



“Violence against women by an intimate partner is a major contributor of the ill-health of women...[it] has a far deeper impact than the immediate harm caused. It has devastating consequences for the women who experience it, and a traumatic effect on those who witness it, particularly children...Violence against women is a violation of basic human rights that must be eliminated through political will, and by legal and civil action in all sectors of society...”

World Health Organization, 2005

1. Message from the Chairperson

Domestic violence is a multi-dimensional issue which has traumatic impact not only on the individual, but also the family and the community. It has been a subject of considerable public concern over the past few years. The World Health Organization (WHO) views “violence against women” as a public health and human rights issue and endorses a public health approach in preventing violence through interdisciplinary and collective action.

The Women’s Commission (WoC), as the central mechanism to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong, advocates this approach and has taken the initiative to organise a multi-level and cross-sectoral push to promote the elimination of domestic violence in the community. After in-depth study of the subject and thorough discussion amongst the relevant stakeholders, WoC has devised a multi-dimensional strategy to tackle domestic violence and put forth a series of recommendations in its report on “Women’s Safety in Hong Kong: Eliminating Domestic Violence”¹ published in January 2006.

Our efforts in tackling domestic violence did not stop with the publication of the Report. Rather, WoC has continued to follow up closely with relevant Government departments, welfare service agencies, women’s groups and other interested stakeholders to secure their support in implementing its recommendations and monitor the new measures put in place.

On behalf of the Commission, I would like to thank our many stakeholders and partners for their unfailing commitment to and efforts in combating domestic violence. We are pleased to note that many of the recommendations put forth in our 2006 Report have been taken on board and the support services for victims of domestic violence have been strengthened on many fronts. The purpose of this report is to outline the progress made by various parties in the past three years and the next step forward for further enhancing women’s safety in Hong Kong.

Together we can make a difference and make Hong Kong a safer place for women and for everyone. We look forward to your continued support and invaluable feedback.

Sophia KAO
Chairperson, Women’s Commission
August 2009

¹The Report can be downloaded from http://www.women.gov.hk/download/safety_english_final.pdf



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3. Introduction

Protection of women against violence is one of the important pledges of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. As the central mechanism to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong, WoC has also put women's safety as one of its priority areas of work. Since its inception, WoC has reviewed the policies, services and legislation pertaining to domestic violence, discussed at length with the relevant Government bureaux and departments and made recommendations on how to combat domestic violence.

Following the Tin Shui Wai tragedy in April 2004 which had aroused a great deal of public attention to the issues of availability and effectiveness of measures and resources to protect families at risk, WoC had set up a dedicated working group to conduct a review with all relevant stakeholders. Taken on board the comments received, WoC has devised a multi-dimensional strategy to tackle domestic violence and released a report "Women's Safety in Hong Kong: Eliminating Domestic Violence" in January 2006 (the 2006 Report).



The multi-dimensional strategy as proposed in the 2006 Report aims to –

- (1) eliminate domestic violence by prevention, timely intervention, empowerment of victims, and community education; and
- (2) advocate gender awareness, gender equality and mutual respect, and involvement of men in the process.

WoC has put forward a total of 21 concrete recommendations covering law reform; services; publicity; professional knowledge-sharing, documentation and research; hospitals, health and medical sectors; gender mainstreaming and gender-related training; early identification and intervention; and community networking.

Since the release of the 2006 Report, the Government, public bodies and concerned non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have responded positively and implemented a number of recommendations put forward by WoC. The Chief Executive, in his 2006-07 Policy Address, introduced a series of new initiatives to take forward the legislative reform and strengthen various measures in tackling domestic violence –

“We plan to amend the Domestic Violence Ordinance and complement this initiative with a series of preventive, supportive and specialised services, including an enhanced 24-hour hotline in the Social Welfare Department, a crisis support centre dedicated to victims of domestic violence and sexual violence, as well as support services for the family members of victims. We will strengthen the functions of the refuge centres for women, continue to promote the building of community support networks, and reach out to vulnerable families to address their problems at an early stage...”

Major progress made in the past three years include the introduction of legislative amendments to the Domestic Violence Ordinance, new enhancement measures launched by the Police in handling domestic violence cases, strengthening of welfare services and support for domestic violence victims and intervention programme for abusers, enhance public awareness of domestic violence problem and its serious impact on individual, family and community through public education and training

for frontline professionals, etc. Separately, many NGOs, community groups and women’s organisations have also launched programmes and activities, as well as other educational and supportive initiatives, at both the community and the neighbourhood levels to complement the Government’s efforts in strengthening community support network and enhancing public awareness of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a multi-faceted problem in which gender is a central focus. All sectors of the community must work together using a gender perspective to combat the problem effectively. In the years ahead, WoC will continue to monitor and evaluate the progress made, and offer advice and support to the Government in implementing the multi-disciplinary strategy. We will also work closely with all relevant stakeholders and other community partners in strengthening the **coordinated community intervention approach** in combating domestic violence.



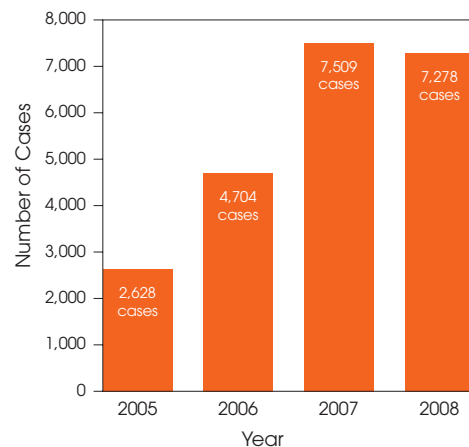
4. Current Situation

Key statistics

Over the past few years, the number of reported domestic violence cases have been on an increasing trend.

