

**For meeting on
4 July 2011**

Paper FC 7/2011

Family Council

Policy Recommendations Arising from the Four Researches on Child Neglect, Elderly Neglect, Youth Drug Abuse and Youth Prostitution

PURPOSE

This paper summarises the findings of the four researches, and puts forward the proposed new and broad policy directions with family-focused strategies and measures recommended by the Sub-committee on Family Support for consideration and discussion of the Family Council.

BACKGROUND

2. In the 2009-10 Policy Address, the Chief Executive noted that many social problems, including juvenile drug abuse, prostitution and the neglect of elderly people and children, could be traced back to the family. Better family relationships meant fewer social problems. To effectively tackle these problems from a family perspective, the Family Council was tasked to focus on these problems and find new policy options to alleviate them at the family level. In 2010, the Family Council commissioned the Central Policy Unit (CPU) to co-ordinate research work in these aspects. Four local universities were invited by the CPU to undertake researches focusing on whether and how these four social problems were related to families and what the solutions were. In the course of research, CPU and the Family Council secretariat had held a number of workshops and discussion sessions with the research teams in order to gain a deeper understanding of the causes of the problems and explore practicable strategies and measures for alleviation and prevention.

3. With completion of the researches in March 2011, the findings and recommendations were submitted for deliberation by the Sub-committee on Family Support (the Sub-committee). A meeting of the Sub-committee was held on 28 April 2011 to examine the findings and other related issues.

The major findings and recommendations of the four researches are outlined below for consideration by Council Members.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FOUR RESEARCHES

4. Executive summaries of the four researches prepared by the research teams are at **Annexes A to D**. The Sub-committee, after deliberations, noted that it was difficult to generalize the causes of the four social problems as they were complicated, multi-layered and multi-faceted. This notwithstanding, the four researches had identified that many of the causes of the four social problems could be traced back to family-

- *Youth drug abuse*: most of the factors causing the problem are related to unstable family background, such as dysfunctional families due to unstable family condition (e.g. poor marital relationships, family crisis, parent divorce, single-parent families); family members working long hours or earning low wages (e.g. insufficient time to spend with the family, less time to care for their teenage children or poor parent-child relationships); and poor/ineffective communication between young people and their families (e.g. inadequate/poor parenting and bad parent-child relationship).
- *Youth prostitution*: parents' improper behaviour (e.g. promiscuous parent); bad examples (e.g. parents working in vice establishments); domestic violence (parents abusing their children) and frequent inter-generational conflicts are contributing factors to higher risk of problems.
- *Child neglect*: parents with poor parenting knowledge/ competency or incorrect parenting concepts would have a greater tendency to neglect their children. Single-parent families, especially deprived families, are particularly prone to child neglect.
- *Elderly neglect*: for families with frigid husband-wife relationship and alienating parent-child relationships, their already weak family bondage would be prone to be undermined by factors such as death of spouse, growing up of children and their forming of new families,

etc. The elderly would easily have nobody to rely on and have to live their final years in neglect. Cross-boundary marriages between ageing husbands and young wives whose relationships are not based on love but on practical interests are also at high risks. Their age differences are the crucial factor to a power transfer (in the family) in future, which would result in a huge power imbalance between the strong and the weak in the family relationship. The weaker side, such as an ill-stricken elderly, could easily become the subject of neglect.

5. In a related note, the four researches have proposed a number of **family-focused strategies**, outlined as follows:

- *Youth drug abuse*: it is essential to nurture positive family relationship, identify high-risk families and provide more training, seminars and workshops for them. Equally important is to arrange professionals to visit neighbourhoods to promote family education and to impart the knowledge and skills to deal with related problems.
- *Youth prostitution*: the research team considered that strengthening effective parenting and parent-child relationship; providing counseling on family reunion and remarriage for broken families; providing counseling for youths from problem families for joint counseling or services for parents and children together; and providing parent education for parents in need regarding crisis intervention; as well as providing guidance to children on proper use of the internet are important strategies.
- *Child neglect*: Family-focused strategies include providing targeting support and assistance for families with potential child neglect problems according to the scale of the problems and the “threshold” for intervention in order to enhance the effectiveness of parenting and prevent child neglect; empowering the court to issue orders to irresponsible parents involved in child neglect to receive compulsory parent education; and requiring parents convicted of child neglect offences to receive parent education.
- *Elderly neglect*: it is important to implement preventive and intervening measures on three levels, including strengthening family, community and school education in relation to respect and care for the elderly; promotion of filial piety; encouraging frequent

interaction and expression of love among family members; and providing counseling services for members of the family.

6. The Sub-committee concluded that, while the causes were complicated and involved many non-family related factors, new policy directions, with family-focused strategies and measures, should be proposed with a view to tackling the problems effectively. The new policy directions with proposed measures are outlined in the paragraphs below.

NEW AND BROAD POLICY DIRECTIONS WITH FAMILY-FOCUSED STRATEGIES AND MEASURES

7. The Sub-committee agreed that efforts of the government alone could not sufficiently and effectively solve all the social problems. Families and various sectors in the community should work hand in hand. Towards this end, new policy directions with family-focused strategies and measures should be adopted. After deliberations, the Sub-committee concluded that the following should be recommended to be adopted as **the new and broad policy directions** in combating the social problems-

- Family engagement (提升家庭的參與)
- Preventive strategy (預防性策略)
- Community-based family support strategy (社區為本支援家庭策略)

8. With a view to effectively supporting the new policy directions, **the Sub-committee recommends that family-focused strategies and measures should be formulated.** In more concise terms, **strategies and measures with family perspective should form the basis and the “public health” approach¹ with multi-level intervention as the means.** The strategies and means should be -

- Family-focused
- Neighbourhood and community-sensitive; and
- Government-led

¹ “Public health” approach aims at providing maximum benefit to the public at large. Programmes based on this approach are targeted at a broad segment of a population. The steps of “public health” approach include: (a) defining the problem through systematic data collection; (b) identifying risk and protective factors; (c) developing and evaluating interventions; and (d) implementing effective and promising interventions in a wide range of settings.

9. In terms of prevention and intervention, the focus should be on *the strengthening of the protective factors and the minimization of the risk factors*.

10. In so far as the target is concerned, it should *target at relevant individuals or groups (young prostitutes and drug-abusers, and neglected elderly and children), with family as the focus*.

11. On the front of collaboration, apart from relying on *community support, inter-departmental, cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration* is also important.

