

**For discussion
on 10 November 2015**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures
to Tackle Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence**

Support Services for Victims of Sexual Violence

Purpose

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

Principle

2. The Social Welfare Department (SWD), or through the SWD-subvented organisations, provides support for victims of sexual violence through an array of preventive, supportive and specialised services. Recognising the uniqueness and importance of the services for victims of sexual violence, the Government has adopted various measures in recent years to improve its services, e.g. setting up an inter-departmental working group, developing procedural guidelines, implementing a new service model, setting up a case information system and a webpage of support for sexual violence victims, etc., so as to provide the victims with appropriate services.

Inter-departmental Working Group

3. SWD has established the Working Group on Combating Violence (the Working Group) to facilitate communication and co-operation among government departments and organisations in the handling of sexual violence cases. Chaired by the Director of Social Welfare and comprising representatives from different government bureaux and departments (e.g. the Security Bureau, the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police) and the Education Bureau), the Hospital Authority (HA) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Working Group is responsible for advising the Government on strategies and measures to tackle sexual violence.

Procedural Guidelines

4. The handling of sexual violence cases involves various government departments and organisations, such as HA, the Police, SWD, NGOs, Department of Justice (DoJ) and Legal Aid Department (LAD). To facilitate close co-operation and interfacing of these departments and organisations, SWD issued a multi-disciplinary “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Sexual Violence Cases (2002)” in 2002 to facilitate the adoption of a common approach and raise the awareness of good practice among professionals who provide services for victims of sexual violence. To further improve the services for victims of sexual violence, the Government conducted a review in 2006 based on the following principles:

- (a) timely, professional and specialised services should be made available to victims of both sexes and their family members on a 24-hour basis;
- (b) there should be a convenient contact point, and services provided should be easily accessible to victims who may come from different districts over the territory;
- (c) the need for victims to undergo different procedures and to repeat accounts of the incidents should be minimised through better service co-ordination;
- (d) continuous support and after-care services should be provided to the victims after the crisis; and
- (e) synergy among the welfare service units concerned should be achieved.

5. After the review, a new service model for handling sexual violence cases was implemented by relevant government departments and organisations in March 2007. To tie in with the new service model, the “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Sexual Violence Cases (2002)” was revised with joint efforts of different disciplines to become the “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Adult Sexual Violence Cases (revised 2007)” (the Guidelines). The Guidelines serve to enhance co-operation and co-ordination among SWD, HA, the Police, NGOs, DoJ, LAD etc., so as to ensure that different needs of 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 the relevant professionals.

New Service Model

6. In March 2007, SWD implemented a new service model to handle sexual violence cases. The key element of this new model is the designation of a social worker as the “case manager” to undertake the following major tasks:

- (a) to provide crisis intervention, including outreaching service, emotional support, counselling and accompanying the victim to go through the necessary procedures;
- (b) to proactively liaise and co-ordinate with relevant departments and organisations (including HA and the Police) and, where necessary, to accompany the victim to receive services, go through the necessary procedures (such as seeking medical treatment, reporting to the Police, giving statements, conducting forensic examination, attending identification parades and visiting crime scenes) and take part in other necessary steps that the victim may have to undergo in the course of the process;
- (c) to help the victim arrange follow-up services, such as medical follow-up and provide company to the victim if necessary;
- (d) to make arrangement/referral for other services, e.g. short-term accommodation, housing assistance, clinical psychological service, legal aid and support groups;
- (e) to assist the victim in obtaining information on the general progress of the case from the Police, the hospital or the lawyer as appropriate so as to ensure that the victim is being informed of the essential procedures and his/her rights;
- (f) to support the victim in court proceedings if necessary; and
- (g) to look after other welfare needs of the victim, his/her family and significant others who are affected by the sexual violence incident.

7. The support network of the new service model covers all districts in the territory. The designated social worker will provide 24-hour outreaching services and arrange a series of necessary services, regardless of the district or department where the victim initially approaches for services. To enable victims to receive 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, SWD will

enhance the co-ordination among different departments and service units in providing person-centred and one-stop service.

CEASE Crisis Centre

8. The Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre, also known as CEASE Crisis Centre (CEASE), is an integral part of the new service model. In 2007, SWD was granted funding from the Lotteries Fund to commission, through an open invitation for proposals, the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals to run CEASE on a trial basis for three years. The 80 short-term accommodation places provided by CEASE commenced service in 2008. As the service and mode of operation were confirmed to be essential and effective, the Government provided recurrent provision from January 2010 onwards for CEASE to continue operation beyond the funding period of the Lotteries Fund.

