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# Facilitating the development of the under threes: Observations from Hong Kong

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# Outline

1. Introduction to the Hong Kong context
2. Health and parenting programmes
3. Education and care for the under-threes
4. Equity for children
5. Legal protection and Children's Rights
6. Policy implications

# 1. Introduction to the Hong Kong context Society

- Hong Kong has the widest income gap among the world's wealthiest economies in 2009, with a relatively high Gini coefficient of 43.4.
- In 2008, 53.4% are double-income families.
- In 2010, the monthly median household income of the richest 10% of the people is 27 times that of the poorest 10%.
- Poverty is defined as a family with a monthly income less than half the median among families of comparable size.
- In 2010, one in every 10 households with at least one working member was living in poverty.

# 1. Introduction to the Hong Kong context

## Society

- In 2011, one out of every six poor families cannot meet their basic food needs. Although Hong Kong has one of the highest human development rankings in the world, 20% of the under-fives live below the poverty line.

Number of children in poverty and the percentage

|           | 2008           |       | 2009           |        | First Half of 2010 |       |
|-----------|----------------|-------|----------------|--------|--------------------|-------|
|           | No of children | %     | No of children | %      | No of children     | %     |
| Age 0 – 5 | 53,800         | 20.0% | 55,400         | 20.50% | 56,400             | 19.7% |

(Census and Statistics Department, 2011; Oxfam, 2011)

# 1. Introduction to the Hong Kong context

## Birth rate

- In 2010, the number of children between zero to four was 256,700, which made up 3.6 % of the total population of 7.1 million.
- Infant mortality rate was 1.6 deaths / 1,000 live births and Maternal Mortality rate was 1.1 deaths / 100,000 live births.
- Birth rate was 0.984 live births per woman of child-bearing age.

# 1. Introduction to the Hong Kong context

## Birth rate

- In 2010, there were 88,600 newborns and 40,800 (46%) were by Mainland parents who came to Hong Kong to give birth for their children to obtain Hong Kong citizenship.

| Year | Number of births ('000) | Number of births by local parents ('000) |
|------|-------------------------|--|
| 2010 | 88.6                    | 47.8                                     |
| 2009 | 82.1                    | 44.8                                     |
| 2008 | 78.8                    | 45.1                                     |
| 2007 | 70.9                    | 42.8                                     |
| 2006 | 65.6                    | 39.8                                     |
| 2005 | 57.1                    | 46                                       |
| 2004 | 49.8                    | 26                                       |

(Census and Statistics Department, 2011)

# 1. Introduction to the Hong Kong context

## Parents

- Cross-border marriages: from 2008 to 2010, an average of 41% of all registered marriages in Hong Kong are cross-boundary marriages with either the bridegroom or the bride originated from Mainland China.
- Survey in 2011 shows Mainland parents who came to Hong Kong to give birth have higher SES than Mainland mothers who are married to local fathers.
- Most of the parents will bring their children back to Hong Kong by the age of five for better education.

|                  | Mainland Mother                   |           |            |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
|                  | When the newborn will stay in HK? |           |            |
|                  | Age 1 – 2                         | Age 3 - 5 | Age 6 - 11 |
| Hong Kong Father | 24.8%                             | 57.6%     | 9.8%       |
| Mainland Father  | 5.2%                              | 40%       | 32.8%      |

(Census and Statistics Department, 2011; Education Bureau, 2011)

# 1. Introduction to the Hong Kong context

## Children

- Parents can apply to the Government's Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) to obtain free kindergarten education for their children (age 3 to 6) who have Hong Kong citizenship.
- Cross-border kindergarten children: increased by 53% in the last three years.
- Competition for kindergarten places is fierce and Hong Kong parents send their under-threes to playgroups and childcare centres to prepare them for kindergarten entrance interviews.

| Number of cross-border kindergarten children |           |           |           |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|  | 2008/2009 | 2009/2010 | 2010/2011 |
| Age 3 – 5                                    | 1,780     | 2,681     | 3,786     |

(Census and Statistics Department, 2011; Education Bureau, 2011)



# 1. Introduction to the Hong Kong context

## Challenges

- 20% of the under-fives live below the poverty line.
- Over 200,000 children are born in Hong Kong by one or both Mainland parents in the past seven years, and are entitled to free education and medical services.
- About 50% of these children will return to Hong Kong to live and study by the age of five, while a growing number of kindergarten age children are living in the Mainland and crossing the border everyday for preschool.
- Competition for kindergarten places becomes more fierce due to the rapidly growing birthrate and free vouchers, and leads to a higher demand of pre-kindergarten programmes for the under-threes.
- Heavy strain on pre-primary education and health services.