Family Engagement (提升家庭的參與)

12. Family engagement is “family-focused” with the emphasis on the formulation of project/activity objectives, decision-making and achievement of objectives through mutual communication and partnership. As indicated by the experience of overseas countries (e.g. USA and Canada) on child education activities/programmes, family welfare services, mental health and therapy programmes, family engagement (participation of family members by both parents and children together in activities/programmes) would have a positive effect on enhancing mutual communication, trust and care, and support for child development. With reference to the success of the overseas experience and the situation of Hong Kong, **the Sub-committee recommends the following strategies and measures -**

- ***Tangible incentives to families:*** Offering concessionary rates to families for public recreational and cultural venues and facilities will be a practicable way to encourage family engagement. Besides, the Government could also make more proactive efforts to encourage the commercial sector to offer similar incentives to families.
- ***Intangible incentives to families:*** In the long run, the government may consider providing support to families in need through “mentors” of mentorship programmes.

Preventive Strategies and Measures (預防性策略及措施)

13. The Sub-committee noted the importance of early identification and early intervention in different areas of families with greater needs. Towards this end, **the Sub-committee recommends the following strategies and measures -**

- ***Development of assessment and management tools for family risks:*** “Early identification and timely intervention” could help mitigate conflicts between family members before the problems would become complicated or intensified to the extent that they could not be solved. There are assessment tools for family functioning, such as Family Assessment Device (Epstein, Baldwin & Bishop, 1983) and Self-Report Family Inventory (Beavers, Hampson & Hulgus, 1985) developed in other countries. Nonetheless, most of the family assessment tools adopted in the Chinese societies target at specific age groups (e.g. young people)² only. Apparently, evidence-based assessment tools for comprehensive assessment of the risks in various stages of the family life course and practical guides for tackling various family problems for use by parents and related professionals are not available in Hong Kong in the meantime. As such, there is a need to develop such tools and establish a certification framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the “family-risks assessment tools and practical guides” for promotion to the stakeholders in the long run.

- ***Strengthening family education:*** Family education should continue to be widely promoted for **different stages of the family life cycle** (including sex education, dating education, pre-marriage education, parental education and cross-generational family education), with particular focus on **families with potential risks** (e.g. low income, single-parent, divorce-parent and cross-border families); adolescence with poor academic performance and low self-esteem; and **irresponsible parents and parents with deviant behaviour** (e.g. drug abusers and crime offenders). To take this forward, the Government should take stock of the current state of family education programmes/ provisions in Hong Kong and consider implementation of accreditation to family education courses for

² Shek, D.T.L and MA, C.M.s. (2010) The Chinese Family Assessment Instrument (C-FAI), Volume 20, No.1, pp112-123

quality assurance purpose, if necessary. In addition, the viability of subsidizing families with low income to attend courses on family education should be explored. As regards the suggestion of imposing a mandatory requirement for neglectful parents to undertake compulsory education on parenting, the Sub-committee considers that this is a contentious issue which requires careful consideration and discussion in the long-run.

- ***Providing more professional training and counseling:*** In view of the fact that today's social problems are more complicated and challenging than those in the past, more professional expertise and skills are needed to tackle them. As such, it is recommended that more professional training and counseling courses should be provided to encourage the participation of home services employees, parent, carers, social welfare institutions and specialized service organizations in order to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the services through training and exchanges.

Community-based Family Support Strategy and Measures (社區為本支援家庭策略及措施)

14. Community resources should be better utilised. Resources available include retirees, religious bodies and supportive neighbours. **The Sub-committee recommends the following strategies and measures -**

- ***Building neighborhood and friendship networks for the community:*** the government may consider exploring ways to increase neighbourhood support in combating and identifying social problems in the community by **partnering with 18 District Councils for “Neighborhood Watcher Programme”**. In a related note, the government should proactively foster informal support to parents with problems and difficulties in child care at the community level. Another possible measure is to encourage families to form self-support groups for mutual assistance.
- ***Encouraging cross-sector collaboration:*** Efforts of a single party alone: be they families, schools, social workers, police, counselors or the government, cannot effectively tackle the social problems. The government should promote collaboration amongst various

sectors in the community and a culture of a loving society in order to provide concerted support for the disadvantaged and high risk/problem families.

- *Continuing to foster and strengthen family core values:* The Government should continue to work closely with different sectors, including families, schools, non-government organizations, and the business sector, etc, to promote the importance of individuals' responsibilities and families' responsibilities to take care of their family members.

15. The Sub-committee considers that some of the findings touch upon contentious issues which require further careful consideration and discussion by relevant bureaux and departments in the long-run.

Advice Sought

16. The Sub-committee recommends **the new and broad policy directions** in combating the social problems as detailed in paragraphs 7 to 14 above for the Family Council's deliberation and endorsement. As regards the rest of the findings of the researches, the Sub-committee notes that relevant Government bureaux and departments would continue to examine the implications.

June 2011
Family Council Secretariat

**A Study On Drug Abuse Among Youths And
Family Relationship**

The University of Hong Kong

Executive Summary

- (1) Based on the extensive literature review on family role in helping teen drug abusers with a family perspective and the comparisons with the results and evidence of the local and overseas studies and Eastern and Western practices dealing with teen drug addictions, this final report makes policy recommendations with regard to the key findings from the secondary data analysis, the focus groups and the case studies.
- (2) Some previous studies show that the overall trend of lifetime drug-taking secondary students rose from 3.3% in 2004/05 to 4.3% in 2008/09. The age of students starting to take drugs has become younger: for those aged 12 or below, there was a close to double increase in drug prevalence of 2.4% in 2004/05 to 4.6% in 2008/09. Among this group of students, 7.7% did not live with either of the parents, compared to 2.5% for their non-drug-using counterparts. From the experiences of front-line social workers and research studies, Hong Kong experiences the process of “normalization” of drug use, especially among marginal youth. The major problem is that they do not consider themselves as having problems or in need of help.
- (3) Chapter 2 summarizes overseas experiences, including Western countries such as Australia, Canada, the U.K., and the U.S. and Asian countries such as Taiwan, Mainland China and Singapore. In those Western countries, there are several initiatives to deal with drug taking and prevention: (i) identifying and reducing the risk factors related to youth substance use; (ii) enhancing protective factors and strengthening the family functioning and attached bonding, maintaining effective communications and harmonized relationships with adults through family-based intervention like parental or family training, provision of nationwide meaningful youth engagement; (iii) addressing the needs of not only the adolescent themselves, but also the young adults, their

families and the broader community; (iv) acknowledging the importance of supporting parents and the families to build healthy families at an early stage so that children and youth can benefit from growing up in a positive environment, thereby naturally building resistance against delinquent behaviors; (v) collaborating with different stakeholders (e.g. NGOs and government) to assist at-risk families, so as to minimize drug and other social problems being spread inter-generationally (especially in the U.K. and Australia); (vi) mobilizing different sectors of the community to address the drug issue (especially in the U.S.); and (vii) emphasizing youth-focused community prevention initiatives involving different partners (especially in Canada). However, in Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Mainland China and Singapore: more emphasis on information dissemination, school drug education and law enforcement are placed. Little is to do with risk and protective factors or the ecological framework of drug use.