The Police have kept statistics on the number of domestic violence incidents (including both crime cases and miscellaneous cases) reported to and handled by the Police. According to Police's information, the number of reported domestic violence cases had increased from 2,628 cases in 2005 to 7,509 cases in 2007. But there has been a sign of a reverse of this trend and the number of cases reported to the Police has fallen to 7,278 cases in 2008, representing a 3.1% reduction compared with the figure in 2007.

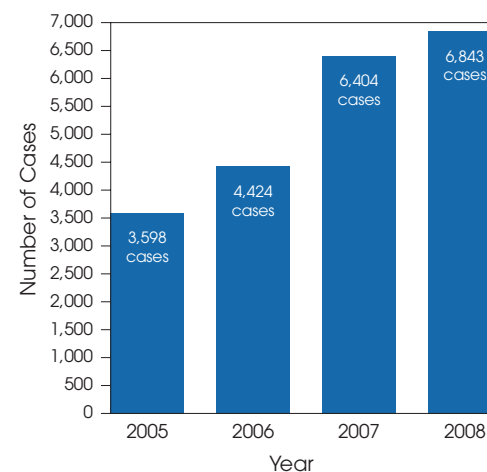
Chart 1: Number of Reported Domestic Violence Cases



Source: Hong Kong Police Force

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has compiled its own set of statistics showing the number of battered spouse cases handled by SWD and welfare agencies. According to SWD's information, the number of newly reported battered spouse cases had increased from 3,598 cases in 2005 to 6,404 cases in 2007. A total of 6,843 cases were reported in 2008, representing an increase of 6.9% compared with the figure in 2007.

**Chart 2: Battered Spouse Cases
(First Reported to Social Welfare Department)**



Source: Social Welfare Department

The increased number of reported domestic violence cases is an indication that domestic violence is still a significant social problem. At the same time, it might also reflect that more victims are willing to come forward to seek help. This could be attributed to the enhanced measures of the Police in handling domestic violence cases, as well as the strengthened efforts of SWD and NGOs to reach out to the vulnerable families and encourage families in need to address their problem at an early stage. With enhanced publicity and public education, the community has become more aware of the problem of domestic violence and the support and remedies available to domestic violence victims.

WoC will continue to monitor the trend, evaluate the effectiveness of various measures, and refine the strategy in tackling domestic violence in the light of the changes.



5. Progress Made

To follow through the implementation of the multi-dimensional strategy and the 21 recommendations in tackling domestic violence, WoC has invited relevant bureaux and departments to its regular meetings from time to time for further discussion and exchange. Its Working Group on Empowerment² has also arranged several separate exchange sessions with relevant government bureaux / departments, and stakeholders to seek an update on their respective efforts made in combating domestic violence. A total of 26 women's groups / NGOs / welfare agencies³ attended the sharing sessions held on 17 and 18 March 2008 and updated us the various initiatives undertaken by their respective organisations to eliminate domestic violence.

The progress recorded in this section is based on the information provided by government bureaux/departments and various stakeholders during the abovementioned meetings and sharing sessions. We have also made reference to other publicly available documents.

² The Working Group on Empowerment is one of the Commission's four working groups formed to spearhead strategy and initiatives to empower women, including women's safety. Its membership is set out in Appendix I.

³ Stakeholders participated at the sharing sessions are listed in Appendix II.

5.1 Law Reform

WoC's Recommendations in 2006 Report

In the 2006 Report, WoC has recommended that the Government should review the Domestic Violence Ordinance (DVO) to provide more effective protection to victims of domestic violence, take forward the proposed anti-stalking legislation and interface law enforcement and judicial systems with an early intervention programme. The specific recommendations are –

1.1

Extending the scope of "protected persons" under the DVO to cover former spouses or co-habitees

WoC recommends that the scope of "protected persons" to whom a non-molestation order is available under the DVO be extended to include an ex-spouse and an ex-cohabitee

1.2

Exploring the extension of scope of "protected persons"

WoC recommends that, in the longer term, it should be explored whether to include the following persons, listed in order of descending priority, in the scope of "protected persons":

- *persons of the in-law relationship (such as parents-in-law and children-in-law)*
- *persons living in the same household, otherwise than merely by reason of one of them being the other's employee, tenant, lodger or boarder*

1.3

Extending the power of arrest to cover violence in a form other than actual bodily harm through attachment of power of arrest to molestation order



WoC recommends that the key words “has caused actual bodily harm to” should be replaced by “has used or threatened violence against”. This will make available the power of arrest in situations where violence is even only threatened as well as where there is psychological harm to the victim.

1.4

Taking forward the proposed anti-stalking legislation

WoC recommends that the Government take forward the proposed anti-stalking legislation to cover the non-physical aspects of domestic violence.

1.5

The courts to refer batterers to Batterer Intervention Programmes (BIPs)

WoC recommends that the courts increase referrals to BIPs.

1.6

Enhancing the promotion of BIPs

WoC recommends that the Social Welfare Department enhance promotion of BIPs to targeted audiences and conduct evaluation of its effectiveness with a view to developing a long-term, sustainable programme.

