Central Data Bank for Children
Views of Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights

"Every government needs reliable, timely, accessible and comprehensive disaggregated information and data in reusable formats on the child rights situation, both current and projected. Such information is fundamental to creating legislation, policies and programmes to directly or indirectly target and advance the rights of the child. For this reason, every government has a need to establish and maintain a database of all policies and resources affecting children so that those involved in implementing and monitoring the corresponding programmes and services have ongoing access to objective and reliable information,[1]" as stated by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in General comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights (art. 4).

Current Situation

In Hong Kong, no specific government department is currently responsible for handling child data. Child data is scattered among government departments and some data is not open for public use. Census and Statistics Department regularly collects some data on children through census and by-census, but most of these data is generic, with no specific data on children under different circumstances. The age groups used by the department are 0-4, 5-9, 10-14 and 15-19 and this makes it hard to focus on analyzing and comparing conditions of children under 18 as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Convention has come into effect in Hong Kong since 1994. The department produced *Thematic Report: Youths[2]* in the 2016 Population By-census for youth aged 15-24 in Hong Kong with demographic, educational, economic, household and housing, geographical characteristics. However, there is no thematic report on children.

Apart from the government, some NGOs and academics have tried to bridge the gap by developing data, indexes and indicators on children in Hong Kong. Back in 1999, *Hong Kong's Children: Our Past, Their Future* (Eds. Nia A. Pryde & Mona M. Tsoi)[3] was published. It was the fruit of a decade long research project which brought together experts in the fields of medicine, psychology, psychiatry, education, social welfare, legislation and economics to weave a picture of the state of child health and wellbeing in Hong Kong. The authors included Ms. Elsie Leung Oi-see (former Chief Justice) and Professor Edward Chen Kwan-yiu (former President of Lingnan College). Later on, Hong Kong Council of Social Services initiated the Hong Kong Social Development Index (SDI)[4] in 1999 and gradually developed a sub-domain on children. The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong developed the Hong Kong Child Development Index (CDI)[5] in 2006. Both

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[1] Committee on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, General comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights (art. 4), http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/document/crc-c-gc-19_1488

[2] Census and Statistics Department, 2016 Population By-census, Thematic Report: Youths, 2018, https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp459.jsp?productCode=B1120104

[3] Pryde NA, Tsoi MM, Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1999, Hong Kong's Children: Our Past, Their Future, http://hub.hku.hk/handle/10722/144833

[4] The Hong Kong Council of Social Services, Social Development Index, http://www.socialindicators.org.hk/

[5] The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, Child Development Index (CDI), http://cdi.bgca.org.hk/

indexes are targeting children and youth. While Young Children's Development Indicators of Hong Kong (YCDI)[6] developed by the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children in 2014 is focusing on young children aged 0 - 6 years old. Despite the civil society's efforts, these data are only gathered from different available sources in an attempt to present a clearer picture of children in Hong Kong. There are also individual academics who are building information and data on a particular issue of children in Hong Kong. The civil society, however, could not collect data that is only available to the government.

If we look at the 2018/2019 Budget Estimates of the HKSAR Government, there are also some indicators for facilities and services related to children. However, they are often in terms of number of places, number of facilities, number of enrolment… etc. Data are more than numbers. Data provides important information on children's needs which is essential to policy planning and public budgeting. A reliable Children Central Data Bank provides important data for making evidence-based and informed decisions for our children.

We need a clear picture of our children population

We have roughly 1.1 million children population under the age of 18 in Hong Kong. However, the existing demographic data is far from sufficient to reveal the composition and the characteristics of children in different circumstances, such as:

- Babies, toddlers, pre-schoolers, children, teenagers, young adults
- Children with and without siblings
- Children with both parents
- Children in single parent families
- Children taken care by extended families
- Orphaned children
- Locally born children, immigrated children, children of different ethnic origins
- Children able and unable to communicate in the major languages in Hong Kong
- Children with chronic illnesses and reside at home / hospital
- Children with different types of disabilities and special needs and reside at home / alternative care
- Children reside in different types of alternative care
- Children reside in mental health facilities
- Children living with carers of hidden harm (i.e. carers have behaviours of drug, alcohol, domestic violence, mental illness)
- Children living in temporary shelters
- Asylum seeking minors and children refugees
- Children in conflict with the law
- Children in detention facilities
- Children in local, international, special kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools
- School drop-outs
- Children engaged in employment