## 2. Maternal and Child Health Services

- A population-based, government-run health promotion and disease prevention programme for children aged 0-5 and women below 65 years old run by the Family Health Service of the Department of Health.
- 31 Maternal and Child Health Centers and 3 Woman Health Centers.

(Leung, 2009; Department of Health, 2011)

# 2. Maternal Health Services

## Antenatal Health Care

- A Comprehensive shared-care programme to monitor the pregnancy and delivery process.
- Collaboration with Integrated Family Service Centers and Medical Social Workers of the Hospital Authority for pregnant women at risk through a referral system.

## Postnatal Health Care

- Health assessment, physical examination, identification of postnatal depression and support/counseling.
- Local breastfed rate rose from 20% in the 1980s to 73% in 2007.

## Family Planning Service

- Family planning services at a fee of \$1 per visit since the 1970s for eligible individual.

## Woman Health Service

- Health education programme on topics such as medical conditions, general lifestyle and healthy living.

(Department of Health Statistics, 2007; Leung, 2009)

## **2. Child Health Services**

### **Integrated Child Health and Development Programme (ICHDP)**

- A universal health promotion and disease prevention programme implemented in MCHCs since 2000.
- Promotes the holistic development of children aged 0 – 5.

# 2. Child Health Services

## ICHDP

### Three Components:

#### 1) Parenting

- Universal Parenting Programme
- Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P)

#### 2) Immunisation

- The Childhood Immunisation Programme (Immunisation against ten infectious diseases)
- The Government Influenza Vaccination Programme

#### 3) Health and Developmental Surveillance

- Newborn consultation
- Growth monitoring and nutrition assessment
- Developmental surveillance
- Screening (Hearing and Vision)

# 2. Child Health Services

## Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS)

- A government policy initiative in 2005 that provides inter-departmental services from the Department of Health, Hospital Authority, Education Bureau and Social Welfare Department.
- Four target groups:
  - 1) At-risk Pregnant Women
  - 2) Families with Psychosocial Needs
  - 3) Mothers with Postnatal Depression
  - 4) Pre-school Children with physical, developmental and behavioral needs
- Examples of Collaboration:
  - Department of Health and Social Welfare: assessment tool to detect children and families with psychosocial needs.
  - MCHCs and pre-primary institutions: Referral and feedback system to identify and refer children with developmental or learning difficulties.

## 2. Parenting Programs

- Introduced in 2002
- Covers two aspects: 1) Physical Health; 2) Psychosocial Health

| Physical Health | Psychosocial Health            |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Breastfeeding   | Preparation for parenthood     |
| Nutrition       | Building positive relationship |
| Home safety     | Promoting child development    |
| Oral Health     | Managing child behavior        |
| Newborn care    |                                |

## 2. Parenting Programs

### Universal Programme

- Anticipatory guidance on child care and parenting issues pertaining to specific ages and stages of development.

(Ip, 2008)

### Intensive Programme – Positive Parenting Program (Triple P)

- A comprehensive multi-level, parenting and family support program from Australia.
- Adopted for parents with children aged 2 – 5 with signs of behavioral problems.
- Triple P decreased child behavior problems, improved parenting sense of competence and augmented marital relationship.

(Ip, 2008; Sanders, 1999; Leung et al, 2003)



## 2. Health and Parenting Programmes Challenges

### Influx of Mainland mothers giving birth in Hong Kong

- Strain on public obstetric and neonatal services and limited resources for local mothers.
  - Overcrowding in hospitals by mainland mothers.
  - Overcrowding in Maternal and child health centers by mainland mothers.
- In response, a Government cap set to 35,000 births: 3400 in public hospitals and 31,000 in private hospitals starting in 2012.

# 3. Early Childhood Programmes

## Pre-primary institutions

|              | <b>Social Welfare Department<br/>(Child Care Services Ordinance)</b> | <b>Education Bureau Joint Office for Pre-Primary Services (Education Ordinance)</b> | <b>Education Bureau (Education Ordinance)</b> |
|--------------|--|---|---|
| <b>0 – 3</b> | Aided Childcare Centres (12)<br>Private Childcare Centres (15)       |   |   |
| <b>0 – 6</b> | Special Childcare Centres (35)                                       | Kindergarten-cum-Mixed Childcare Centres (22)                                       |   |
| <b>2 – 6</b> |  | Kindergarten-cum-Childcare Centres (453)  |   |
| <b>3 – 6</b> |  |   | Kindergartens (951)                           |

(Social Welfare Department, 2011; Education Bureau, 2011)