Developments since 2006

The DVO provides civil remedies in the form of injunctive orders to protect primarily individuals in certain specified relationships and their children against molestation by the other person. The Government, after a comprehensive review of the DVO, had introduced the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill 2007 into the Legislative Council (LegCo) in June 2007. Improvements have been made in the following areas –

- (a) the scope of “protected persons” has been expanded considerably from married couples and heterosexual cohabitants, to also former spouse/cohabitants; immediate and extended family members, including parents,

grandparents, children, grandchildren, siblings, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces or cousins, or the spouse of such relatives, or such relatives of the spouse, irrespective of whether they are residing with the abusers;

- (b) minors under the age of 18 are now allowed to apply for an injunction in their own right and with the assistance of their “next friends” against molestation by their parents, siblings, and specified immediate and extended family members, whether or not they are residing together. Also, the court may vary or suspend a pre-existing custody or access order relating to a minor when it grants an exclusion order;
- (c) the court may attach an authorization of arrest to an injunction order if it is satisfied that the abuser has caused actual bodily harm to the applicant or the minor concerned, or it reasonably believes that the abuser will likely cause actual bodily harm to the applicant or the minor concerned;
- (d) the maximum duration of an injunction order and authorization of arrest has been extended from 6 months to 24 months; and
- (e) the court, in granting a non-molestation order under the DVO, may require the abuser to attend an anti-violence programme approved by the Director of Social Welfare (DSW). The anti-violence programme aims to change the attitude and behaviour of the abuser that lead to the granting of the injunction order.

The Government has taken on board our recommendations and the new amendment legislation has already come into operation since 1 August 2008. The Government has also undertaken to introduce further amendments to the DVO to extend its coverage to include same-sex cohabitants. There is however not much progress in respect of the proposed anti-stalking legislation which is still being under review by the Government.

In regard to WoC’s recommendations on encouraging the courts to increase referrals to BIPs and enhancing its promotion, SWD had launched a BIP pilot project together with the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society from January 2006 to March 2008 to promote the development of BIP in Hong Kong and identify effective treatment modalities for



batterers with different backgrounds. An advisory group comprising local and overseas academia, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and social work practitioners was also formed to advise on and oversee the development of the pilot project. Under the pilot project, a total of 33 groups (including three groups designated for female batterers), with 267 batterers had been conducted. To encourage more referrals of batterers to join BIP, SWD had arranged a briefing session for a total of 32 Judges and judicial officers in December 2006 to facilitate the court's consideration in referring batterers under probation orders to attend BIP as appropriate. Briefings were also conducted for potential service referral agencies at both central and district levels.

With the assistance of the advisory group, SWD has conducted an evaluation study upon completion of the BIP pilot project in March 2008. The findings have affirmed the value of BIPs in terms of its contribution to changes in the batterers' attitudes and awareness and the experience drawn from the BIP pilot project would be useful reference with SWD and NGOs to facilitate further development of BIPs for their clients. SWD has conducted briefings for social workers and other practitioners to share the findings. User manuals have also been developed for professional use to share the experience gained from the BIP pilot project.

Furthermore, in connection with the enactment of the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Ordinance 2008, SWD has developed a new anti-violence programme (AVP) which seeks to help abusers change their abusive attitude and behaviour. The AVP is different from BIPs in that it is a psycho-educational programme for abusers involving in adult against adult and adult against child abusive behaviour, aiming to reduce the risk of reoccurrence of violence and abuse, whereas BIPs mainly target at tackling spouse battering behaviour. The core components of the AVP include rapport building and ownership; controlling and monitoring of violence; understanding of antecedents of violence; self-understanding; skills training and building; and relapse prevention.

WoC's Comments

We welcome the legislative amendments to the DVO, which have substantially expanded the scope of protected persons covered under the Ordinance and greatly enhanced the protection to children and victims of domestic violence. We also welcome Government's undertaking to further amend the DVO to expand its coverage to include same-sex cohabitants. In this regard, we are also impressed by the persistent efforts of the various women advocacy groups, including the Alliance for the Reform of Domestic Violence Ordinance, that have provided constructive advice to the Government in taking the legislative reform forward.

Nevertheless, there are still areas that have to be followed up. We urge the Government to expedite action and take forward the proposed anti-stalking legislation to cover the non-physical aspects of domestic violence as early as possible. The Government should also keep in view the developments in other overseas jurisdictions in establishing specialised domestic violence courts and consider the feasibility of adapting the experience to Hong Kong with a view to facilitating the court process for handling domestic violence cases and providing better support to the victims.

We are pleased to note the significant progress made in developing and implementing BIPs in the past few years and we fully support the Government and the welfare sector in continuing their efforts in that direction. We encourage SWD to more pro-actively promote the various programmes to batterers to help them break the cycle of violence.



5.2 Services

WoC's Recommendations in 2006 Report

WoC has recommended that emphasis should be placed on identifying and providing properly-developed services for batterers to deal effectively and decisively with domestic violence in Hong Kong, including the following –

2.1

Combating transgenerational transmission through BIPs

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 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.

2.2

BIPs be given due attention

WoC recommends that effective BIPs be instituted in Hong Kong, with reference to overseas experience.

2.3

After-care and support for victims

WoC recommends that the Social Welfare Department monitor situations of victims leaving women's shelter in order to provide support and timely intervention.

Developments since 2006

The developments in respect of the BIPs and AVP have been detailed in the above section.

