (male dominated) science stream than students from the (female dominated) arts stream.¹³ The Equal Opportunities Officer can monitor the admissions process.

⁸ The entrenched Chinese social concept that women need not be too highly educated stems from the belief that they will marry and be supported by their husbands. Men, on the other hand, need to be as educated as possible to maximize their employability and earning power to fulfill the breadwinner's role.

⁹ Tacey, Elisabeth (1998, August 7, Friday). "Girls and boys put schools to test." *The South China Morning Post*. pg. 19. This controversial debate initiated when a female student with top grades was assigned to a less prestigious school than the ones allotted to male classmates with equivalent or lower marks. By October, the EOC had received from parents over 22,000 responses to a questionnaire on concerns over equal educational opportunities. The investigation continues.

¹⁰ In the Initial Report, the Government states that sex education is included in the schools subjects of General Studies, Biology, Human Biology, Science, Social Studies, Home Economics, Religious Studies, and Liberal Studies at primary, secondary and form six levels. Training courses for teachers are also provided according to the report.

¹¹ A survey conducted by the Family Planning Association has found that knowledge about sex and pregnancy is alarmingly inadequate - nearly half of the respondents incorrectly believed that a woman could not get pregnant having intercourse (if ejaculation occurred outside her body). The survey found that 82% of the males and 50% of the females receive their sex education from newspapers and magazines.

¹² Census and Statistics. "1996 Population By-Census: Main Reports." For instance, in 1996, only 8.8% of the female population attained tertiary education qualification, while the corresponding figure for the male population was 12.0%

¹³ Luk, Hung-kay (1991). "Women's opportunities in tertiary education in Hong Kong" in *Selected papers of Conference on Gender Studies in Chinese Societies* by Fanny M. Cheung, Po-san Wan, Hang-keung Choi and Lee-man Choy (eds.). Hong Kong, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong. This contributes to a tapering off of female students at the tertiary level. Thus, while the female-to-male population ratio is about 50:50 (2,554,664:2,511,854), the sex ratio of students in tertiary education is 0.79:1 (339,936 females to 428,584 males).

Government Funded Scholarships and Grants:

One way to encourage students is to provide financial incentives in the form of scholarships, grants, and awards (Article 10:75-76). Instead of simply relying on non-governmental organizations, private groups, colleges, and universities - the Government should also formulate a coherent and progressive policy on the elimination of gender stereotypes by providing public funding for students to pursue less conventional topics, such as Women's Studies.

Selection of Faculty:

The proportional breakdown of the faculty in different educational institutions is also skewed. At the tertiary level in 1997, 276 male and 86 female instructors and lecturers have posts in universities or technical colleges. Universities need to promote more balanced gender representation.

2. Sexual Harassment:

Educational institutions do not yet have a unit specifically designed for the needs of female students.¹⁴ The existing procedures for reporting harassment offenses are lengthy, bureaucratic, and public. Moreover, the penalty for offenders is usually only censure, with no strict measures to prevent future reoccurrence. Victims, therefore, are dissuaded from approaching the staff or faculty. Universities and colleges should have a reliable system for counseling and processing sexual abuse cases.¹⁵

3. Vocational Training

Women continue to be segregated in higher education sectors (Article 10:68-72). For those who do not continue onto the tertiary level, Annex I of the Initial Report lists 18 types of training courses. The proportion of female trainees is higher in only three types; their number constitutes only 33% of total enrollment.

The CEDAW Report is correct in stating that educational inequality is not so prominent among younger age groups (Article 11:100). Nevertheless, the remaining female population still requires adequate schooling to cope with the dramatic social changes within the last few decades. This generational gap can only be mitigated through long-term investment in raising general education level and lifelong learning. For women who have completed secondary education, the Vocational Training Council should take greater initiative in developing a vocational certification system with some focus on the needs of women trainees. The program can include classes on high skilled work, such as computer maintenance, nutrition, pharmacy, childcare, retail, and hospitality services - they should, however, address specific issues which women will encounter in their respective fields. As government resources are limited, the program can enlist the expertise and resources of private institutions.

¹⁴ When the Gender Research Program of the Chinese University of Hong Kong distributed questionnaires to over 800 students, female participants noted various cases categorized under 18 types of campus sexual harassment behavior. Student clubs and support groups have also reported incidence of indecent behavior at Hong Kong University. At the same time, they feel that the school has not provided them with a discreet and regular system for reporting and processing harassment cases. (XX Group, Hong Kong University)

¹⁵ Hong Kong University, in response on complaints on a recent harassment case, has committed to appointing an Equal Opportunities Officer to deal with gender issues on campus.