- (4) Chapter 3 shows that use of psychotropic substance has become more prevalent among boys in older adolescents (Form 3-7) than for younger adolescents (Form 1-2), and exceed the prevalence of using inhalant. There is about 5% prevalence of drug abuse among our youth of aged 15-24. The drug prevalence for working young adults soars up to 14% for males and 9% for females. The drug abusers have similar risk profiles with other deviant behaviors, e.g. deliberate self-harm, smoking and drinking. From the study of odds ratios of logistic regression models, there is a significant association between family structure and drug abuse among boys. The adjusted odds ratios showed that, compared to those who have married parents, boys whose either or both parents has passed away were more likely to be drug users (OR=4.633, CI=2.294, 9.355), whereas girls whose parents were divorced or separated were more likely to be drug users (OR=2.367, CI=1.178, 4.759). Parents' divorce, separation or passing away has a high influence on substance abuse among adolescents. Feeling happy about family life, good relationship with parents and acceptance to parenting are significant protective factors to substance abuse.
- (5) In Chapter 4, the results of focus groups show that there are four themes. First, young people's initial drug use must be understood in the context and primacy of their peers. Second, both young people and their children recognize the lack of communication in the family as one of the risk factors, and want to develop the ability to have meaningful interactions.

Third, youth and their family relationships are heavily shaped by parents' work and other commitments in a culture which is perceived to place heavy emphasis on materialism. This can add further pressure on parents and their children. Fourth, at the community and education levels, young people tend to thrive in an environment of creativity.

- (6) Based on the four in-depth case studies as presented in Chapter 5, a number of risk and protective factors around five themes have been identified: including 1) family crisis; 2) attachment to family members; 3) factors attributable to drug use; 4) factors conducive to drug withdrawal; and 5) issues in tackling drug use. Youths seem to share a very similar pattern of taking drug and other deviant behaviors. These youths started to experiment with drugs after the occurrence of a family crisis (i.e., presence of parent's physical illness, parents' relationship problems) which strongly weakens the parental monitoring and family system. The results reveal a common pathway of marginal youths taking drug when they possessed less family and school social capital, suffered from more educational disadvantages and failures, and had involvement with drug-taking peers. However, with the help of the attached parent(s) or significant others and efforts from professionals, the four cases demonstrated that they were able to stop using drugs. More importantly, the non-psychiatric medical services have helped the drug-taking youths have a better understanding of the physical harmfulness of drug use on them. They have also provided a platform for multi-disciplinary effort in dealing with recreational drug-taking youths who have yet to develop substance-use disorders that require psychiatric service.
- (7) In short, a common trajectory of the youths taking drug is ascertained in this study. Drug use like other adolescent behavioral issues involves a number of factors, some of which interact or operate jointly. Firstly, most of them are heavily affected by dysfunction families due to unstable family condition (e.g. poor marital relationship, family crisis, divorce, single-parent family), low income and long working hours of family members (e.g. limited family time, little attention to young people, poor attachment with parents/significant others), poor/ineffective communication between youth and his/her family (e.g. inadequate/poor parenting and bad relationship with parents). Secondly, easy access to drugs within immediate neighborhood (e.g. convenient supply and relatively cheap cost) increases the exposure of risk to drug. Thirdly, failure of school achievement, feeling boredom and affected by

undesirable peer influence and intergenerational addiction are also the major risk factors.

- (8) Given the evidence and findings from this study, a public health approach with a multi-layered intervention is therefore recommended to empower family. Efforts on preventions and interventions should be made to enhance protective factors through family-based intervention like parental or family training, provision of community-wide meaningful youth engagement, and reduce risk factors, instead of focusing on the drug issue per se and individual. The target would not only cover among the school youths, but also drop-out, unemployed or working youngsters. FOUR themes should be included **youth-centered** (for, with, and by the youth); **family-focused** (equal-finality proposition); **neighborhood and community-sensitive** (ecological, public health, social development, broken window (early intervention); cultural/contextual); and **government-led** (top-down directives especially for cross-departmental collaborations) approach focusing on transitional periods and developmental stages. Specific recommendations should be included: (i) **to identify and support high risk families**: single-parent, inter-generational addictions (drug/gambling/drinking), poorer social economic status (e.g. receiving CSSA), having frequent family crises involving school-age children, out of school youths and working youths through the cooperation of different sectors of the community (i.e. outreach social workers, non-clinical & clinical professionals, teachers and schools, police, etc.) and link with referral of family services (e.g. in-home family support); (ii) **to nurture positive family relationship**: a family-friendly working environment should be promoted and reinforced in Hong Kong; (iii) **to enhance community involvement**: especially for poorer household income and at-risk districts.; (iv) **to curb drug sources covering a wider range**: such as random drug tests at the border between Mainland and Hong Kong to handle cross-border drug and liaison with the Mainland authority in making it more difficult for young people to get hold of the drug rather than just imposing drug tests at school; (v) **to extend more professional trainings**: which include to develop a manual to work with children and parents in dysfunctional families, provide more trainings, seminars and workshops for identifying at-risk families and suggesting measures to strengthen family protective factors that can be held at the district level and school-based with the support of the parent association in the school; family and school social workers as trusted professionals in the

neighborhood and in the workplace to provide family parenting education and early identification and to help family recover the resiliency of family function; (vi) **to provide more efficient anti-drug programs**: it is necessary to examine how different existing programs modify the youth's drug-related attitude and behavior in the long run; (vii) **to reform the mindset in the educational system**: such as making school curriculum more attractive and developing interactive joint parental activities and to reinforce the importance of family values which can help the youths become a full competent, self-regulated and caring person. Incentives such as scholarships can be awarded to the students who might not perform well in academic, but in other domains such as sports and arts; (viii) **to disseminate credible anti-drug and family-harmonized environment messages/slogans**: youth-respite and drug free and family-harmonized ambassadors should be appointed through public events to establish a positive idol to the youngsters and enhance parental relationship.