We note that the Government has devoted additional resources to strengthen the preventive, supportive and specialised services for victims of domestic violence over the past few years. For instance, additional funding has been provided to enhance the direct support to victims of domestic violence and families in need, including strengthening social work manpower and clinical psychological services, enhancing the hotline service of SWD, increasing the capacity and support services of refuge centres for women, setting up a new crisis intervention and support centre (the CEASE Centre) primarily for victims of sexual violence, launching a family support programme to reach out to vulnerable families for early intervention, sustaining the effort of the publicity campaign and public education, and enhancing the training of relevant frontline professionals etc. SWD has also strengthened clinical psychological support for victims of domestic violence, particularly children witnessing domestic violence, which would help mitigate the long-term adverse impact on the victim as well as the children in the concerned family.

The refuge centres for women have always provided temporary accommodation service for women who are having serious personal or family problems or in danger of domestic violence. Caseworkers of the centres would discuss with the victims to work out a discharge plan taking into account their own wish and safety consideration, e.g. applying for compassionate re-housing, moving to a rented unit, staying with their natal family, and relatives or friends. The refuge centres would also provide after-care services through various means, including telephone contact, home visit, and peer support groups. The refuge centre concerned would also prepare brief discharge reports to the follow-up service units to ensure the needs of the victims concerned are adequately taken care of.

In his 2008-09 Policy Address released in October 2008, the Chief Executive announced that the Government would further provide additional resources to strengthen the manpower of the Family and Child Protective Services Units and the Clinical Psychology Unit, to further develop the batterer intervention programme for abusers, and to strengthen support for the refuge centres for women and various crisis



centres. In addition to the Government's efforts, we understand that many NGOs, such as the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, the Harmony House and the Christian Family Service Centre, are also providing different treatment programmes for abusers.

Total annual recurrent provision of \$1.78 billion has been provided to SWD in 2009-10 for the support and services for victims of domestic violence and families in need.

WoC's Comments

We recognise the Government's initiatives to further strengthen the direct support for victims of domestic violence and families in need. We call on the Government to continuously monitor the service demand, and provide sufficient resources to meet such demand.

5.3 Publicity

WoC's Recommendations in 2006 Report

Publicity is needed to promote awareness of domestic violence, change community attitudes, provide information regarding legal avenues and services available, and encourage early identification of abuse, and we believe that more efforts should be devoted to this area.

3

Changing attitudes and disseminating information

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.

Developments since 2006

To help increase public's awareness of the domestic violence problem, WoC has produced and launched two Announcements of Public Interests (APIs) on "Zero tolerance against violence, zero violence against women" and "Nurturing Families" in June 2006. WoC's Capacity Building Mileage Programme has also launched a course on "Prevention of Domestic Violence" in March 2008 to give an overview of domestic violence situation in Hong Kong, the available legal framework and services, the characteristics and handling of different types of domestic violence, and the way to cultivate healthy and harmonious relationships within the family.



WoC API on "Zero tolerance against violence, zero violence against women"



On the government side, SWD has since 2002 launched a publicity campaign on “Strengthening Families and Combating Violence”. It consists of a series of territory-wide and district-based programmes, including talks, seminars, workshops, exhibitions etc that enhance public awareness of the serious impact of domestic violence, encourage families in need to seek timely and early assistance, and promote the concept of neighbourhood watch. SWD has also produced a series of APIs on TV and radio in the past three years, including the theme of “Stop all family violence” and “Give a helping hand to your neighbour facing family violence”. In addition, to help victims of domestic violence understand their rights, protection provided by law and support services available in the community, SWD has also developed and distributed widely an information kit since June 2007. Following the commencement of the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Ordinance 2008 in August 2008, publicity efforts have also been strengthened to increase public awareness of the much-expanded protection of the new legislation and the wide application of “molestation” under the DVO.

In addition to the Government’s efforts, many women’s groups and NGOs have also taken their own initiatives to complement these publicity efforts. Some of them have published information booklets on various topics related to prevention of domestic violence. For instance, the Kwan Fook Women’s Concern Group has published an “Escape Manual” to advise victims of the ways to deal with and escape from the threat of domestic violence. The Group has also planned to produce a lettergramme to facilitate victims of domestic violence in reporting their cases to the Police. NGOs that operate refuge centres for women are also key parties to promote awareness of domestic violence in the community and provide information and assistance to victims of domestic violence. Some NGOs and women’s groups, such as the Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centres and the Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre and the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals CEASE Crisis Centre, have also set up hotlines to assist victims of domestic violence and individuals who are facing family crisis.

WoC’s Comments

WoC welcomes the publicity efforts of Government and NGOs and encourages all sectors to join hands to create more synergy. WoC also suggests that the Family Council should consider stepping up the promotion of harmonious family and core values in the community, and encourage schools to incorporate into the curriculum the core value of gender equality and cultivate the spirit of love and mutual respect among the younger generation.



5.4 Professional knowledge-sharing, documentation and research

WoC’s Recommendations in 2006 Report

WoC recommends that all stakeholders should develop methodologies to compile and continually update good practices for handling domestic violence cases; proactively share these practices on a frequent basis among professionals and stakeholders, and continually learn with and from each other, including international experience.

4.1

Sharing professional knowledge and good practices

WoC recommends that a platform for sharing professional knowledge and good practices be established.

4.2

Strengthening methods of investigation by the Police

An important part of strengthening the ability to investigate and prosecute abusers is compilation of sufficient evidence for the court. WoC recommends that the Police strengthen the existing investigation process through using a re-designed aide-memoir card / a checklist.

