INTRODUCTION

This paper introduces the findings of the Part One of the Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering commissioned by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

BACKGROUND

2. In April 2003, SWD commissioned the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of the University of Hong Kong (the Consultant) to conduct a Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering. Part One of the Study aims to estimate the prevalence rate of child abuse and spouse battering in Hong Kong, to analyze the demographic, social, psychological and family profile of perpetrators and victims, as well as to identify elements contributing to effective prevention and intervention, including studying the feasibility and implications of adopting mandatory treatment of perpetrators in Hong Kong and examining the existing legislative measures. Part Two of the Study aims to develop and validate assessment tools to facilitate early identification of cases at risk of child abuse and spouse battering, and to conduct training for frontline professionals on the use of the assessment tools.

3. This paper presents the results of Part One of the Study.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4. Part One of the Study comprises a territory-wide household survey and a review of the social and legal measures in the prevention and intervention of
domestic violence in Hong Kong.

5. In brief, the household survey was conducted between December 2003 and August 2004, and a total of 5,049 adult respondents and 2,062 child respondents were interviewed face-to-face. It was estimated that about 13.9% of adult respondents had ever experienced physical assault, physical injury and/or sexual coercion by their spouses and about 7% had these experiences during the 12 months before the survey. Among the child respondents, about 45% indicated they had ever encountered physical assault (including minor, severe and very severe) by either of or both their parents. The ever prevalence rate for very severe physical assault was about 9%. About 23% indicated they had encountered physical assault (including minor, severe and very severe) by either one or both their parents during the 12 months before the survey. The annual prevalence rate for very severe physical assault was about 4%.

6. In the review of social and legal measures in the prevention and intervention of domestic violence, the Consultant had examined a number of issues, including the context and conditions in providing court-ordered mandatory batterer intervention programmes, reporting of domestic violence cases, the practice of arrest and prosecution, legal support for victims, multi-disciplinary collaboration and legislative changes to the Domestic Violence Ordinance.

PRELIMINARY ADMINISTRATION’S RESPONSES

7. The household survey conducted in this study was the first of its kind conducted in Hong Kong in terms of scale and coverage. Apart from estimating the prevalence of child abuse and spouse battering in Hong Kong, the findings of the survey provide information on the demographic, social, psychological and family profile of perpetrators and victims. Such information will provide reference for the Administration in refining the existing policies and measures in tackling child abuse and spouse battering.

8. On the Consultant’s suggestions on introducing batterer intervention programmes in Hong Kong, SWD presently has offered group programmes to batterers. It is planning to run a pilot involving on non-governmental
organisation on batterer intervention programmes, under which treatment will be provided to batterers joining the pilot programmes on voluntary basis, and batterers put on probation under the arrangement of probation officers. Through the pilot programme, we aim to get more insights of the goal, content, standard and effectiveness of such programmes. The outcome of the pilot programme will facilitate further consideration of the recommendations made by the Consultant.

9. Among other things, the Consultant has recommended a Domestic Violence Serious Injury or Fatality Review. As previously reported to the Subcommittee, SWD has proposed establishing a review mechanism for fatal child abuse cases and is in the process of consulting the concerned parties including the Working Group on Combating Violence and Committee on Child Abuse. Advice from the Department of Justice and the Police is also being sought. The Consultant also made a number of recommendations on the review of the Domestic Violence Ordinance. We note that many of the comments made are similar to the views previously expressed by legislators and other interested parties, and the Government will critically review the need for legislative amendments taking into account all relevant factors.

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