

**Family Council**

**Action Plans of the 2011 Family Survey**

**PURPOSE**

This paper outlines the issues discussed at the two focus group meetings on the 2011 Family Survey and proposes action plans for consideration by the Family Council (the Council).

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Council commissioned Policy 21 Ltd. to conduct a study entitled “2011 Family Survey” (the Survey) and discussed preliminary findings of the Survey at its meeting on 9 February 2012. The Subcommittee on Family Support (the Subcommittee) and the Central Policy Unit (CPU) were tasked to work together to conduct focus groups to further explore the policy implications of the Survey’s findings. Two focus group meetings were organized by CPU on 29 March and 18 April 2012 and attempts were made to generate action plans for the Council’s consideration. Academics, family experts/practitioners and members of the Council attended these meetings. Major issues discussed in the focus groups and proposed action plans are highlighted in the ensuing paragraphs.

**MAJOR ISSUES DISCUSSED**

3. Discussion in these meetings covered, inter alia, (a) the importance of family core values; (b) attitude towards parenthood; (c) family functioning; (d) satisfaction with family life; and (e) balancing work and family.

### *The current states of Hong Kong families*

4. Participants discussed, among others, the characteristics of families, challenges posed to the families, and the causes of changes in family values and functions. Their views on these subjects are summarized below -

- (a) divorce, remarriage, and remaining single are now more acceptable in Hong Kong;
- (b) there are different kinds of stresses in the family, and the stress from raising children is deemed most 'stressful'. Families vary both in the kind of stresses they have and in their abilities to cope with these stresses;
- (c) lack of communication or poor communication has deleterious effects on harmony in the family and family functions;
- (d) parents' long working hours is the major reason for work-family imbalance; and
- (e) family life satisfaction varies with the quality of communication in the family, the sources and levels of stress (e.g. work stress and childrearing) and the financial conditions of families. This varies further with different age groups and/or different types of families (e.g. family structure).

### *Issues that need to be addressed*

5. Participants reckoned that rapid social and economic changes in Hong Kong have negative implications for traditional family values and functions. These have posed many challenges to the family. In their view, the following three areas are worthy of priority attention of policy-makers -

- (a) address the stress in raising children;
- (b) reduce the negative long-term effects of divorce on child development; and
- (c) enhance parenting and tri-parenting skills among grand-parents and foreign domestic workers.

## **ACTION PLANS**

6. It is the shared consensus of these focus group meetings that future family policies should be evidence-based, giving due emphasis to prevention, making policy objectives explicit, and allocated with more public resources. Specifically, the Council should consider the following -

### ***Having more studies on family***

7. First, there is the need to conduct more studies on the family and help develop more nuanced policy measures sensitive to the differential needs of different types of families. Participants are of the view that family research in Hong Kong is not keeping up with family change. There is the need for systematic, regular and longitudinal studies, and it is suggested that the following studies should be conducted -

- (a) the phenomenon of divorce in Hong Kong;
- (b) the characteristics of skipped-generation and surrogate families, the implications of these family structures for child development and appropriate support measures; and
- (c) the sources of stress, factors affecting stress and stress-coping strategies among different types of families and people in different family life-cycle stages, and their differential needs.

### ***Strengthening family life education***

8. Second, family life education (FLE) is considered a useful and important means to enhance family functions, strengthen family relationships and prevent family breakdown. However, FLE appears to be outdated and lagging behind the social change in Hong Kong, particularly in “Marriage Enrichment Programmes”/ “Counselling Services” for young couples/parents. Concerned bureaux/departments could make reference to overseas experiences (e.g. Canada) in devising FLE programmes and encouraging parents’ participation. It is considered necessary to provide preventive measures (e.g. “Marriage Preparation Programmes” and “Pre-divorce Programmes”/ “Counselling Services”) to help forestall marital conflicts and avoid transmitting the problems to the next generations and creating new social problems. Likewise, to ensure that children in disadvantaged and skipped-generation

families have proper care and nurturing, there is the need to provide “Effective Parenting Courses” for these families. It is also pointed out that the substantive contents of FLE have to be up-dated to keep abreast of social change.

### ***Providing explicit family policies***

9. Third, the Council should devise policies and measures that aim to enhance family-caring capacity, strengthen inter-generational support and promote happy and harmonious family relationships. The Council should also actively engage concerned bureaux/departments on relevant policies. Specifically, it should act on the following: (a) develop a protocol/mechanism for Family Impact Assessment (FIA) of public policies; (b) foster more family-friendly employment practices both in the public and private sectors to help the parents (especially mothers) of dual-career families alleviate the stress on their work and family responsibilities; and (c) target support at disadvantaged/at-risk families (e.g. low-income/new immigrant/cross-boundary families) with school-age children and provide specific support/after school services to them.

### ***Setting up a Family Development Fund***

10. Fourth, the Council should consider establishing a “Family Development Fund” to encourage teachers/academics/social practitioners, voluntary groups, NGOs, business firms to initiate a wider range of innovative projects and programmes for strengthening and supporting families. The Fund may provide support to –

- (a) community activities which aim at promoting family core values, cherishing family and harmonious relationships, strengthening intergenerational reciprocity and obligations, and reaffirming values on filial piety;
- (b) implementing pilot and innovative projects to develop new family service models that cater for the differential needs of different types of families;
- (c) encouraging academics and service providers to conduct researches on family and related issues, and building databases on family studies; and

- (d) promoting FLE at all levels of the community in Hong Kong by organizing conferences, seminars, workshops, trainings or counselling programmes.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

11. Members are invited to consider the action plans as outlined in paragraphs 7 to 10 above.

**Central Policy Unit**  
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