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[6] Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children, Young Children's Development Indicators of Hong Kong, http://ycdi.hkspc.org/

- Unemployed young adults
- Children high achievers
- Children of different religion backgrounds
- Children receiving public security assistance
- Children in low-income families
- Children in different household settings (public housing, bed-space apartments, private housing)
- Children have drug behaviours
- Young parents and take care of the kids by themselves
- Young parents and the kids are taken care by extended families and/or domestic helpers

The above is not an exhaustive list. The government should set up a working group with multi sectors' participation to map out the demographic data needed that could best reflect our children population for policy, service and program planning at the soonest. The Central Data Bank for Children also serves as the foundation for the development of child impact assessment[7] systems and child consultation systems as both need the clear data for a thorough and genuine consultation on children's views and their challenges who fall into different circumstances.

Children data by domain and Child Well-Being Framework

The Hong Kong government should ask herself the purpose of collecting children's data. On top of the basic demographic data of the children population as mentioned above, many countries have been collecting data proactively by domains to measure children's well-being and provides evidence for policy and service planning. Using the Child Well-Being monitoring framework, their government departments have been coordinated and delicately collecting the data on the domains surrounding children in their countries to meet the needs of children. These included both the objective well-being data collected by the government departments, research institutes and NGOs, as well as the subjective well-being data collected directly from children and young people in child friendly ways. Governments have been actively engaging young citizens to voice out on matters closely related to them so as to make policies and service provisions that tailor-made for their needs.

Western Australia[8]	United Kingdom[9]
Measuring children and young people's <u>objective wellbeing</u> under eight domains: (1) Health and Safety (2) Education (3) Family and Peers relationship	Measuring people (including children)'s <u>objective well-being</u> under seven domains: (1) Health (2) Education and skills (3) Our relationship

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[7] ACT Human Rights Commission, Child Impact Assessments, http://hrc.act.gov.au/childrenyoungpeople/child-impact-assessments/

[8] Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia, Well-Being Monitoring Framework, https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/our-work/wellbeing-monitoring-framework/

[9] Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom, Measuring National Well-Being, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing

(4) Materials Wellbeing (5) Participations (6) Behaviors and Risks (7) Environment (8) Subjective Well Being (Please refer to Appendix 1)	(4) Personal finance (5) What we do (6) Where we live (7) Personal well-being (Please refer to Appendix 2)
Measuring children and young people's <u>subjective wellbeing</u> under seven aspects: (1) Being loved and valued (2) Being safe (3) Being healthy (4) Learning and developing (5) Having a say (6) Being a part of the community (7) Achieving material basics	Measuring people (including children)'s <u>subjective wellbeing</u> under four domains : (1) Satisfaction (2) Worthwhile (3) Happiness (4) Anxiety

Overseas experiences show that it is not enough to borrow and apply the well-being monitoring framework on local contexts directly. In order to devise policies and services tailored for the children of a specific country, research at a national scale is needed to evaluate the specific determinants of child well-being for that locality.

Child-focused Qualitative Data

Data are more than numbers. Through data, we should be able to find out where the challenges are and where to make policy improvement and timely interventions for the best interest of the child. Take alternative care of children as an example, apart from the number of alternative placements of various kinds, the percentage of enrolment, the amount to be spent per place, we also need to know the qualitative data. For example, the average duration of a child needs to spend in alternative care; the average waiting time for such a placement… etc. The data should be child-focused so as to evaluate if the services and the public money spent are actually realizing the rights of children in needy or even risky situation. Should such data have been collected, the community should not allow cases like a young adult who sadly voiced out at the Subcommittee on Children's Rights of Legislative Council on 21 February 2017[10] that he has spent his whole precious childhood at different short-term residential care placements. He recalled how challenging it was for his young soul to trust and gain trust from people unfamiliar to him.