4.3

Collecting evidence for the court

WoC recommends that stakeholders produce a booklet on the importance of domestic violence evidence gathering, to educate professionals, stakeholders, concerned individuals and particularly victims.

4.4

Research and database sharing

WoC recommends that a system be established to facilitate and share research and database information about domestic violence.

Developments since 2006

SWD has established various multi-disciplinary committees, viz. the Working Group on Combating Violence at the central level, the District Liaison Groups on Family Violence at the district level, and Multi-disciplinary Case Conferences at the case level, to facilitate the coordination and collaboration between different Government departments, professionals and NGOs involved in tackling domestic violence problem, and to serve as a platform for sharing of professional knowledge and good practices among different professionals and stakeholders.

Officers from the Labour and Welfare Bureau, SWD and the Police also attend from time to time forum and arrange briefing sessions for various sectors (including the Legislative Council, Government advisory bodies, relevant professionals, NGOs and women's groups etc) to brief parties concerned on their policy, strategies and measures in tackling and preventing domestic violence, and make use of such platforms to collect and exchange views. They also actively participate in various publicity campaigns, seminars and activities organised by themselves or NGOs / community groups etc in combating and preventing domestic violence.

SWD regularly arranges training programmes for social workers and related professionals, including teachers, childcare professionals, medical and allied health professionals, and the Police, to enhance the professional skills in handling domestic violence. SWD also publishes and updates from time to time relevant procedural guidelines for professionals in the relevant field to strengthen multi-disciplinary collaboration in handling domestic violence cases. These guidelines are uploaded onto the SWD's website for easy reference by relevant professionals.

On the Police's front, it has taken into account WoC's advice and has since November 2006 rolled out a series of improvement measures to strengthen its response and

capabilities in handling and investigating domestic violence cases, details as follows –

- (a) To enhance frontline supervision and proper handling of cases at the scene, an officer at the rank of Sergeant or above would be deployed to take charge of the initial investigation. The Police has also designed and introduced risk assessment tools including an Emergency Referral Questionnaire and an Action Checklist to assist police officers in identifying risk factors, better understanding the family situation and making a more informed decision on whether any emergency referral is required (such as removal of victims to a refuge centre or approaching the SWD's outreaching teams for immediate crisis intervention);
- (b) To facilitate the Police to seek urgent professional advice and immediate social work support in handling urgent and high-risk cases, SWD has set up a 24-hour Direct Referral Line for the Police since October 2006. Where necessary, social workers may perform outreaching duties with the Police to handle crisis situation;
- (c) To assist in early identification of high-risk cases, the Police has established a Central Domestic Violence Database (CDVD) in March 2005. For more intensive monitoring and management of high-risk cases, an alert mechanism has been installed in the CDVD to automatically generate alarm to the attention of supervisory officers on repetitive domestic violence cases occurring within 12 months or less;
- (d) To effectively investigate serious domestic violence case, designated Domestic Violence Investigation Units comprising specially trained officers with strong investigative background have been set up in all Police Districts;
- (e) To overcome the complications arising from different investigation units handling different cases involving the same family, the Police has adopted a "One Family One Team" approach to enhance the ability of investigation team in identifying risk factors for early intervention; and
- (f) To prepare for implementation of the above improvement measures, all



frontline officers have been trained between July and October 2006. The Police has also enhanced its training programmes to raise the capability of police officers in handling and investigating DV cases, with particular focus on risk assessment, questioning techniques, conflict management, sensitivity and awareness of family dynamics, victim psychology, and service interface with welfare units etc.

In addition, the Police has reiterated its commitment to handling and investigating all reports of domestic violence professionally and conducting thorough investigations according to the circumstances of each case. Where there is evidence of an offence, the Police will take prompt and decisive actions to effect arrest. The prosecuting authorities have also accorded priorities at all stages of proceedings, and implemented various measures to facilitate fast-tracking of cases involving vulnerable witness. To strengthen support and safety assurance to victims throughout the case enquiry and legal proceedings, the Police has set up a protocol of Victim Management in May 2008 for victims of serious domestic violence cases.

As regards research and data sharing, SWD has shared findings of its research and study reports with stakeholders, respective committees and relevant LegCo subcommittees through briefing sessions and meetings, e.g. the earlier Consultancy Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering, and the more recent pilot project on BIP. SWD also releases quarterly statistics on newly reported spouse battering cases, child abuse cases, elder abuse cases and sexual violence cases. These statistics would also be uploaded onto SWD's website for public information. The Police also announces crime figures regularly through press conference and press release, including statistics on domestic violence reports. It is also noted that the tertiary institutes and NGOs, such as the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) and the Association of the Advancement of Feminism, have also conducted research studies and organised seminars / workshops to facilitate exchanges among the professionals and stakeholders concerned.

WoC's Comments

WoC fully recognises the efforts and the commitment of the Police in combating domestic violence and bringing the perpetrators into justice, in particular its special efforts to strengthen the training of Police officers to enhance their skills and sensitivity

in handling domestic violence cases and making a cultural change within the Police Force.

We believe that the Family Council, SWD, academic institutions, and agencies such as HKCSS and Hong Kong Social Workers Association, are well positioned to play an active role in providing a platform for professional knowledge and good practices sharing. We encourage all stakeholders to continue the active exchange and sharing of professional knowledge, documentation and research amongst themselves for mutual enhancement.