ARTICLE 11:78-108

EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR RIGHTS

- ❑ Increase efforts to monitor gender discrimination in the private sector and the civil service.
- ❑ Report on income disparities between men and women.
- ❑ Increase research on gender-specific information.
- ❑ Focus on long-term skills demanded by the market in retraining; subsidize class fees and review the age limit for the Employee Retraining Scheme.
- ❑ Encourage general education for those who have not yet completed secondary education.

The Initial Report claims that women “enjoy the fruits of economic growth and prosperity” alongside men (Article 11:102). Yet it omits certain discriminatory practices and serious factors which impede women’s efforts at continuing education and retraining. Statistics suggest that income and employment are not independent of gender prejudice. While the Government and the EOC cannot easily control income level in the private sector, they can implement an effective monitoring system for equal employment opportunities. The Commissioner of Women’s Affairs will serve as a crucial link between the state and private employers. In addition, the Commissioner should push for the retraining scheme to integrate more long-term skills into its program, putting greater emphasis on long-term employment. Other areas which need attention from the Government include general education for immigrant women and research of gender dynamics by the Census and Statistic Department.

1. The Professional World

Though the proportion of women in various sectors has risen slightly (Article 11:102), female workers are nonetheless segregated both vertically into low-level non-managerial positions as well as horizontally into the “pink collar” professions. With a male to female population ratio of 1:0.98 for those aged 20-65,¹⁶ Hong Kong men outnumber their female counterparts in seven out of nine occupational groupings.¹⁷ Age discrimination exerts a significantly heavier pressure on women than on men.¹⁸

¹⁶ As of June 1998, there are 2.0 million men (75.5% of the male population) and 1.3 million women in the labour force (48.3% of female population). “Quarterly Report on General Household Survey, April to June 1998.” Census and Statistics Department, Table 31, pg. 8.

¹⁷ “Quarterly Report on General Household Survey, April to June 1998.” Census and Statistics, Table 3F, pg. 20-22. Men account for a great majority of the “managers and administrators,” “professionals,” “associate professionals,” “service workers,” “craft and related workers,” and “plant and machine operators.” For the women - “clerks” and “elementary occupations” are the two winning contestants in terms of numbers.

¹⁸ “Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1998.” Census and Statistics, Table 2.1, pg. 13. In 1997, men between ages 20 and 65 years maintained a participation rate in the workforce which spanned from 98.3% to 48.4%. Well over 90% of them stayed active in the labor force until their mid-fifties. From their late fifties to early sixties, the participation rate dropped from 77.5% to 48.4%. By contrast, the highest labor participation rate of 83.7% for women occurred among those aged 25 to 29; from 30 to 35, the figures had already fallen by 13.2% to 70.5%; from 35 to 40, another notable drop in female employment left 58.2% in the workforce. The overall labor force participation of Hong Kong women between the ages of 30 and 59 is 56.9%; this compares with 56% in Singapore, 64% in Japan and 74% in the United States. By their late fifties, only 27.1% of women were still working. These numbers have remained almost constant throughout the last decade.

2. Gender Disproportion in Civil Service

The Civil Service has employed a disproportionate number of male officers. In March 1998, men take up 125,233 of the 186,213 occupied posts.¹⁹ The selection process needs to eliminate biases in respect to sex.

3. Income and Gender Specific Statistics

Though the Initial Report is correct that women's earnings have risen at a slightly faster rate than that of male income (Article 11:103), it fails to address the issue of absolute income disparity between the two. Women on average receive lower monthly wages than men.²⁰ A change of attitude among employers for this problem requires long-term education.

Another reason is that work done within the household is not considered "economic activity."²¹ The current accounting system does not recognize their contributions to the economy. To establish a more accurate system of measurement, the Census and Statistics Department needs to adjust its General Household Surveys to record domestic work by gender, i.e. to incorporate the "informal" (rather than "inactive" sector of the economy).

4. Retraining

Women are most susceptible than men to social transitions, market restructuring, and economically unstable periods.²² More than half the women in Hong Kong's labor force are now in clerical or non-technical jobs.²³ Women, thirty years or older, face great dilemmas in economic restructuring.²⁴ They need improved vocational training to compete in the job market. Women recognize the importance of retraining.²⁵ At the same time, the Employee Retraining Scheme needs to revise its age limit for women below 30 years old, because it prevents younger women from learning skills early. Families would

¹⁹ Census & Statistics. "Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics." September 1998, pg. 9.