**Parental Perspectives on Child Neglect
in Hong Kong**

**Centre for Social Studies, Department of Applied Social Sciences
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Executive Summary

Objectives of the study

For better protection of children from being neglected, and improved service and policy responses to neglectful families in Hong Kong, the Central Policy Unit of the Hong Kong SAR Government commissioned this consultancy study to the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in June 2010 with the following objectives:

1. to identify the views of parents on the basic needs of children in Hong Kong;
2. to study the views of parents on what constitutes a child neglect case in Hong Kong;
3. to study the views of child protection professionals on the needs of the neglectful families and the thresholds for intervening in the neglectful families;
4. to explore the experiences and realities of neglectful families in Hong Kong, with particular reference to the antecedents of the child neglect problem that appeared in the family;
5. to identify in what ways and under what circumstances families can play a role in solving the child neglect problem, both at the prevention and intervention levels;
6. to make recommendations at service and policy levels on the management and prevention of the child neglect problem in Hong Kong.

Methods of the Study

This study has revealed some of the major literature on child neglect for the purpose of this study (Chapter 2). Besides, it has conducted a desktop survey on 7 countries/places to examine their responses to child neglect, including the United States, England and Wales, New South Wales of Australian, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong (Chapter 3).

In addition, a telephone survey was conducted between 18th August, 2010 and 30th October 2010 to examine the views of Hong Kong parents on the needs of children, child neglect, and intervention in child neglect. Totally, 1,046 parents with at least one child under 16 were interviewed on the telephone.

Besides, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 neglectful parents, 17 non-neglectful parents, and 13 social workers between November 2010 and February 2011 to explore in greater details about their views on the child neglect problem and intervention that is needed for families of child neglect.

Finding of the Study

Desktop survey (Chapter 3)

A number of responses to child neglect are identified, for instance, mandatory report of child neglect, family support, parent responsibility contract, statutory care and protection of the children, punitive measures on offending parents and caregivers, and mandatory parent education. These measures are worthy of further examination with respect to their relevance to helping neglectful parents and families in Hong Kong.

Telephone interview (Chapter 4)

The findings of the telephone suggest that child neglect is a rather common problem in Hong Kong because 10.4% the parent respondents reported that they or their spouse have neglected their children (last paragraph of Section 3.4.1).

Parents have a general expectation that children's basic needs are to be adequately met by parents in the family because they rated highly when they were asked to affirm the following needs of children on a 5-point scale: food and clothing (4.52), respect and recognition (4.54), care and concern (4.70), protection (4.64), education (4.59), and medical care (4.73) (Section 3.4.3.3).

Parents also generally consider that family has the prime responsibility in responding to the various needs of the children. Their average ratings of parental responsibility on a 5-point scale are over 4.5 in all areas of children's needs covered in this study (Section 4.3.4).

Among the four types of child neglect, parents have the highest definitional tendency in physical neglect (4.21) and lowest in emotional neglect (3.09). The findings suggest that parental awareness of child neglect is highest in physical neglect and lowest in emotional neglect (Section 4.3.5).

For parents and families with difficulties in meeting these needs, they are to be adequately supported in discharging their responsibilities, including help by relatives, assistance by neighbors, and social work interventions. Social work intervention is commonly preferred (3.68), while police intervention is the least preferred form of intervention (2.88) in neglectful families according to the parent respondents (Section 4.3.6).

In-depth Interviews (Chapter 5)

A lot of parents admitted to have neglected their children before, but their children do not suffer significantly because these parents learn from their mistakes (Section 5.3.1). Cases of neglectful families show that the problem is multi-causal and requires collaborative efforts for its prevention (Section 5.3.1.1 to 5.3.1.8). Though their views vary, parents generally welcome assistance of the informal system in milder forms of child neglect. Where intervention of the formal systems in neglectful families is needed, parents prefer social work intervention and are hesitant of police intervention except in cases of irresponsible parents (Section 5.3.2.1 a and b).

Social workers suggested that supportive informal network be developed and strengthened as the first line of child neglect prevention (Section 5.3.3.3 a). Families with difficulties in a range of problems that can

lead to child neglect should be supported with help from social services (Section 5.3.3.3 b). Families with child neglect not involving significant risk or serious harm should be closely monitored with the support of social services (Section 5.3.3.3 c), while cases with significant risk or serious harm to child, child protection procedures should be initiated (Section 5.3.3.3 d). Social workers also considered it difficult to help neglectful parents, especially those who are irresponsible and unmotivated (Section 5.3.3.4).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for the consideration of the Central Policy Unit and the Family Council of the Hong Kong SAR Government:

Pertaining to responses to the child neglect problem

- (a) The needs of children in areas of food and clothing, respect and recognition, care and concern, protection, education, and proper medical care, are to be adequately met in line with the general expectations of the Hong Kong community.
- (b) The families should be respected as an important site in meeting children's needs, and parents be responsible for fulfilling their children's needs and seeing to it that the various needs of their children are being adequately fulfilled.
- (c) The government has the responsibility to see to it that the needs of children in these areas are adequately met, and to assist parents and families with difficulties to look after these needs of the children.
- (d) Public and family education be widely used as an instrument to promote positive and responsible parenting as a strategy for preventing child neglect in the general population.
- (e) Public and family education programs should target at raising public awareness of the non-physical forms of child neglect so that the community knows all forms of child neglect are equally injurious to children.
- (f) Assisting neglectful families be made a multi-party endeavor, including the collaborative efforts of the relatives, friends, neighbors, social workers, and police officers.

- (g) For children in need, the collaborative efforts of relatives, friends, neighbors, social workers, and police officers be focused on meeting the needs of children to child neglect.
- (h) The mutual help functions of the informal support networks be developed, strengthened, and publicized in the community as a strategy to combat child neglect at the prevention level.
- (i) The parent and family support functions of social services be strengthened to help families with problems of parenting, child care, marital conflicts, financial hardships to prevent them from developing into child neglect.
- (j) The parent and family support functions of social services be constantly evaluated for their effectiveness in preventing problems of parenting, childcare, marital conflicts, financial hardships from developing into child neglect.
- (k) The role of police intervention in child neglect cases be reviewed; in the meantime, the intervention of police in neglectful families be judiciously exercised, if not being a last resort in neglectful families.

Pertaining to families at risk of child neglect

- (l) Early identification of parent with difficulties and strengthening parenting competence at different stages of the family life cycle through parent/ family education.
- (m) Problems in parenting, child care, marital problem, financial hardships should be taken as the threshold for intervention; families with these problems should be given appropriate assistance and family support and counseling to stop the problems from developing to child neglect.
- (n) The presence of snap-shot non-injurious child neglect in families be taken as a second threshold; for these families, besides social service support, the families should be closely monitored to see if child protection in accordance with the Guide is needed. Pertaining to unresponsive but non-offending parents
- (o) Whether injurious or non-injurious, the presence of consistent child neglect be taken as a third threshold; for these families, child protection procedures in accordance with the *Guide* should be followed.