5.5 Hospitals, health and medical sectors

WoC's Recommendations in 2006 Report

WoC recommends that best practices in handling victims of domestic violence should be included and emphasised in the curriculum for health care professional training. Regular in-service trainings for all relevant medical professionals should also be conducted.

5.1

Health care professional training

WoC recommends emphasising on domestic violence in the curriculum for health care professional training.

5.2

Continuous in-service training

WoC recommends that the Hospital Authority, the Department of Health and the Fire Services Department conduct regular in-service training on domestic violence for all relevant medical personnel who deal with patients, both in primary care and emergency contexts (e.g. staff doctors and ambulance personnel).

5.3

Content of training

WoC recommends that Hospital Authority, the Department of Health, and relevant health care professionals put in place good practices for attending to victims of domestic violence such as:

- *early recognition of victims of domestic violence, and collecting forensic evidence*
- *giving advice and empathetic care to all victims of domestic violence*
- *referring all victims to expert service providers*

Developments since 2006

The Hospital Authority (HA) has provided on-going training programmes to their frontline officers. Management of family and sexual violence cases has also been structured in the training programmes for specialist paediatricians, family physicians, and doctors and nurses working in Accidents and Emergency Department. Ongoing in-service training is also provided to medical social workers by HA and SWD. The Institute of Advanced Nursing Studies also offers e-learning programme on domestic violence to enhance the competence of all HA nurses in handling domestic violence. The e-learning programme is treated as a compulsory part of the curriculum of the Post Registration Certificate Course in Emergency Nursing.

Regarding the content of training, recognition and attention to the psychosocial needs of the victims, and referral mechanisms are important components of the training for doctors and nurses. Seminars have also been organised by HA for family physicians to update their forensic knowledge in assessing injuries and deal with victims of domestic and sexual violence. Key topics include forensic assessment of child abuse, child sexual abuse, domestic violence and sexual assaults.

Furthermore, SWD has developed multidisciplinary guidelines on handling of spouse battering, sexual violence and child abuse cases, and HA has put these guidelines on its intranet for easy access by its staff.

WoC's Comments

WoC acknowledges these efforts and calls upon the relevant authorities to evaluate the effectiveness of such training courses, and continue to strengthen the training content for relevant medical professionals who may serve victims of domestic violence.



5.6 Gender mainstreaming and gender-related training

WoC's Recommendations in 2006 Report

WoC has also recommended that the Government should apply the WoC Gender Mainstreaming Checklist⁴ (the Checklist) to all aspects of its work on domestic violence and promote gender related training to their officers.

6

WoC Gender Mainstreaming Checklist

WoC recommends that the Government apply the WoC Gender Mainstreaming Checklist to all aspects of its work on domestic violence and promote gender-related training to their officers.

Developments since 2006

On the advice of WoC, the Government has applied the Checklist in its review of the Domestic Violence Ordinance (DVO), and the overall policy in tackling domestic violence and services for victims of domestic violence. As a result, the Government has amended the DVO to further enhance the protection for victims of domestic violence and strengthened services for the victims, taking into account the specific needs and concerns of both genders. Improvements have been made, among others, to enhance the shelter service for victims of domestic violence such that boys over the age of 12 can be admitted to the shelter homes together with their mothers where necessary. SWD and the Police have also strengthened training for frontline social workers, police officers and other relevant professionals responsible for handling domestic violence cases to enhance their gender awareness and sensitivity.

In addition, gender-related training has also been provided to civil servants of various grades and ranks to raise their awareness of gender issues, and to facilitate their taking into consideration gender perspectives in their work. It is noted that over 3,600 civil servants, including officers from SWD, Department of Health, Auxiliary Medical Services, Department of Justice, and staff of various bureaux and departments, have attended such training courses by December 2008. And as mentioned in previous sections, SWD and the Police have also strengthened training of frontline officers to raise their awareness and sensitivity on domestic violence.

WoC's Comments

WoC urges the Government to enhance the adoption of the Checklist when devising new measures / services or reviewing the relevant policies, and continue with gender-related training for all civil servants.

⁴ Gender mainstreaming refers to the integration of gender needs and perspectives in the making and implementation of legislation, policies and programmes. It makes women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all legislation, policies and programmes, so as to help ensure that women and men have equitable access to, and benefit from, society's resources and opportunities. The Checklist is an analytical tool developed by WoC to assist Government in applying gender mainstreaming in a systematic way.



5.7 Early identification and intervention

WoC's Recommendations in 2006 Report

Prevention is better than cure. WoC therefore considers it important to identify domestic violence cases and provide assistance to those in need as early as possible.

7

Early identification of abuse

WoC recommends that all stakeholders and the community have a responsibility in early identification of abuse

Developments since 2006

To facilitate intervention at an earlier stage, it is crucial to identify families affected by domestic violence as early as possible. The Government has taken various preventive measures to identify the vulnerable families and provide assistance as early as possible before their problems escalate into more serious incidents.

SWD has since early 2007 launched a Family Support Programme (FSP) to increase contacts with needy families which are reluctant to seek help. Under the FSP, through telephone contacts, home visits and other outreaching programmes, families at risk, including those at risk of domestic violence, psychiatric problems and social isolation, are connected to various support services available and are motivated to receive services to prevent further deterioration of their problems. Volunteers, including those who have overcome family / personal problems or crises, are recruited and trained to contact these families and to provide them with support and assistance. From April 2007 to December 2008, some 21,900 vulnerable individuals / families have been engaged and connected to the various service units, and over 2,900 volunteers have been recruited and trained under the FSP.