²⁰ "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1998." Census and Statistics, Table 2.8, pg. 21. As of September 1998, women earned 31% less than men in manufacturing; 26% less in personal services; and 15% lower in wholesale and retail, import/export trades, restaurants and hotels, transport services, and other selected industries. The average monthly wage for men was \$11,000 in comparison to the \$8,500 for women

²¹ "Special Topics Report No.19." HK Census and Statistics, 1998, pg. 1-2. About 800,000 women in Hong Kong are homemakers.

²² Asia Monitor Resource Center. We in the Zone. 1997, Hong Kong, pg. 33-35. The trend towards an increasingly technologically advanced and high value-addon service economy has a disproportionate impact on women. Those previously employed in manufacturing could not make a smooth shift into other professions as Hong Kong de-industrialized throughout the 1980s. The market simply did not provide enough vacancies elsewhere to offset the unemployment during this period. The 1990s therefore saw an increase in casualization and underemployment of women workers.

²³ These include sales clerks, who are the first to go when the economic downturn hits the retail market, and pager operators, whose jobs are increasingly relocated to lower-wage levels.

²⁴ In 1996, just under 3,000 girls left school after Form 3, and over 23,000 after Form 5. Education Department Information Officer Leo Liu, personal communication, 6 March 1998. Once laid off, they often find themselves with inappropriate skills to secure new jobs. Often, by the time they undergo job-specific skills training, those jobs have already become obsolete. In addition, they are more likely to face age discrimination in times of hardship, when employers must limit hiring and increase firing. For the younger women who leave school after Forms 3 or 5, inadequate education will constrain in many ways their ability to navigate an increasingly insecure job market.

²⁵ "A Baseline Survey of Equal Opportunities on the Basis of Gender in Hong Kong," Research Report No. 1, Equal Opportunites Commission, 1997. According to a survey commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission, Hong Kong women are also more likely than men to enroll in adult and continuing education programs. In fact, as stated in the CEDAW Report, about 82% of the participants in the Employee Retraining Scheme are women (Article 11:108).

benefit further if these women can more actively participate in activities at home, in the new community, and at work. Furthermore, the Government should increase subsidies for women to participate in retraining classes in both governmental as well as non-governmental organizations.

5. General Education

Some women, particularly the older generation, have not yet completed secondary or even primary education. For personal growth, those seeking a general education should be encouraged and supported. Education and professional training are particularly important to immigrants from mainland China.²⁶ New female arrivals are older, and tend to emigrate specifically in order to join their families. They need familiarity with the new system and training for the Hong Kong job market.²⁷ Fundamental skills in communication and learning are sometimes even more valuable than job-specific training.

²⁶ The Employee Retraining Scheme is directed at the unemployed over 30 years old with only lower secondary education. A secondary concern is those who are currently employed and need basic training to retain their jobs. According to a recent survey by the YWCA, mainland wives in Hong Kong identify integration into the society and economy as a significant obstacle. Over the last 7 years, the average age of immigrant men has been 16, while women have averaged 30 years old. One extensive survey has also indicated a large differential in average monthly wages, with men receiving \$7,404 and women \$5,094.

²⁷ In personal interviews, many mainland women have mentioned that those from the city tend to adapt and perform better in the workplace than their counterparts from rural areas. This phenomenon reveals that urbanity as well as educational background separates the new immigrants into two groups with different needs for training and education.

ARTICLE 11:109-113

CHILDCARE FACILITIES

- Conduct further research to assess the childcare needs of the community.
- Provide more government or aided childcare centers.
- Extend hours of service to early morning and late evening.
- Carry out more rigorous inspection standards for childcare centers and childcare workers.
- Give more consideration to support services for mainland wives and single parents.

One major problem for working women is childcare. The lack of childcare facilities under the Employment Retraining Scheme programs prevents many mothers from scheduling classes that conflict with daily responsibilities.²⁸ The Government must map out steps toward expanding access to education and training by supporting families' childcare needs. Many groups are involved: the Social Welfare Department, community initiatives, commercial childcare centers, and individual "child-minders." The Commissioner of Women's Affairs can monitor these different entities and coordinate plans, possibly joint programs between various groups, to improve childcare for Hong Kong families.

