

WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Response of Social Welfare Department to Recommendations of The Women's Commission Report on Women's Safety in Hong Kong : Eliminating Domestic Violence

PURPOSE

This paper sets out the response of the Social Welfare Department to the recommendations of The Women's Commission Report on Women's Safety in Hong Kong : Eliminating Domestic Violence (the Report) issued in January 2006.

GENERAL RESPONSE

2. The Department welcomes the Report and those recommendations pertaining to social welfare. The Department shares the same belief of the Commission that harmonious family is the foundation of a harmonious community. The Government's policy that we do not tolerate domestic violence is clear. We appreciate that the Report provides a strategic plan for eliminating domestic violence. We fully share that domestic violence is a multi-dimensional issue and a coordinated community strategy should be adopted in tackling domestic violence. While the Government holds the responsibility to continuously enhance the policy and strategies, we agree that the entire community should address the issue collaboratively and creatively as recommended in the Report. Each and every sector of the community has an important role in combating domestic violence and we believe that through a coordinated manner, the effectiveness of the effort directed at combating domestic violence including support for victims and families would be enhanced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. In the Report, the Commission has made 21 recommendations on eight areas. While the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau is co-ordinating the joint effort of respective government bureaux/departments and stakeholders to examine the feasibility of adopting the recommendations, the Department's response to the areas relating to law reform, services, publicity, professional knowledge-sharing, documentation and research, early identification and intervention as well as community networking is detailed in the Annex.

ADVICE SOUGHT

4. Members are invited to note the Department's response.

Social Welfare Department

April 2006

**SWD's Response to Recommendations of
The Women's Commission Report
Women's Safety in Hong Kong: Eliminating Domestic Violence**

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
1.	Law reform	
#1.1-1.3	<p>Amendment of existing Domestic Violence Ordinance (DVO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extending the scope of “protected persons” to cover former spouses or cohabitantes • exploring extension of scope of “protected persons” to cover in-law relationship and persons living in the same household, other than merely by reason of one of them being the other’s employee, tenant, lodger or boarder • extending power of arrest to cover violence in a form other than actual bodily harm through attachment of power of arrest to molestation order 	<p>Some of the recommendations may have far-reaching implications on family relationships in the Hong Kong society or read-across implications on other legislation and have to be carefully considered. The Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HFWB) has formed an inter-departmental working group, to which SWD is one of the members, to review the DVO and examine whether, and if so, how the existing legislative framework may be further strengthened to render protection to victims of domestic violence. The following proposed amendments to the DVO are being considered :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ extending the scope to cover former spouse and former cohabitants; ✧ enabling the Court to grant an order for up to 18 months; and ✧ empowering the Court to attach a power of arrest to the injunction order if it is satisfied that the respondent has caused any physical or psychological harm/damage to the applicant or the child(ren) concerned.

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
		The HWFB is now in the process of consulting different sectors on the above proposals and will proceed with the law amendment in 2006-07.
#1.5 -1.6	The courts to refer batterer to Batterer Intervention Programmes (BIPs) Enhancing promotion of BIPs	Two pilot BIP projects run by SWD and the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society (HKFWS) have been commenced in March 2006. For batterers put on probation, the Court may stipulate the treatment as a condition in the probation order. To promote the service and encourage referrals, briefings with different stakeholders have been launched by SWD and HKFWS at both the central and district levels. To encourage referrals by the court, sharing with the Judge and law enforcement agencies will be arranged upon completion of the first phase of the trial run in mid-2006.
2.	Services	
# 2.1	Combating transgenerational transmission through BIPs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WoC recommends all stakeholders working with domestic violence in Hong Kong learn about transgenerational transmission and how to stop it. As much emphasis must be placed on identifying and providing properly-developed services for potential, and actual, batterers as providing services for victims. • WoC recommends that the Social Welfare Department 	Social workers of the Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) and Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) are aware of the need to combat transgenerational transmission. All along, the FCPSUs have provided and arranged necessary services, including counselling, statutory protection, residential child care service, psychological assessment and treatment for abused children according to their needs. Apart from individual casework and clinical psychological services, the FCPSUs, in collaboration with clinical psychologists, have developed various handbooks for running group programmes for victims, children and batterers. Continuous effort will be made to enhance the