The Government has also launched a Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) in phases since July 2005. Built on the existing services provided in Maternal and Child Health Centres, public hospitals, the Integrated Family Service Centres and pre-primary institutions, CCDS seeks to identify at-risk pregnant women, mothers with probable Postnatal Depression, children and families with psychosocial needs, and pre-primary

children with physical, developmental and behavioural problems at an early stage. Children and families in need would be referred to receive appropriate intervention services, such as child care arrangement, psychiatric, emotional and social service support. The CCDS is now available in 9 districts⁵.

NGOs and community groups have also launched a number of initiatives to reach out to and identify "hidden families" and encourage them to seek help. More details will be given in the next section.

WoC's Comments

WoC welcomes the proactive measures taken by the Government to identify families at risk and intervene at an early stage before further deterioration of their problems, and is pleased to note the effectiveness of FSP and CCDS. Early identification of abuse is very important in preventing escalation of violence. It requires close collaboration of all parties, including NGOs and community groups, and individuals. WoC calls upon all stakeholders to continue their efforts on these fronts.

⁵ Sham Shui Po, Tin Shui Wai, Tuen Mun, Tseung Kwan O, Tung Chung, Yuen Long, Kwun Tong, Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing.



5.8 Community networking

WoC's Recommendations in 2006 Report

Building community support requires the joint efforts by all sectors in society. To that end, WoC has made the following recommendations:

8.1

Building community support

WoC recommends making better use of community resources, e.g. training and developing volunteers to support professional social workers and help victims integrate more fully into the community. These initiatives include self-help, mutual support, and peer counselling.

WoC recommends developing a community support network to better support victims and their children.

8.2

District networking

WoC recommends that the Home Affairs Department:

- *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.*

Developments since 2006

On district networking, the Home Affairs Department has been building up district support networks and fostering harmonious communities for better prevention of domestic violence through closer coordination between district offices and the district councils, district groups and relevant government departments. The issue of preventing and tackling domestic violence is also frequently discussed at the District Fight Crime Committees, and related publicity activities are frequently organised. The issue of combating domestic violence has also been a priority subject area for the biennial Fight Crime Committee Conference.

The Government has also set up the \$300 million Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) to build capacity for self-reliance, re-cultivate the precious relationship and trust among neighbours for mutual support, and encourage cross-sectoral partnerships to create new social and economic participation opportunities through supporting various social capital development projects. Over the past six years, the CIIF has provided funding of over \$180 million in support of 189 projects, involving over 4,000 collaborators in all 18 districts of Hong Kong. Many of these social capital development projects aimed to strengthen individual and family functioning, relieve family stress and build up mutual care and support networks amongst neighbours. A number of NGOs, women's groups and voluntary / community groups were involved in these projects.

To complement the Government's efforts, many NGOs, community groups and women's organisations have also launched programmes and activities, as well as other educational and supportive initiatives, at both the community and the neighbourhood levels to strengthen community support network and to enhance public awareness of domestic violence. For instance, some have organised activities such as debate competitions, drama performances and carnivals to promote family harmony. From time to time, some NGOs have also worked together to organise events of a larger scale, such as the "Hong Kong Harmonious Family Drive" organised in 2007 by the Hong Kong Federation of Women, and co-organised by the Hong Kong Island Women's Association, the Kowloon Women's Organisations Federation, and the Hong Kong Women Development Association, in which 10 Most Outstanding Families were selected to share their experiences of maintaining healthy family relationships.

At the neighbourhood level, door-to-door visits are often conducted by NGOs to help



6. Conclusion

identify the “hidden families”. In order to reach out to more residents, some NGOs have organised activities to encourage interaction among residents and introduce their services to them. For example, the Hong Kong Young Women’s Christian Association has organised “dessert party” and “soup party” at night for residents in Tin Shui Wai to help establish community network. It has also provided training for women volunteers to conduct door-to-door visits.

Similarly, the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society has initiated a “Network of Peace - Community Education and Network Development” Project to mobilise women volunteers to promote peace in families and neighbourhood. Launched in four districts⁶ in April 2008, the project recruits and trains local women to become “ambassadors”, who would be engaged in outreach programmes, such as teaching skills of handicrafts or knowledge of women’s health at markets or shopping malls, and giving street drama performances to disseminate the message of preventing domestic violence.

Besides programmes to promote family harmony and community networking, some district organisations and women’s groups also provide hotline services and free legal advice for women in need. If cases of domestic violence were identified, the victims would be referred to relevant organisations for further assistance. Examples of organisations providing such services include the Hong Kong Federation of Women, the Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centre, and the Tuen Mun District Women’s Association.

WoC’s Comments

WoC believes that community networking is fundamental in preventing domestic violence and supporting vulnerable families. Building community support network requires the joint efforts by all sectors in society, in particular the involvement of NGOs and district community groups. WoC appreciates the initiatives taken by the Government and the NGOs on these fronts.

WoC is of the view that the CIIF approach to collaborate among the Government, business sectors and community groups is effective in mobilising volunteers, developing social capital and building a safety net for families in the community.

WoC believes that violence against women is a violation of basic human rights. We are pleased to note the concerted efforts of the Government and various stakeholders in taking forward our recommendations to combat domestic violence over the past three years.

