

## AGENDA 5

### Family Functioning, Disintegration and Domestic Violence

#### Major Trends

1. According to the figures from the report of Census and Statistics Department in 2006, family structure and relationships among family members had experienced significant changes. The number of divorced and separated people had risen from 97,000 to 224,000. The number of singleton and people living alone were on the rise, resulting in increase of single-parent families and problems of economic hardship, family care and emotional support and so on. Nevertheless, couple’s socio-cultural difference and age difference in some cross-border families and the forced separation of family members due to the fault of migration policy in others have significantly affected familial harmony and solidarity. In recent years, the number of cases of domestic violence has increased tremendously. The number of cases of spousal abuse in 2008 was 6,843, which is 6 times the number in 1998. Those of elder and child abuse were also on the rise. These indicate that the protective function and the elder/child care function of the family have been attenuated. Stress of work and everyday life resulting from economic restructuring as well as the challenge to traditional values posed by the change in gender role have also impacted family role assignment and the capacity of the family in handling family conflicts and crises.
2. Associated social problems
  - Ageing
  - Youth problem
  - Poverty
  - Disability, health and mental health
  - Unemployment
  - Inter-generational care
  - Discrimination & social exclusionAll the above social problems could be related to families-at-risk.
3. Trend of DV, homicide and suicide
4. The stages of family cycle are changing. How the family relationships be affected by early retirement of parents, delay of first-born, remarriage, separation of family members in families with cross-border marriage etc.?

Not all families are experiencing the same while facing the social problems or challenges. Interpretation of the impact on family function should be careful and specific. Discussion should be directed to the impact of social problems on family functions in specific family groups, e.g. cross-border families, dual working parents families, single parent families, families with members having chronic illness or disabilities.

## Concerns

1. Disintegration of families due to, ironically, the integration between Hong Kong and the Mainland. Despite the economic advantages generated after the 1997 and the more than ever close collaboration between the 2 economies ( HK and Mainland) in the past decade, there are negative implications for families arising from such economic integration. Extra-marital affairs, cross border marriages, vast differences between spouses, have played an important part causing family disintegration and in some cases, the onset of IPV.  
This is an "indigenous" problem faced by families in HK after 1997.
2. If economy has to be regarded as the factor for family disintegration, then economic down turn rather than collaboration of HK & mainland economy is the culprit. Cross-border marriage is not a cause of family disintegration. It is the interpretation of Basic Law by the National People’s Congress Standing Committee in 1999 which totally disregarded the right to family reunion that made families suffers from disintegration. Also, the enactment of the discriminating Population Policy 2003 which continuously create difficulties for family reunion was made possible, or at least haven’t been placed under scrutiny of the public just by riding on, or even exacerbating the under current of social exclusion.
3. Changes in family functions: what are the risk factors and protective factors?
4. Risk factors and protective factors of family violence: A framework of discussion (Appendix 2, which can be downloaded from [www.swsd2010.org/ch/local\\_agenda.html](http://www.swsd2010.org/ch/local_agenda.html) )
5. Multiplicity of family violence or family violence polyvictimization:  
Families-at-risk are likely to have various types of family violence and/or self-inflicted violence. A number of issues have to be discussed and specialized services (e.g. proactive screening, home visitation) should be considered to support these families and prevent violence. Examples like:
  - Co-occurrence of child abuse & spouse battering
  - Nexus between suicide and IPV
  - In-law conflict and IPV
  - Child polyvictimization

## Challenges Ahead

Diversity of family functions & family subtypes

- do not impose “mainstream” type of family
- accept various types of families as healthy and normal families, e.g. divorce families, cross-border families, same-sex couples etc.
- HK needs a family policy which can address special needs of different family subgroups.
- The function of Family Council is not yet fulfilled. The Council should focus on the making of a family policy.
- Population policy should be reviewed immediately
- Family policy is urgently needed.

## Possible Actions

In view of the difficulties and challenges facing the family, we can explore the following 5 topics:-

1. Family Membership and Stability
2. Economic Support
3. Enabling Relationship and Interdependence
4. Childrearing and Socialization
5. Care-giving and Mediating Role for Community Resources

Concrete actions can be explored from two aspects:

- 1. Strengthening and supporting families**
  - 1.1 Changing harmful traditional practices
  - 1.2 Family support services
  - 1.3 Training in parenting
- 2. Violence prevention**
  - 2.1 Anti-violence policy
  - 2.2 Universal screening for people at risk
  - 2.3 Home visitation
  - 2.4 School-based programs
  - 2.5 To call for Community Development tactics in violence prevention
  - 2.6 Support single parent families and parents with long working hour.
  - 2.7 Others

The details of the possible actions are elaborated in Appendix 1. (Appendix 1 can be downloaded from [www.swsd2010.org/ch/local\\_agenda.html](http://www.swsd2010.org/ch/local_agenda.html))

How do you think about the themes/topics above? Are there any other themes left out that you would like to raise? What are other issues or problems related to this Agenda that you think should be explored and discussed?

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Please go to [www.swsd2010.org/en/local\\_agenda.html](http://www.swsd2010.org/en/local_agenda.html) to express your views.