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
	consider how to address needs of children witnessing domestic violence, developing programmes for them, and their families, in order to break the cycle of violence.	<p>programme content.</p> <p>Commencing from 2005-06, SWD has allocated additional resources to the refuge centres for women to strengthen support services for women and children admitted to the centres to help them cope with the trauma.</p> <p>In 2006-07, SWD will produce an information kit to enhance the victims' and children's understanding on the problems of domestic violence, their rights as well as services available. The kit will be presented in the form of leaflet, VCD as well as cartoons for the children.</p>
#2.2	<p>BIPs be given due attention</p> <p>WoC recommends that effective BIPs be instituted in Hong Kong, with reference to overseas experience.</p>	<p>We agree that overseas experience will complement our effort in promoting BIP. Overseas expert will be invited to join the Advisory Group of the BIP pilot project. In developing the programme content and evaluation framework, SWD has made reference to experience in the USA, UK, Taiwan and Singapore.</p>
#2.3	<p>After-care and support for victims</p> <p>WoC recommends that the Social Welfare Department monitor situations of victims leaving women's shelters in order to provide support and timely intervention.</p>	<p>For women discharged from refuge centres, after-care services will be provided by the shelter through various means, including telephone contact, home visit, peer support groups, etc. A brief discharged report will also be provided by the refuge centres to the follow-up service units to ensure the needs of the residents are adequately taken care of.</p>

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
		To enhance collaboration among services units, sharing forums will be arranged in 2006-07.
3.	Publicity	
	<p>Changing attitudes and disseminating information</p> <p>WoC recommends that all stakeholders align efforts to promote awareness, change community attitudes, give information regarding legal avenues and services available, and encourage early identification of abuse.</p>	<p>We agree that prevention is always better than cure and joint effort of different sectors in launching public education will be more effective in preventing domestic violence. Hence, the Working Group on the Publicity Campaign on Strengthening Families and Combating Violence comprising representatives from SWD, Information Services Department and concerned NGOs involved in delivery of family services, and management of child abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse and sexual violence cases, was formed in 2002 to map out the publicity strategies to combat violence. During the past few years, a territory-wide Publicity Campaign on "Strengthening Families and Combating Violence" has been organized on an annual basis. The objectives of the Campaign are to enhance public awareness of the need to strengthen families, encourage families to seek early assistance and prevent violence. The five sub-themes cover spouse battering, child abuse, elder abuse, sexual violence and suicide.</p> <p>SWD has always tried to align effort of the other sectors through organizing publicity events with them, e.g. the mural design competition jointly organized with the Hong Kong Mural Society. Moreover, a series of 1-minute animation on prevention of violence have been arranged to be broadcast on 5 advertising channels, and the VCDs have</p>

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
		<p>been distributed to the Department of Health, Immigration Department, Housing Department and Hospital Authority for viewing by the public.</p> <p>At the district level, the District Coordinating Committees on Family and Child Welfare Services chaired by the District Social Welfare Officers and attended by community leaders and representatives from local NGOs and government departments provides a forum for aligning efforts of different disciplines/sectors in combating violence. Joint programmes with different stakeholders are also organized at district levels.</p>
4.	Professional knowledge-sharing, documentation and research	
#4.1	<p>Sharing professional knowledge and good practices</p> <p>WoC recommends that a platform for sharing professional knowledge and good practices be established.</p>	<p>SWD has been providing on-going training to the related professionals. These joint training opportunities facilitate sharing of professional knowledge and good practice among different disciplines. Furthermore, SWD has commissioned the Hong Kong University Family Institute and Sau Po Centre on Ageing to conduct a series of open seminars on basic awareness of domestic violence organised on regional/cluster basis for 2 420 related professionals (e.g. social workers, police officers, medical personnel, teachers, etc.) and district personnel (e.g. district council members) from 26.11.2005 to 26.1.2006. There were fruitful exchanges on these occasions among the participants. In 2006-07, SWD will continue to provide training and sharing opportunities.</p>

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
		<p>At district level, as mentioned above, the District Coordinating Committees on Family and Child Welfare Services, with representatives from local NGOs, government departments and community leaders, have also been organizing seminars and forums to promote mutual sharing.</p> <p>To strengthen district coordination and to improve the handling of domestic violence cases, 13 District Liaison Groups on Family Violence (DLGFV) have been formed since March 2005. The DLGFV are convened by the District Social Welfare Offices, with the participation of FCPSUs, IFSCs, the Police and other relevant organisations. The DLGFV provides a platform for the operating units to have direct sharing on experience and knowledge in handling family violence cases.</p>
#4.4	<p>Research and database sharing</p> <p>WoC recommends that a system be established to facilitate and share research and database information about domestic violence.</p>	<p>In view of the rising number of family tragedies, evidence-based research is required for more in-depth understanding of the subject. During the past three years, researches related to family violence have been initiated, e.g. the study on homicide-suicide in Hong Kong commissioned to the Centre for Criminology of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) in November 2002, the study on child abuse and spouse battering commissioned to HKU in April 2003 which is still underway. The completed/relevant reports have been published / uploaded in SWD homepage.</p>

