

Submission to Legislative Council on Child Fatality Review

11 February 2011

Dr. C.B. Chow, BBS, JP
Chairman, Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights &
Chairman, Hong Kong Childhood Injury Prevention and Research Association

1. We would like to congratulate the Panel under the leadership of Prof. NK Leung in producing an excellent report despite all the limitations. This should be a big step forward and we do welcome the recommendation that this should be a standing child fatality review mechanism.
2. The Child Fatality Review mechanism is a voluntary system with information based on what is presented to the coroner, or reports provided by agencies who managed the child before his demise. As the coroner looks mainly at the cause of death and what agencies provide or not provide is totally at their discretion, there are much limitations to the recommendations that could be made. Furthermore, these recommendations are non-binding. HKSAR needs a Child Fatality Review system that has statutory power to access information and the ability to monitor the implementation of recommendations. We do urge that introduction of the necessary legislation be studied.
3. An overarching body is also required to overlook the multi-disciplinary process, the analysis and follow up of the recommendations on prevention that encompass many disciplines and different Government Departments, otherwise the effectiveness of the Review will be greatly reduced. And an independent CHILDREN'S COMMISSION be set up to overlook and follow up on the Review, and be responsible for activities regarding child injury prevention and child safety promotion, as well as develop and implement a comprehensive child policy and a plan of action as a holistic approach is required to ensure safe and nurturing environment for our children to grow and develop achieving their full potential.
4. The report highlighted that some 40% of fatal incidents occurred at home and many child deaths are related to lack of proper child care. Seven children died from falling from height accidentally. Five of the fall cases happened at home and four of the deceased children were left unattended.
5. Children being left unattended alone at home have been a concern for more than 10 years.

- a. In 1997 it was estimated that 110,000 children aged 12 and below had been left unattended at home during the 7 days before enumeration in a General Household Survey (Census and Statistics Department, 1997).
 - b. The Child Health Survey in 2005 (Department of Health, 2009) estimated that a total of 205,800 aged 10 and below children had ever left alone at home or being cared for by elder children aged below 16 in the past 12 months preceding the survey. This group represents a third of the total number of 0-10 children surveyed and 25% of those children being left unattended at home are aged below 5.
 - c. The Hong Kong Christian Service Foster Care Service conducted a survey between January and March 2008, in exploring situation and feelings of unattended children left at home and their reaction towards their parents. In this study, 168 children aged 5-15 were being interviewed, 70% of them have experience of being left alone at home. And 70% of the parents leave their children unattended at home because they need to work or go shopping. Over 60% of the children know the whereabouts of their parents. The feelings were rather different between younger and older children being left alone at home. Most of the younger children are fearful or even angry to be left alone at home, while older children tend to be happier and more excited. However, most children expressed they do not like to be left alone at home for a long time.
 - d. According to information provided by the Hong Kong Police Force that 49 child neglect cases involving children being left unattended at home and action was taken against 10 parents. In seven of these cases, accidents and casualties resulted from caregivers' negligence (Labour & Welfare Bureau, 2008).
 - e. Death and cases reported to Police is only the tip of an ice-berg as many more will be injured and many many more psychologically traumatized for being left unattended at home.
6. So after almost 15 years, despite many efforts to increase child care services and promote neighbourhood support, children are still left unattended at home putting them at high risk of injuries and deaths. While we adopt a zero tolerance to traffic casualties we should adopt a more stringent policy towards childhood injuries which are largely preventable.
 7. This illustrates the importance of legislation and having a comprehensive child-focused policy for child protection.
 8. It cannot be over emphasized that a CHILDREN'S COMMISSION should be set up immediately in Hong Kong and legislation on Child Fatality Review committee should be studied.
 9. There is often a delay of a couple of years for any Child Fatality Review to be completed with recommendations and then implementations, hence an Injury Surveillance System should be set up in Hong Kong as our children cannot wait should this be related to injuries, disabilities and deaths. Establish a robust Injury Surveillance System to collect data on injuries sustained by children, identify

magnitude and causes of injury as well as to monitor the trends and evaluation of intervention policies/programmes. Define and support priorities for research on childhood injuries.

10. Last but not the least, we call on the government to echo to the community call for the establishment of an authoritative CHILDREN'S COMMISSION under the Paris Principles to champion for 1.3 million children aged under 18 in Hong Kong, whose rights cannot be guaranteed and the issue being discussed here today is just one of the examples.

Contact information:

Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights
3/F, Western District Community Centre
36A Western Street, Sai Ying Pun
Hong Kong
Tel: 2324 9782
Fax: 2324 9804
Email: hkccr8@childrenrights.org.hk
Website: www.childrenrights.org.hk