1. Research and Dissemination of Information

The Government comments that day care services are a priority (Article 11:109) and that "comprehensive childcare services are provided" (Article 5:35). But based on available data, places in childcare centers are available for only 8.4 % of Hong Kong's eligible children.²⁹ In addition, the quota on child arrivals from the mainland has been raised from 45 to 60 in January 1997, meaning that almost 22,000 more children will join their parent(s) each year. The Government needs to continuously upgrade information on the demand for childcare. On the receiving end, most women report little or no awareness of the support services offered by the Government and private NGOs. They face enormous challenges and should not suffer silently. The Government should raise awareness about available support.

2. More Childcare Centers

For many women in Hong Kong, having a child and having a job is still mutually exclusive. The decrease in labor force participation of women in their thirties implies that raising children is still considered primarily the mother's responsibility.³⁰ Yet childcare centers in Hong Kong only care for less than 10% of all children under six years old. In September 1997, there were 681 occasional childcare places provided in 218 childcare centers.³¹ The Government has committed to provide approximately 3,000

²⁸ Childcare in Hong Kong is related to several other problems: the employment of live-in Filipino maids to care for children is a luxury only for some. Those who cannot afford the maids risk serious consequences when they leave children home alone.

²⁹ The HK Women's Christian Council: 43, 981 places for 523,600 children under the age of 6. In comparison, 61% of American children under the age of 6 are in child care; 30% of these are in child care centers, while the rest are cared for by relatives or childminders.

³⁰ The women's participation in the workforce decreases from 75% of women between the ages of 25 and 34, to 57% of women between 35 and 44.

³¹ Do Hong Kong families have the childcare they need? According to the Census & Statistics Department, there are 523,600 children below the age of 6 in Hong Kong; 311,500 of these are of nursery age (2-6) and 212,100 are below the age of 2, and thus eligible for care in creches. However the Social Welfare Department, responsible for planning and providing child care services, has no information on the number of children in Hong Kong, or the percentage in regular child care.

additional aided childcare center places in 1998/99. However, commitments made since 1992 to increase the number of childcare places have not been met, due to difficulties in finding suitable premises, according to the Health and Welfare Bureau. The Social Welfare Department should collaborate with non-governmental organizations, volunteers, and community initiatives to expand the service.

3. Hours of Service

The current day care centers' opening hours do not fully accommodate work schedules. As of December 1997, only five childcare centers offered extended-hour services.³² Parents have suggested two extra hours in the morning and two in the evening to provide 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. service.³³ This schedule allows parents greater flexibility. Again, the Government can gather assistance from the community.

4. Quality Childcare

The Childcare Service Ordinance (1997) is intended to monitor the quality of the childcare, but it encompasses only a fraction of "childminders" in Hong Kong. The Ordinance provides for the issuing of certificates only for non-prohibited people.³⁴ Thus, its implementation will depend on the initiative of parents in requesting certification from childminders. While these initiatives will help parents who have the will and the means to seek the best care for their children, other families still have a great need for affordable, accessible, quality childcare.³⁵

5. Single Parents

The number of single mothers in Hong Kong is projected to increase 15% between this year and 1999. Many of these women, faced with the prospect of staying home on public assistance or balancing full-time employment with childcare, end up on welfare.³⁶ More should be done to enhance the education and training opportunities for these women, including subsidized class fees as well as safe and reliable child care.

Particular attention should be given to decreasing discrimination against single mothers.³⁷ Discrimination against single parents specifically in employment, education, provision of goods, facilities and services is illegal following the passage of the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance in June last year.

32 There are also single fathers in Hong Kong. Some Hong Kong men with families on the mainland have brought their children, many of whom are just barely of school age, to join them. The Society for Community Organization (SOCO) estimates that there are approximately 20,000 such families, each with a single father responsible for an average of +3 children. A recent survey by SOCO revealed that 20% of these fathers had found it necessary to quit their jobs and rely on CSSA in order to support their children. Three-quarters kept their jobs and left children on their own.
Social Welfare Department. Personal communication, 20 October 1998.

33 Jesse Yu, Single Parents Association, personal communication, 1 December, 1998. The current hours are 8 am - 6 pm.

34 In addition, the "mutual help childcare groups" supported by the government are exempted from the requirements set for childcare centers; they don't need to go through inspection and registration.

35 As childminding arrangements are informal, there are few safeguards for the child's health and welfare. A government survey of parents employing childminders revealed that the number one priority in choosing a childminder was proximity to the home, not the quality of care.