- (p) Section 34(1)(c) of the Protection of Children and Juvenile Ordinance, Chapter 213 of the Laws of Hong Kong be more widely used by juvenile courts to deal with the irresponsible parents.
- (q) The Protection of Children and Juvenile Ordinance be amended to include provisions of ‘parent responsibilities contracts’ like that of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 of New South Wales, Australia.
- (r) The Protection of Children and Juvenile Ordinance be amended to empower the court to order neglectful parents to receive mandatory parent education.

Pertaining to mandatory parent education for offending parents neglect

- (s) Where appropriate, parents be diverted from prosecution to join the police discretionary caution scheme and attend compulsory parent education; in this regard, the mandate and charter of the police discretionary caution scheme be revised to make this recommendation possible.
- (t) Suitable offending parents be subjected to magistrate bind-over and be required to attend parent education programs; in this connection, Section 62 of the of the Magistrate Ordinance be revised for the purpose of empowering magistrates to make an order for parent education.
- (u) Convicted parents be subjected to a bind-over sentence and be required to attend parent education programs; in this connection, Section 36 of the of the Magistrate Ordinance and Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Ordinance (and other related ordinances) be revised to empower the courts to make an order for parent education.
- (v) Existing probation services be more widely used in cases where parents are convicted of child neglect; convicted parents be required to attend parent education program through insertion of a special requirement in the probation order made under Chapter 298 of the Law of Hong Kong.

Other recommendations

- (w) The NGOs and the markets should play a more active role in developing different varieties of parent education programs and provide them to the parents as a form of court-ordered treatment.

- (x) Closer collaboration among the government departments (including the SWD and police), the NGOs, and the Judiciary be fostered in implementing court-ordered parent education in Hong Kong.

**Family-centered Prevention of Adolescent
Girls' and Boys' Prostitution –**

**Social Capital and Impact Assessment Research Unit
Department of Applied Social Studies
City University of Hong Kong**

Executive Summary

This is a report of findings and recommendations concerning government policies and practices related to family-centered prevention of adolescent prostitution. The findings evolve from quantitative analysis of survey data obtained from 387 youths and qualitative analysis of data obtained from 30 youths, 30 parents, and 58 professionals provided in personal interviews or focus groups. Specifically, the 387 surveyed youths (including 259 girls and 128 boys), as referred by some social service units, included 30 youths selected for qualitative interviews due to their experience in compensated dating and/or prostitution. The survey and interviews with the youths and parents occurred between May and October 2010.

Background

Prostitution is a social problem involving young people, beginning in adolescence, and made worse by the development of an unscrupulous form of compensated dating which refers to a girl's or a boy's dating for the purpose of receiving compensation. This typically occurs among adolescents and is facilitated by individualized contact using modern information and communication technology. Prostitution is harmful to the adolescent physically, mentally, and spiritually. The problems afflict girls and boys as well. Because of this, adolescent prostitution engenders problems in health, labor, education, law and order, social ethos, and other areas in society. A promising way to prevent the problem is a family-centered approach, in view of the potential impacts of the family on adolescent development, harmonious family relationships, and related issues. However, knowledge about family-centered prevention of adolescent prostitution is lacking.

In his address at the Legislative Council meeting on October 14, 2009, the Chief Executive, The Honourable Donald Tsang said, "Many social problems, including juvenile drug abuse, prostitution ..., can be traced back to the family. Better family relationships mean fewer social problems. I will ask the Family Council to focus on these problems and find new policy options to alleviate them at the family level."

With this background, the Family Council, in association with the Central Policy Unit, commissioned this research team to conduct this study. Upon completion of this study, it is expected that the findings should include information and analyses on the following four themes:

1. family antecedents of the problem;
2. experiences of families in the process;
3. how families can play a role to solve the problem; and
4. recommendations for family related policy.

Objectives

The overall aim of the study is to explicate family factors related to adolescent prostitution in order to inform policies and practices for family-centered prevention of adolescent prostitution. Specifically, the study intends to fulfill the following objectives:

1. Clarifying family-centered factors that are useful for practice and policy to tackle adolescent prostitution and its risks;
2. Verifying the influences of family or parental factors on adolescent prostitution and its risks;
3. Exploring relationships among the family and parental factors and suggestions from social work and other professionals which are relevant for practice and policy; and
4. Developing practical knowledge to inform the prevention of adolescent prostitution and mitigate its risks.

Data Collection

Research about adolescent prostitution is remarkably sensitive and difficult to conduct. A pragmatic approach is necessary to collect data, typically through social service units. As a result, the sample for this study was not a representative sample. Therefore, the results of this study can only be used and interpreted with great caution. By the end of October 2010, the study surveyed 387 youths mostly about their experiences before age 18. They included 289 youths not involved in prostitution or compensated dating and 98 involved in prostitution or compensated dating before the age of 18.

Results

387 youths who responded to the survey had the following characteristics:

- 81.6% of those experienced in compensated dating and/or prostitution were girls, whereas 61.9% of those having no such experience were girls.
- Among the youths, an average age of 16.6 years was found in those experienced in compensated dating and/or prostitution, whereas an average age of 16.3 years was found in those not having the experience.
- An average formal schooling of 8.3 years (since primary school) was found in both groups (those experienced in compensated dating and/or prostitution and those not having had this type of experience).
- 71.1% of those experienced in compensated dating and/or prostitution lived with mothers. For those not having the experience, the percentage was 84.8%.
- 66.0% of those experienced in compensated dating and/or prostitution lived with fathers. For those not having the experience, the percentage was 65.4%.

The survey found the following among adolescents interviewed in the sample:

- 25.3% (98) of the adolescents had compensated dating with or without sexual relationships under the age of 18. The percentage for the girls was 30.9% (80) and the percentage for the boys was 14.1% (18).
- 16.8% (65) of the adolescents had prostitution or compensated dating with sexual relationships under the age of 18. The percentage for the girls was 19.7% (51) and the percentage for the boys was 10.9% (14).
- During the most recent 2 months or the last two months before the age of 18, the adolescents with compensated dating experience without sexual relationships had an average of 3.7 dates (4.1 dates for girls and 2.3 dates for boys).
- During the most recent 2 months or the last two months before the age of 18, the adolescents with prostitution or compensated dating with sexual relationships had an average of 1.1 experience (1.1 times for girls and 1.3 times for boys).

Analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data identified some common factors in prostitution, including risk or signaling factors and protective or impedance factors (respectively found related to prostitution positively and negatively).