We recognise and appreciate the Government’s firm commitment to and action in combating domestic violence and strengthening support to the victims. We are also encouraged by the enthusiasm of our partners, including NGOs, community groups and women’s organisations, in launching different programmes and activities to strengthen community and neighbourhood support network and enhance public awareness of domestic violence.

We should however not be complacent about these developments. Domestic violence is a complicated social issue that requires continued attention and multi-disciplinary collaboration to tackle.

Apart from increasing the number of social workers and providing more resources, it is crucial to vigorously promote public awareness of the severity of domestic violence as a social problem, and encourage victims to come forward and seek assistance. It is also important to promote neighbourhood watch so as to identify families at risk and facilitate early and timely intervention by professionals.

Everyone is entitled to a violence-free domestic environment. All women should be empowered to recognise such rights. Power imbalance between men and women is one of the major underlying causes of domestic violence. WoC will continue its effort on women empowerment and promoting a culture of gender equality and mutual respect in society.

The prevalence of domestic violence can also be affected by the macro social and economic environment. WoC will continue to advise, monitor and evaluate the Government’s initiatives to enhance women’s safety, and work closely with all relevant stakeholders and community partners in strengthening the **coordinated community intervention approach** to eliminate domestic violence.

⁶ Tuen Mun, Tin Shui Wai, Tseung Kwan O and Hong Kong East



7. The Next Step

In the past few years, the Government and NGO /community partners have responded positively to our call and launched a wide range of measures to combat and prevent domestic violence and a series of enhanced services to assist victims of domestic violence. WoC encourages all parties to continue such efforts.

As reviewed in section 5 above, we are pleased to note that many of our recommendations made in the 2006 Report have been implemented. That notwithstanding, we believe continuous efforts are required and we recommend further actions be taken in the following aspects –

(a) To continue strengthening the legal protection for victims of domestic violence

- We urge the Government to expedite action in taking forward the proposed anti-stalking legislation as early as possible.
- We suggest the Government to keep in view the development of specialised domestic violence courts in other overseas jurisdictions and consider the feasibility of adopting a suitable model in Hong Kong.
- We suggest the Government to step up publicity efforts to increase public awareness of the much-expanded protection of the amended DVO, and to help victims of domestic violence understand their rights, protection provided by law and support services available in the community.

(b) To promote community networking and neighbourhood watch

- In addition to Government's efforts, we encourage the Government and relevant stakeholders to join hands and mobilise the community's efforts and resources in combating domestic violence.
- We encourage NGOs and community groups to complement the Government's efforts to promote mutual help / peer support and assist victims to re-integrate into the community.
- We note that NGOs and community groups have in recent years developed a number of good models of community networking and collaboration to combat domestic violence. We encourage them to further strengthen their efforts and share good practices with other stakeholders.

- Identifying families at risk is crucial for the success of early prevention and intervention. We call on the Government and relevant stakeholders to work on all fronts in promoting neighbourhood watch so as to facilitate early and timely intervention and support. Friends and relatives could also play an important role in encouraging victims of domestic violence to come forward and seek professional assistance.
- We encourage NGOs and community groups to reach out to those vulnerable "hidden" families, in particular those with new arrivals and ethnic minorities, to inform them of the availability of different types of services and community resources, and encourage them to seek help when necessary.

(c) To strengthen public education

- Domestic violence is a form of violence built on power imbalance between the two genders. It is important to change the mindset of both genders in order to stop such abusive relationships. WoC will continue our efforts to promote gender equality in the community, in particular to the younger generation.
- Gender equality should be promoted through the school curriculum. We urge the Education Bureau to incorporate gender equality and remove gender stereotypes in teaching and learning materials, and strengthen gender-related training for all teaching professionals.
- We also recommend that the Family Council should consider strengthening the promotion of harmonious family and core values in the community, and cultivating the spirit of love and mutual respect in families. The Council should also consider measures to enhance pre-marital and pre-natal education for the promotion of gender equality and harmony in families.



8.1 Appendix I: *Women's Commission Working Group on Empowerment (2008)*

Co-convenors

(in alphabetical order)

Ms Joanna LAU

Dr YEUNG Ka-ching

Members

(in alphabetical order)

Ms Jacqueline CHENG

Ms KO Po-ling

Mr Christopher LAW

Prof Maria TAM

Prof Grace TANG

8.2 Appendix II: *Departments and organisations participated in sharing sessions / meetings with Women's Commission*

(in alphabetical order)

Alliance for the Reform of Domestic Violence Ordinance

Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women

Association for the Advancement of Feminism

Caritas - Hong Kong

Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre

Christian Family Service Centre

Harmony Link - Domestic Violence Prevention Centre

Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Hong Kong Family Welfare Society

Hong Kong Federation of Women

Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres

Hong Kong Single Parents Association

Hong Kong Women Christian Council

Hong Kong Women's Coalition on Equal Opportunities

Hong Kong Police Force

Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association

Hospital Authority

Housing Department

Kwan Fook Women's Concern Group

Kowloon Women's Organisations Federation

Labour and Welfare Bureau (former Health, Welfare and Food Bureau)

Legal Aid Department

Lions Club of Harbour View Charity Foundation

Po Leung Kuk Sunrise Court

Social Welfare Department

The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong – Tseung Kwan O Women's Club

Tin Shui Wai (North) Integrated Family Service Centre of International Social Service
Hong Kong Branch

Tsing Yi Lady's Forum

Tuen Mun District Women's Association

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals

CEASE Crisis Centre, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals

Yau Tsim Mong Women Association