# 3. Early Childhood Programmes

## Types of Child Care Centers

- Day Creche (Birth -2 years old)
- Day Nursery (2-6 years old)
- Mixed Child Care Centers
- Occasional Child Care Centers
- Extended Hour Service
- Residential Child Care Centers
- Mutual Help Child Care Centers

# 3. Early Childhood Programmes

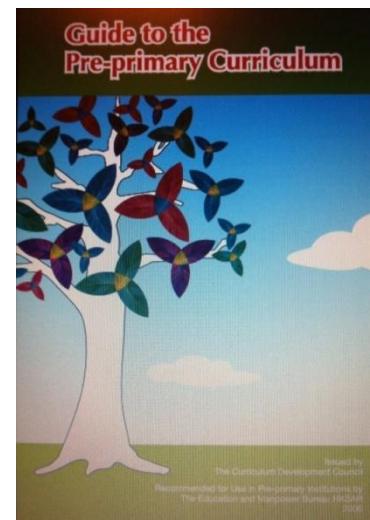
***Operation Manual for Pre-Primary Institution (2006)*** by the Social Welfare Department and Education Bureau.

- Sufficient time for physical needs (health, toileting, feeding and rest)
- Developmentally-appropriate activities to learn through play.

***Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum (2006)*** by The Curriculum Development Council for institutions serving children between 2 – 6.

Six learning areas:

- Physical Fitness and Health,
- Language,
- Early Mathematics,
- Science and Technology,
- Self and Society
- Arts



## Suggested Program of Activities for One to Two Year Olds

|                  | Monday to Friday  | Saturday                                      |
|------------------|---|---|
| 8:00 – 8:45 am   | Admission<br>Health Inspection<br>Toileting<br>Free Play (Toys) |   |
| 8:45 – 9:30 am   | Breakfast, Toileting  |   |
| 9:30 – 10:15 am  | Play (Gross Motor Activities)                                   |   |
| 10:15 – 10:45 am | Toileting, Morning Snacks                                       |   |
| 10:45 – 11:30 am | Play (Fine motor activities/Art and Crafts/Music/Toys)          | Play (Interest activities/Special activities) |
| 11:30 – 12:15pm  | Toileting, Lunch  |   |
| 12:15 – 2:30pm   | Toileting, Afternoon Nap  | Free Play (Toys)<br><br>Discharge             |
| 2:30 – 3:15 pm   | Toileting, Play   |   |
| 3:15 – 4:00pm    | Toileting, Afternoon Snacks                                     |   |
| 4:00 – 4:45 pm   | Play (Story-telling, Nursery Rhymes, Interest Activities)       |   |
| 4:45 – 6:00pm    | Free Play (Toys), Discharge                                     |   |

# 3. Early Childhood Programmes

## Financial Assistance

- Means- tested Kindergarten and Child Care Center Fee Remission Scheme under the Student Financial Assistance Agency of the Education Bureau.

## Quality Assurance

- Child Care Centers Advisory Inspectorate is responsible for the registration, control and inspection of Child Care Centers, under the Child Care Services Ordinance and Regulations.
- All child care workers/kindergarten teachers must possess a qualified kindergarten teacher qualification.

# 3. Early Childhood Programmes

## Other Child Care Arrangements

- Child minders
- Domestic helpers
- Extended family members e.g. grandparents
- Privately-run playgroup centers that offer classes such as:
  - Putonghua, Putonghua pinyin, Spanish, English, English phonics
  - Music and movement
  - Arts and crafts
  - Maths concept, Lego play
  - Physical, sensorial training
  - Kindergarten interview preparation class

# 3. Early Childhood Programmes

## Challenges

### Unregulated playgroup programmes

- Safety of such establishments in multi-storey commercial buildings.
- Lack of supervision by governmental departments.
- No classification or definition of playgroups under the Child Care Services Ordinance or Education Ordinance.



## 4. Equity for children from low SES backgrounds

- Access is the availability and provision of programmes and services for all children.
- Equity is assurance that the greatest possible opportunities for quality early childhood programmes are available for all children and families (Britto, Yoshikawa and Boller, 2011).
- A three-year longitudinal study of 199 Hong Kong children was started when they entered kindergarten at age three, to identify the competencies of children from middle and low SES backgrounds.
- Findings revealed that children from middle SES backgrounds achieve better measurement scores in Chinese, English and Mathematics than those from low SES backgrounds by 3% to 13% .

## 4. Equity for children from low SES backgrounds

- Middle SES children are better in the pronunciation of Cantonese (dialect used in Hong Kong) and English (second language) than low SES children by 13% and 8% respectively.
- Middle SES parents are better educated, have more time and resources to nurture their children.
- It is suggested that the Government should provide more resources to teachers to identify and help children who require additional learning assistance, and narrow the achievement gap in the kindergarten stage.
- Access as well as equity to quality programmes that cater to individual needs.