Important risk or signaling factors (positively related to prostitution) were:

- Parental abuse (which might create strain and inducement to handle the strain by such a delinquent means, including prostitution)
- Parental crime (which might show approval and even tutelage, cajolement, instigation, or aid to delinquency, including prostitution)
- Talking about sex (notably parents' promiscuous affairs) with parents (which might reduce scruples about prostitution)
- Working in indecent clubs (which might provide opportunities for prostitution)

Important protective or impedance factors (negatively related to prostitution) were:

- Paternal and maternal parenting competence (which might curb prostitution)
- Parent-child recreation (which might facilitate parent-child bonding and thus protection against prostitution)
- Parental moral guidance (which might discourage prostitution)
- Mother-child secure and not anxious, ambivalent interaction during arrest (which might prevent or facilitate desistance from prostitution)
- Parent-child joint counseling (which might prevent prostitution)

Moreover, findings also identify a service gap in specialized services committed to preventing adolescent prostitution, in view of the following limitations in existing services:

- Integrated family services: having little room for strengthening families that are not imminently risky, because of the heavy workload for tackling crisis cases.
- Youth outreaching social work service: difficulty in involving families.
- School social work service: difficulty in following up or referring adolescents who leave or drop out from school too quickly.
- Services related to Care and Protection Order: difficulty in sustaining services because the Order is too short.
- Various services: difficulty in identifying adolescent prostitution and coordinating efforts for preventing adolescent prostitution.

Policy Recommendations

Ten policy recommendations emerge, based on evidence culled from the data analyses and professional views. The first two recommendations are about the mission of the policy for preventing adolescent prostitution in general. Recommendation Numbers 3, 4, 5 specify the target of the policy, related to the risk of adolescent prostitution. The next two recommendations then identify the mission of the policy for the prevention of prostitution

among at-risk adolescents. Lastly, Recommendation Numbers 8, 9, 10 indicate general policy strategies for preventing adolescent prostitution.

1. Strengthening efficient parenting. Efficient parenting means effective parenting under constraints of limited time or opportunity. Effective parenting needs to strike a balance between being too strict and too lenient. Caring, love, affection, reasoning, and explanation are all essential to effective parenting. Importantly, parenting needs to be conducive to communication with adolescents. Parents need to be competent in parenting and achieve a consensus within the family concerning parenting and rules in the family. Moreover, competent fathering is especially important.

1.1. **Raising moral character, values, and reasoning.** Prostitution is a moral problem, and its solution requires parental contributions as well as moral education in the school. Parental moral guidance, in line with moral education in the school, is effective in preventing adolescent prostitution. Parental moral guidance is crucial in parents' inculcation of moral values to their children.

1.2. **Raising competence.** Internet contact is usually a sufficient condition for engaging in compensated dating or prostitution eventually. An initial checkpoint would be the monitoring of Internet activity and discouraging the adolescent having face-to-face contact with someone acquainted only through the Internet and other information technologies. The raising of parental competence needs to take account of the rapid change of information communication technologies.

1.3. **Preventing early sex.** Early prevention or discouragement of sex is important for preventing further involvement. It is because once the adolescent experiences a sexual debut, he or she will be less cautious about sexual involvement or protection of chastity. Particularly, early marriage or cohabitation, and therefore even romantic love and dating, deserve attention.

2. Strengthening parent-child bonding. Attachment to the parent requires the child's interaction with the parent and the parent's concern for the child. Particularly, attachment to the father is important for fostering moral development.

3. **Targeting broken families.** Adolescents who are not living with both parents are at risk of prostitution. The family with an absent parent suffers from the adequate creation of the parent-child bond and provision of effective parenting and control. Conversely, advice for reunion or remarriage is a way to assuage problems of the broken family, who requires the strengthening of parenting.
4. **Targeting problematic families.** Problems in families that predict adolescent prostitution include parental abuse of the child, committing crimes, and as such drawing the attention of the police. Such problems would harm effective parenting. Tackling these family problems, such as through counseling, is a necessary step toward prevention of adolescent prostitution.
5. **Targeting adolescent problems.** Adolescent problems predictive of adolescent prostitution include cohabitation, marriage, working in indecent clubs, and earlier compensated dating. Such problems can be gateways to prostitution. Mobilizing family coping with adolescent problems is essential. Notably, strengthening parents' communication and conflict management skills are essential.
6. **Crisis intervention.** A crisis is an opportunity for families to help and divert their adolescent children from prostitution, importantly in partnership with professionals such as police and social workers. The goal is to erect parental understanding of the crisis, support for the adolescent, and collaboration with professional services to make the crisis a turning point for the adolescent's rehabilitation. Crises include:
 - 6.1. **During police arrest.** Police sanctions create a crisis for the adolescent, which requires the family and other professionals to collaborate in crisis intervention. Both punishment and caring are necessary for prevention of at-risk adolescents' prostitution. Families and various professionals can provide complementary inputs to enhance the effectiveness of each input.
 - 6.2. **During pregnancy.** The adolescent girl's pregnancy is distressing condition for families and other professionals to intervene. In this connection, the girl's physical and emotional needs for care provide the opportunity for intervention to demonstrate its effectiveness.

6.3. During injury or infection. Physical suffering in the adolescent, especially due to prostitution, is a crisis in need of intervention. Treatment of the physical suffering is an entry point for diverting adolescents from prostitution.

7. **Parent-child joint counseling or service involvement.** Family-wide intervention involving parents and adolescent children is most effective. For one, collaboration between the family and professionals is a key to successful prevention. Counseling and other services are required to resolve the family problem. Professionals trained in family counseling would be most appropriate to provide counseling services.

8. **Supporting specialized services for wraparound prevention of adolescent prostitution.** Such services can be extensions of existing specialized services for preventing adolescent prostitution. Their merits consist in providing direct services and coordinating efforts of families and various professionals to generate synergistic effects, based on the expertise of the services.

8.1. **Proactive approaches to service delivery.** The proposed specialized service unit needs to mobilize and engage families identified in Recommendation Numbers 3 and 4 for preventive work in order to help needy families. It can include reaching out work to engage hard-to-reach families.

8.2. **Assessing needs and risks and allotting services.** Early detection of needs and risks of families and their children concerning adolescent prostitution is the first step to render preventive services. For this purpose, schools, youth and family services are helpful. With the detection and assessment, services are useful when they match the needs and risks.

8.3. **Delivering parent education for needy parents and families with at-risk children.** The proposed specialized service unit needs to provide educational services to the target parents about their duties and skills of moral guidance, crisis intervention, Internet monitoring, and other appropriate parenting performances, and most fundamentally about the values of family and parenting. Subsidized parenting education, as modeled after retraining in the Employee Retraining Board, can provide incentives for parents and

would-be parents admitted by the education services.