9. Victims of sexual violence can seek services from CEASE through referral by the Police, medical personnel, social workers or other relevant professionals, or approach CEASE direct through its 24-hour hotline.

10. Under the new service model, a social worker of CEASE will be assigned as the “case manager”. When a new case is received, the case manager will provide immediate outreaching/crisis intervention services for the victim in need on a 24-hour basis at a location convenient to the victim for conducting risk assessment and counselling, make referrals to the relevant social/medical service units as early as possible for completing the necessary procedures, which include immediate medical services (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 be provided immediately if needed. The location of the centre is kept confidential for the safety of service users.

11. CEASE will provide follow-up services for victims for at least six months. To help victims of sexual violence address stress and emotional problems, CEASE will provide them with individual and/or group counselling and developmental programmes. Depending on the post-traumatic negative thoughts and emotional responses of the victims e.g. self-blame, anger, shame, loss of self-confidence and trust on other people, CEASE will use appropriate counselling methods to help them deal with those thoughts and emotional responses so that they can regain self-confidence and ability for facing their

¹ Normally short-term accommodation of not more than two weeks will be provided. The length of stay can be adjusted on a case-by-case basis.

living in the future. CEASE will also provide different types of group therapies and developmental activities of various formats and contents, such as mindfulness training group to strengthen their self-understanding and acceptance, art therapeutic group to help manage their emotions, adventure-based training to enhance their self-confidence and living skills, as well as volunteer training for helping other victims of sexual violence. These could help widen their personal support network as well as strengthen their self-image and self-confidence, thereby facilitating their reintegration into the community.

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

13. In 2014-15, CEASE handled 572 cases of sexual violence. Most of the service users were satisfied with the services provided, including the accommodation service. They also stated that their resilience against immediate crisis/adversity had been enhanced.

Training

14. The Staff Development and Training Section of SWD regularly organises training courses on the sexual violence related subjects for the social work staff of SWD, NGOs and HA, in order to enhance their knowledge of the subjects concerned and their ability in handling similar cases.

The Police's Handling of Sexual Violence Cases

15. The Police handle all sexual violence cases in a serious and professional manner to safeguard the personal safety of the victims and to bring the offenders to justice. 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.

16. The Police endeavour to reduce the pressure on victims of sexual violence who are assisting in investigation. With the victim's consent and

where practicable, immediate referral will be made for the one-stop support service provided by SWD and 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 avoid the need for the victim to travel and will expedite the investigation process. Victims can also request the presence of other person(s) of their choice when attending police interviews and forensic examination.

17. 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.

Protective measures for victims

18. 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.

19. 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 protective measures for victims (e.g. use of special passageway and provision of witness support).

Training courses for police officers

20. To fully equip frontline police officers with the skills and knowledge of handling sexual violence cases, the Police have incorporated relevant topics into various regular courses, such as the foundation training courses for recruit constables and probationary inspectors, criminal investigation courses, development courses and promotion courses. The topics covered include

“Sexual Violence Cases”, “Victims Charter”, “Psychological Skill in Handling Victims”, “Empathetic Listening Skills”, “Conflict Management”, “Violent Behaviour and Ways to Handle it”, etc.

21. The Police also provide frontline officers with continuous training. In October 2015, a set of related training packages was introduced. It teaches frontline officers ways to deal with various types of sexual violence cases professionally, and the professional sensitivity required for handling those cases. The training is mandatory to all frontline police officers and there will be discussions under the guidance of facilitators.

Other Support Services and Measures

22. To keep track of the situation of sexual violence in Hong Kong, SWD has set up the “Central Information System on Spouse/Cohabitant Battering Cases and Sexual Violence Cases” to collect, collate and analyse data of, among other things, sexual violence cases. Reporting agencies to the system include SWD, NGOs, HA, LAD, the Police and the Department of Health.

23. SWD has also 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 of sexual violence and how to seek assistance when necessary.

24. 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 RainLily in November 2000 (the centre has been funded by the Community Chest since 2006). This non-SWD-subsidised 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 re-provisioning and fitting-out works of RainLily to enable continuation of its service.

25. RainLily provides hotline service at specified period of time every 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 RainLily. Upon receipt of a report, the counsellors of RainLily will provide immediate crisis intervention and counselling services, accompany the victim to give statements to the Police, attend forensic examination and the relevant medical treatment, etc. Also, 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 for other professional services.

Advice Sought

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

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Hong Kong Police Force
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November 2015