Another example is children under the care of people with substance abuse behaviours. Drug related data is mainly attributed by the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) at present. While there is data related to drug

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[10] Subcommittee on Children's Rights, Legislative Council, Minutes on the 4th Meeting, 21 February 2017, https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/hc/sub_com/hs101/minutes/hs10120170221.pdf

abuse population, frequency and locality of abusing drugs, economic activity status, criminal record… and so on, the Registry however has no data on the number of children under the care of substance abuse parents or carers. This is particularly worrisome, as the current data indicates that the majority of drug abusers use drugs at home or at their friend's home (80%). The 5-year-old boy Yeung Chi-wai also died at home where his mother and his mother's boyfriend had drug behaviours. Social Welfare Department has been conducting a series of workshops for social workers to pay attention on the indicators of children under the care of substance abusers since the Coroner Court case of Yeung in 2016. Should the CRDA is being child-focused in collecting data in the first place, it might have already generated useful data for timely interventions and save the remedial measures. Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights' own research[11] has already found at least 11 kids were abused, neglected, poisoned, dropped from height, injured or even died as a result of parental substance abuse in 2013-15.

Recommendations

1. The Census and Statistics Department should publish a Thematic Report on Children for those aged from 0 to 18 as stated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in every Census and By-census.

2. Government should develop a Central Data Bank for Children for the development of policies and services for children in Hong Kong that could be comparable to the best practices (i.e. Child Well-Being monitoring framework). The data bank should be child-focused with detailed demographic data on the children population in Hong Kong including children fall into different and special circumstances. The central data bank should be regularly updated and operate in a sustainable manner. These datum should be shared with the public for child rights monitoring, educational and research purposes.

3. A working group should be set up with multi sectors' participation to work on the development of the Central Data Bank for Children to ensure that it is well-coordinated, comprehensive and could best reflect our children population for policy, service and program planning. The databank should also equip the government and the community to make better informed decisions, and targeted interventions for any child-related issue that may arise.

Conclusion

Are data really that deficient in Hong Kong? Or they are just segregated and not linked and not well-coordinated between departments, research institutes and agencies, NGOs and individual academics so that we have the missing puzzles in the "map of children" in Hong Kong? The future Commission on Children has a key role to play to ensure this important data bank for children could break the usual bureaucracies for the best interests of the child. It is only with the commitment and child-focused awareness of all government departments and active participation of research institutes and agencies, NGOs, academics and children themselves shall we be able to set up a data bank that could truly benefit all children in Hong Kong.

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[11] Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights, Child Rights Review on Hidden Harm, 2016,
http://review.childrenrights.org.hk/child-rights-review/zh-hant/

The breakdown of the eight Objective Well-being domains under the Child Well-Being framework in Western Australia:

1. Health and Safety	• Smoke-free pregnancy • Alcohol-free pregnancy • Birth weight • Infant mortality • Immunisation • Child health checks • Ear health • Oral health • Nutrition • Physical activity • Body weight • Mental health • Self-harm and suicide • Hospitalisations from injury and poisoning • Deaths from injury and poisoning • Family and domestic violence • Parental use of alcohol and drugs • Abuse or neglect: substantiations • Out-of-home care
2. Education	• Parents engaging children in informal learning • Early education • Children developmentally vulnerable on entering school • Students achieving at or above national minimum standards • Pathways for leaving school
3. Material Well-being	• Low-income households • Jobless families • Overcrowded households • Homelessness
4. Family and Peer Relationships	• Children and young people value • Advice and support to manage personal problems
5. Participation	• Participation in sport and cultural activities

	• Internet access
6. Subjective Well-being	• Concerns of children and young people
7. Behaviours and Risks	• Smoking • Alcohol consumption • Births to teenage mothers • Youth justice: Diversion • Youth justice: Community-based supervision • Youth justice: Detention
8. Environment	• Access to green spaces, parks and community facilities • Drinking water quality • Air quality

The breakdown of the seven Objective Well-being domains under the People (including children)'s Well-Being framework in the United Kingdom:

1. Personal well-being	• Life satisfaction • Happiness • Worthwhile • Appearance
2. Our relationships	• Quarrel with parents • Talk to parents • Bullied • Family • Friends
3. Health	• Low birth weight • Overweight • Happiness with health • Disability • Mental ill-health
4. What we do	• Sport participation • Arts and culture

	• Time on social websites • Time use
5. Where we live	• Victims of crime • Feel safe • Like living in their neighbourhood • Accommodation • Natural environment
6. Personal finance	• In households less than 60% of median income • In workless households • Possessions • In households with combined low income and material deprivation
7. Education and skills	• Early years education • Achieving 5 or more GCSEs A*-C • The school they go to • Go on to full-time further education