8.4. **Minimizing any labeling effect on participants.** Ways to minimize any labeling effect on participants include situating specific services within general-purpose premises and packaging the services in an appealing and non-sensitive manner.

9. **Facilitating the partnerships of professionals or units with families.** Instituting laws or regulations is a requisite to facilitate professionals and their partnerships in preventing adolescent prostitution. It needs to formalizing protocols for partnership in crisis intervention during such crises as police arrest and hospitalization. An important condition for partnership is the sharing of information. Particularly, adolescents aged 16 and 17 are of concern, because their prostitution is within a grey area between prostitution and sexual abuse.

10. **Mobilizing community support for the prevention.** The target of mobilization includes employers, managers, and professionals, as well as residents. Sustaining family and moral values for parenting and adolescent development in society is essential to champion efforts to prevent adolescent prostitution and other problems. School has a role to strengthen moral education for cultivating family and other moral values, and eradicating immoral values like selling virginity for money, in order to prevent adolescent prostitution.

**Exploratory Study of Neglect Among Elderly In Hong Kong :
A Family Perspective**

**Lingnan University
Asia Pacific institute of Ageing Studies**

Executive Summary

Background

Elder abuse has attracted considerable attention in recent years because of its increasing trend and happenings within the family that clashes head-on with the traditional Chinese values of respecting and caring for the older persons. Elder neglect is common yet seen as a lesser fair of elder abuse. Part of the reason is that neglect is not readily distinguishable from abuse. Yet, the situation often worsens to finally become abusive in nature if preventive actions are not taken. Therefore, the study approached ‘neglect’ as the midway processes between loving relationship and a worsening care to the extreme of abusive behaviors. Such perspective allows subsequent implementation of intervening procedures to help improve the relationship between the older victims and the perpetrators and to rectify problems at early stages.

Aims

Elder neglect, instead of abuse, forms an obvious focus in studying changes before irreversible damages are made to the families over time to examine the family cohesion factors as well as to identify interpersonal or helping relationships among elder parents and adult children, in particular during the time of sickness when an older person requires intensive care. Such occasions reveal the impacts of family dynamic on the vulnerability of elder neglect. It is under this background, Family Council and Central Policy Unit, commissioned the Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies of Lingnan University to undertake the study, in April 2010, with the following aims:

- (a) To provide literature review on family neglect in Asian countries, including Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and India;
- (b) To identify critical points of elder neglect in Hong Kong and its explanation(s); and
- (c) To propose possible interventions.

Methodology

The explanatory model for family life pathway proposed in the study is an eco-system analysis resembling organic functionalism (i.e. organic system theory) where individuals are taken as units within a system (e.g. family) where they are trying to adapt to the demand by adjusting themselves to fit in with the roles and functions expected of them. Successful adaptation means ever better survival for not just the individual units but the whole system as well (i.e. a state of equilibrium). On the other hand, ill adaptation can mean total failure of the individuals and its system (i.e. family) falling apart, with problems and malfunctions needing assistance and rectifications from the outside. This pathway provides the structure of our explanation.

The study adopted a qualitative in-depth interview approach design. The first part involved using 'structured questionnaire' to obtain individual socio-economic data, risk or protective factors, characteristics of significant others and the Chinese cultural elements of care and love or neglect; while the second part focused on significant life events recall with the help of a guideline. The detailed accounts of the experiences from different perspectives (i.e. elders and perpetrators) were audio-taped and summarized in accordance to the developmental stages indicated in the explanatory model of family life pathway. The interviews were processed and broken down into events and behaviors for coding, with reference to different developmental stages of family life stages (e.g. courtship and marriage, extension or subtraction of family in reaction to life circumstances). . The codes were compared to find consistencies and differences, to reveal different categories. The categories became saturated and the central focus emerged. Such categories were used to reconstruct the family life pathway

leading to elder mistreatment, highlighting the critical points at different family developmental stages that require adaptations.

Sampling

The study adopted purposive sampling to identify potential targets (i.e. elders aged 60 years old or above, who live alone or with the family members (i.e. sons or/and daughters or/and in-laws) and his/her family members from ‘caring family’ and ‘neglected family’), being referred by Social Welfare Department, social welfare organizations. A total of 40 neglected families (40 elders plus 22 perpetrators) and 43 caring families (43 happy elders plus 40 caregivers) were included in the study.

Characteristics

The elders from neglected and caring families in the sample share similar demographic socio-economic characteristics whereas their financial conditions and family care are found to be different. Elders from the caring families are comparatively well-off, as compared to elders from the neglect families. Family support to older persons in caring family is nurtured by love and care, i.e. most elders are living with the family with their children’s support. On the contrary, half of the elders from neglected family are living alone and relying on government’s provisions for living. Health problems are not necessarily a risk factor in themselves, as it depends on how members react to them. Health issues could worsen the mistreatment of the elderly because extra burden was put onto the perpetrators, but it could also prompt members to provide more care and concerns, thus drawing the relationship closer. Perpetuators and caregivers are mostly adult children or spouses. Caregivers are generally female, single (separated or divorced) and of higher education attainment. Some are still working and living on the salary earned while some are retired with financial support from their own children; whereas perpetrators are found to be mostly male, working, married, living with two to three persons in a flat of modest size, and earning a salary that provides a source for most family expenses.

Findings

The stories shared have reflected a pattern of cultural and individual factors that leads to similar life events that coincide with developmental stages in the family life pathway. Two types of family life pathways formed the focus of the study: (1) ordinary marriage between mainlanders, who come to Hong Kong as immigrants or refugees in 1940s to 1970s, or between Hong Kongers; and (2) cross-border marriage, as a product of the 1980s and the 1990s, with Hong Kong male residents marrying mainland female residents, and a few of such marriages involve significant age differences. The findings serve to construct the common family life pathway for the two types of family, pinpointing the critical points gradually leading to elder mistreatment.