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
		<p>Regarding database, three different information systems, namely Child Protection Registry (CPR), the Central Information System on Battered Spouse Cases and Sexual Violence Cases (CISBS&SV) and the Central Information System on Elder Abuse (CISEA), have been developed by SWD to capture statistics on the different types of abuse. The CPR and CISBS&SV were enhanced in 2003. The statistics are regularly reported at the Committee On Child Abuse (CCA), Working Group on Combating Violence (WGCV) and Working Group on Elder Abuse (WGEA). The key statistics (breakdown by types of abuse, gender of the victims and abusers, etc) of CPR and CISBS&SV are also regularly uploaded in the Victim Support Website for Child Abuse, Spouse Battering and Sexual Violence whereas the key statistics of CISEA is uploaded in SWD homepage.</p>
7.	Early identification and intervention	
	<p>Early identification of abuse WoC recommends that all stakeholders and the community have a responsibility in early identification of abuse.</p>	<p>We fully agree that all stakeholders and the community have a responsibility in early identification of abuse. To enhance the sensitivity of the stakeholders and the community on early identification of abuse case and to encourage them to share the responsibility, SWD has launched various public education, publicity and training, details of which have been given in items 3 and 4.1 above.</p> <p>Furthermore, to strengthen an integrated community-based child and family service model and to ensure early</p>

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
		identification of the varied needs of children and their families so that appropriate services can be made available to them in a timely manner, the Maternal and Child Health Centres of the Department of Health, Hospital Authority, Education and Manpower Bureau, SWD and NGOs cooperate to better align the delivery of health, education and social services. The pilot Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) (0-5 years) was launched in Sham Shui Po in July 2005 and extended to Tin Shui Wai, Tuen Mun and Tseung Kwan O in January 2006. CCDS will be further extended to the other communities in Hong Kong by phases. The progress of the pilot service is encouraging, contributing to enhanced collaboration and interface of different sectors and increased client accessibility to services.
8.	Community networking	
#8.1	<p>Building community support</p> <p>WoC recommends making better use of community resources, for example, training and developing volunteers to support professional social workers and help victims integrate more fully into the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These initiatives include self-help, mutual support, and peer counselling. <p>WoC recommends developing a community support network to better support victims and their children.</p>	<p>We fully agree that family harmony is the foundation of social harmony and volunteers can provide valuable services. The FCPSUs and IFSCs work with their service users in promoting mutual help and support, as well as offering services to the needy in the community. The Government has allocated additional resources in 2006-07 to strengthen and extend family education to promote the values, ethics and individual responsibility needed for family harmony.</p> <p>SWD will launch a Family Support Programme in 2006-07. It aims to serve vulnerable families who are identified to be</p>

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
		in need of support services but unmotivated to be contacted by welfare units. Volunteers including those who have gone through similar problems or crisis before will be recruited to contact these families to form a network of community care and assistance.
#8.2	<p>District networking</p> <p>WoC recommends that the Home Affairs Department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work closely with the Social Welfare Department and the Housing Department to develop programmes to help early identification of domestic violence cases at the district level. • incorporate the topic of domestic violence and prevention in the district fight crime programmes and activities. • work closely with the Social Welfare Department and women's groups to help empower women to seek assistance and help mobilise male and female volunteers to strengthen community awareness and support. 	<p>While the Home Affairs Department (HAD) is the lead department in community building, SWD also places much emphasis on the importance of networking and building social capital. As mentioned above, at the district level, there are District Coordinating Committees on Family and Child Welfare Services chaired by the District Social Welfare Officers and attended by representatives from local NGOs, government departments and community leaders. To echo the Publicity Campaign, various district activities such as seminars, workshops, family camps and exhibitions are held. During the period from April to October 2005, 246 district activities with 296,184 participants were held in the 12 SWD districts.</p> <p>To build up and strengthen community support, a pilot project named Welfare Concourse was implemented in Kwun Tong district from July 2004 to December 2005. With domestic violence as the focus of work, the Concourse composing different stakeholders in the district including government department, NGOs and local leaders provided a forum for cross-sector collaboration on the planning and coordination of welfare services to combat domestic violence. The pilot project was proved to be effective and</p>

	WoC's Recommendations	SWD's Response
		<p>SWD will extend the good practice to other districts by phases.</p> <p>In addition, the Working Group on Planning and Community Building for Tin Shui Wai was formed in December 2004 under the chairmanship of a District Council member. Members included various government departments including the HAD, Housing Department and local leaders. The Working Group meets regularly and closely monitors the improvement of the community facilities and services in Tin Shui Wai in order to prevent domestic violence.</p> <p>Upon the full implementation of IFSCs and setting up of additional FCPSUs, inter-agency coordination and collaboration has been enhanced on a cluster and district basis.</p>