36 As at January 1998, 8.5% of CSSA recipients are single-parent families.

37 Many single mothers report landlords who refuse to rent to them, believing they are financially unreliable. Others say their children are discriminated against in school admissions, as children of single parents are perceived to be more disruptive - one primary school is even known to have internal guidelines prohibiting admission to children of single mothers.

ARTICLE 12

EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO HEALTH FACILITIES

- Provide more comprehensive coverage of breast cancer and cervical cancer screening.
- Raise awareness of women's psychological health.
- Give more information about AIDS and other sexual transmitted diseases.
- Start a regular sex education program in Hong Kong curriculum.
- Conduct an annual study of women's health needs to develop health programs accordingly.
- Initiate neighborhood health clinics to dispense advice and therapy.

In regard to women's health, the Initial Report states: "the Government offers a comprehensive range of promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health care services for women of all ages" (Article 12:120). The health care service in Hong Kong, however, is still inadequate in numerous areas. The Government needs to promote better services and greater awareness of women's needs by the Health Department, private clinics, and other health-related facilities.

1. Quality Control in Breast Cancer Clinics

Breast cancer is the most common cancer and second most common cause of death among women globally. In Hong Kong, deaths from breast cancer are on the rise.³⁸ Though more women are receiving mammograms, there is still a lack of quality control, follow-up care, counseling, and public education.

2. Risk of Cervical Cancer

Compared to other industrialized countries, Hong Kong has a moderately high mortality rate for cervical cancer; it is considered a high-risk area for the disease.³⁹ While cervical cancer is not the most common form of cancer, it is one of the most preventable.⁴⁰ However, Hong Kong has no centrally organized, systematic, population-based cervical screening program. The Commissioner of Women's Affairs can work on it with the Health Department.

3. Awareness of Breast-Feeding Benefits

Hong Kong women have one of the lowest rates of breast-feeding in the world.⁴¹ It is a common procedure that medical professionals give out free samples of bottled milk in the maternity wards. This misleading practice has sustained the misconception that milk powder is more nutritious than breast milk and it should stop immediately. Awareness starts with education of health professionals.

4. Men's Cross Border Sexual Encounters

Men with regular sexual relations in mainland China endanger themselves as well as their partners. Numerous Hong Kong women live with the knowledge of their husband's "mainland mistress" while

³⁸ 376 women died of the disease in 1996, a rise with 20% since 1993.

³⁹ Cervical cancer affects 15 out of every 100,000 women in Hong Kong.

⁴⁰ Evidence supporting the effectiveness of screening using pap smears is so strong that death from the disease under the age of 65 is considered avoidable.

⁴¹ Less than a third of Hong Kong women breast-fed their babies Survey on women's health conducted by the Family Planning Association (FPA) in 1993.

many others remain ignorant. This situation creates emotional stress for women as well as increases the risks of getting sexually transmitted diseases.⁴²

5. Women's Psychological Health and Post-Natal Depression

Awareness of mental health is very low in Hong Kong, and the Government does not address the issue of women's mental health in its Initial Report.⁴³ Post-natal depression (PND) is quite common among women who have recently been given birth, and it is a well-documented mental illness. The Health Department needs to promote community awareness in Hong Kong about PND and provide more extensive support services.

6. Teen Pregnancies

Recent studies have indicated a rising rate of teen pregnancy among Hong Kong youth. The Government, however, does not monitor the rate or prevalence of teenage pregnancy. Of all the women in Hong Kong, 52% had their first pregnancy between ages 18 and 20.⁴⁴ The community resources for teens are limited to Family Planning Association and government clinics, where services include contraception and gynecological check-ups. At the same time, they should also focus on counseling and emotional and moral development.

⁴² A survey by Centre for Clinical Trials and Epidemiological Research at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. One in three men who regularly travel to Mainland China for business visits prostitutes. Three-quarters of those who have sex with prostitutes do not use a condom, and most do not use a condom with their wives or girlfriends when they come home. With 70,000 Hong Kong residents crossing the border daily, these survey results suggest a significant risk spread of sexual transmitted disease. The survey also revealed that 11% admitted to cheating on their wives with mistresses; another 11% admitted to paying for sex. One in five respondents said they had contracted a sexually transmitted disease; 21% of these men were married.

⁴³ A 1994 study by The Chinese University of Hong Kong shows that among those over the age of 70, 41% of women

⁴⁴ Family Planning Association. Personal communication, November 12, 1998