The elder mistreatment cases in cross-border marriages in the study shared similar characteristics and patterns in resulting shattered family. The time for courtship was relatively short, their union was found being accelerated by popular myths of Hong Kong men (richer, more educated, more sophisticated, etc) as well as that of mainland women (submissive, obedient, gentle, etc). The basis of the marriage was largely functional and material, instead of mutual understanding and affection. The couples were often separated by the border in the first few years of marriage, with the husband from Hong Kong visiting his wife in mainland China during weekends and holidays. The relationships between the two persons were generally amiable at the beginning, as accompanied by the birth of children (usually within one year after marriage). The first common critical point was then revealed at the reunion of family in Hong Kong, when the mainland wife and mainland-born children joined the husband in Hong Kong. It was often found that the expectations that the wives or the husbands were different when they were separated. The relationship was discounted and instead became filled with blame and suspicion. The wives continued to stay with the husbands as they were the only persons that the wives could rely on in every way especially during their first few years of stay in Hong Kong. The second critical point came when the wives became more established in terms of familiarity with the support system, job market and education opportunities, etc, while the husbands' capability went downhill. Often the husbands aged, and brought home less or even no money, which led to the foundation of their marriage being challenged again. Life circumstances (such as illnesses, sudden and huge loss of money, etc) were usually found

to be the trigger factors of mistreatment and finally resulted in shattered families.

The elder mistreatment cases in among marriages of the husband and wife both coming from mainland China also shared some common traits and patterns that resulted the worsening care to older persons in the family. The couples got married rather in a rush (i.e. little or even nil time for courtship) as well as late in life, as compared to their counterparts at that time (i.e. in their early 30s) for all sort of purposes such as parents' wills, peer pressure, an escape from poverty and hardship, etc, instead of mutual affection. The separation time for couples between mainland China and Hong Kong was quite long, due to the unstable political and social conditions at that time. This put the family relationship to a critical test, and the relationships between husband and wife and father and children were quite alienated and distant because of the separation. The situation did not seem to improve even the families finally reunited in Hong Kong. However, the wives, though having to live in such an oppressive situation, stayed with the husbands regardless of the situation, observing the Chinese wives' tradition of absolute obedience to their husbands. Mistreatment between husbands and wives might happen, but the wives often sucked it up. It turned out to affect the children who had to grow up in such an environment. The death of husband was found to be a critical point, where the older mother lost her anchor and needed to move into her married son's household. As an extension of functional spousal relationship between the mother and the father, the relationship between mother and son was no better, as it was also based on calculation and functions. Life circumstances, in particular the deterioration of health, brought extra burden to the family, as rated against the declining level of contribution and depreciating value to the family of the older person as he or she ages. Mistreatments and conflicts within family came along.

Conclusion

The study has identified two patterns of marriage, namely 'ordinary marriage' and 'cross-border marriage'. The reasons behind the union of man and woman in question varied, according to the different social, economic and political backdrop when the marriage took place. The critical points leading to elder mistreatment were similar in both ordinary and cross-border marriage, for example the addition or subtraction of family member and life

circumstances such as loss of job, loss of money, health problem, weakened earning ability because of old age or health problem, etc. These require families to adjust balance and adapt, and the capability and underlying forces for positive adjustment, balance and adaptation of individual or family were found to be different in the two identified patterns of marriage. 'Ordinary marriage' involved the middle-old and old-old generations now, normally took place between 1940s and 1970s. The marriages were generally stricken by poverty and hardship at the time when traditional thoughts strongly prevailed; their unions, mostly, were out of family pressure and social expectations, with little emphasis on love and mutual understanding. The relationship between husband and wife, parents and children was rather distant, bestowing little threshold and resilience on the family to withstand and overcome life circumstances. 'Cross-border marriage' involved mostly the young-old and took place between 1980s and 1990s, a time characterized by economic affluence, increased contact between Hong Kong and mainland China and a more open attitude toward love and marriage due to western influence. As reflected in the cases, the unions were largely out of functions and materials. Having grown up in different social and cultural context of cross-border couples, the reunion of family, implying day-in day-out living together under the same roof, caused challenges. The unfulfilled wants and wrongful expectations accelerated the change of the relationship. The age difference induced a shift of power in the later family life, when husbands retired and lost its earning power while the wives in their prime age, striving for a better future, became the breadwinner of the family. The basis (i.e. functions and materials) of the marriage changes, the relationship between husband and wife would become troubled and alienated, and gradually worsened to become a severely damaged or even an abusive relationship.

In conclusion, elder neglect in normal marriage was due to the lack of love and care from the onset of the man-woman relationship (i.e. courtship and marriage stage) and leading to an alienated family relationship among members of family; whereas the happening of elder neglect in cross-border marriage was due to its functional and materialistic nature of love and care, which infected other members in the family, the shift of power in relation to functions put the weakest link at risk.

Limitations

There are limitations that need to be acknowledged and addressed in

the present study. The first limitation has to do with the extent to which the findings can be generalized beyond the cases studied. The number of cases is too limited as well as too homogeneous for broad generalizations. Further empirical studies, however, are needed to replicate the findings in different contexts and surroundings, so to enhance our understanding of elder neglect among different groups of elders for more well defined indicators of the mistreatment. The second limitation is the definition of elder neglect. It is well predicted that the consultant team approached elder neglect as a midway process to elder abuse shall arouse social debates as the approach connotes different beliefs and perspectives behind. This, however, will be taken as the beginning of a long process on the elimination of elder mistreatment in Hong Kong.

Policy Recommendations

Family is an organic system, like the human body. It senses heat and cold, when the stimulus exceeds a certain threshold, the body transmits signals that the brain interprets as pain. The ‘pain’ is the critical point in the family life pathway. If one ignores the pain, the pain will worsen and become chronic or even incurable if it is not being taken good care of at its onset. Precisely, small problems happened along the pathway, and gradually transform into big troubles that shatter the family and might cause regrets for life. Therefore, the policy recommendations have taken on a public health approach to the developmental pathways of family life, to encourage successful adaptations and to increase the threshold of family to come head-on to overcome the challenges along the pathways. They are divided into three levels (1) Primary, focusing on early prevention; (2) Secondary, focusing on timely intervention and; (3) Tertiary, focusing on rehabilitation. Suggested key actions are indicated below.

1. Primary level: Focusing on early prevention
 - To review existing policies working against family cohesion or reducing family responsibility to care;
 - To strengthen family life and community education for filial care;
 - To promote a positive image and instill respect and care for the older persons among the public; and

- To introduce dating and marriage life education and filial care education in formal curriculum at an early age.
2. Secondary level: Focusing on timely intervention
 - To commission further studies to develop instruments for early detection of elder neglect;
 - To encourage family members to have frequent interactions and show love and concerns;
 - To help build neighborhood and friendship networks for older persons; and
 - To encourage intergenerational interactions.
 3. Tertiary level: Focusing on rehabilitation upon intervention
 - To support training of mediators or counselors for neglectful/unhappy marriage relationships;
 - To make affordable marriage/family counseling/mediating services available in accessible locations to elders such as social centers for the elderly; and
 - To promote help-seeking mentalities of elders for marriage counseling services among unhappy couples.