## 4. Equity for children with special needs

- Between 2006 and 2009, a yearly average of 1,600 children from ages zero to six have been diagnosed to have developmental delays.
- An estimated 5 – 9% of them were not identified or recognised by their parents until the age of six.
- Social Welfare Department operates or sponsors different education and training programmes for children with special needs from zero to six:
  - ✓ Early Education and Training Centre (0-6 years);
  - ✓ Special Child Care Centre (day centre / residential) (2 – 6 years);
  - ✓ Integrated Programmes in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centre (2-6 years)
- Only a total of 1,638 places for all children in Hong Kong.

## 4. Equity for ethnic minority children

- Few ethnic minority (EM) children attend childcare centres under the age of three but with the Government's voucher scheme, over 11,000 non-Chinese speaking, EM children enrolled in kindergartens in 2010/11.
- Learning Chinese is the greatest challenge but the Education Bureau only provides Chinese learning support to EM children in primary and secondary schools.
- Race Discrimination Ordinance in 2009 protects the right of every individual to equal education irrespective of race.
- In July 2011, the Equal Opportunities Commission issued a report on "Education for All" and recommends Chinese to be taught as a Second Language (CSL) and cultural programmes to be introduced in kindergartens.
- It also advocates early intervention and support for EM students with special education needs who face double disadvantages.

(Education Bureau, 2011; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2011)

# 4. Equity Challenges

- Achievement gap of 3% to 13% between children of middle and low SES backgrounds.
- Insufficient places to education and training programmes for children with special needs.
- Lack of Chinese language and cultural programmes for ethnic minority children from zero to six.

# 5. Legal Protection and Children's Rights (1)

- The Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance in 1991: *“Every child shall have, without discrimination to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society, and the State”*.
- Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights (HKCCR) was established in 1995 as an independent organisation.
- In 1996 and 2005, the United Nations Committee on Children's Rights (UNCRC) recommended the establishment of an independent mechanism specifically to monitor the implementation of government policy in relation to the rights of the child.
- Hong Kong does not have a Child Commission up to this day.

(Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, 2007)

# 5. Legal Protection and Children's Rights (2)

## Hong Kong child abuse statistics

| New cases            | 2001       | 2002       | 2003       | 2004       | 2005       | 2006       | 2007       | 2008       | 2009       | 2010        |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Physical abuse       | 306        | 292        | 277        | 345        | 413        | 438        | 499        | 483        | 503        | 488         |
| Sexual abuse         | 152        | 179        | 150        | 189        | 234        | 233        | 270        | 277        | 331        | 334         |
| Neglect              | 29         | 17         | 20         | 40         | 41         | 77         | 114        | 78         | 102        | 113         |
| Psycho-logical abuse | 17         | 11         | 4          | 9          | 23         | 12         | 20         | 15         | 15         | 18          |
| Multiple abuse       | 31         | 21         | 30         | 39         | 52         | 46         | 41         | 29         | 42         | 48          |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>535</b> | <b>520</b> | <b>481</b> | <b>622</b> | <b>763</b> | <b>806</b> | <b>944</b> | <b>882</b> | <b>993</b> | <b>1001</b> |

(Social Welfare Department, 2010)

# 5. Legal Protection and Children's Rights (3)

- According to Hong Kong's Child Fatality Review in 2011, a total of 84 children below the age of three died in 2006 and 2007.
- 65 died of natural causes such as neo-natal conditions or medical conditions or others. Others died due to accidents, assaults or other causes.
- The Review Panel highlights that:
  - ❖ Many child deaths could have been avoided if parents could exercise positive parenting and adequate supervision by themselves or seek assistance from reliable child-minders.
  - ❖ Parents' level of awareness of home safety, alertness and motivation can effectively prevent young children's death.
  - ❖ The problems arising from adjustment and adaptation of new arrivals from cross-border marriages can be found in different cases.



## 5. Legal Protection and Children's Rights (4)

- “Domestic and Cohabitation Relationship Violence Ordinance” was amended in 2010.
- In 2010, The Law Reform Commission recommended the Government to establish a scheme for “Sexual Offences Records Checks” for persons undertaking child-related work.
- Many abuse cases and under-threes’ fatalities caused by cross-border family issues and poverty.
- Urge by different organisations to setup a Child Commission.

# 5. Legal Protection and Children's Rights Challenges

- Continuous increase in the number of child abuse cases, especially sexual abuse.
- “Sexual Offences Records Checks” scheme has not yet been established.
- Abuse and fatality cases caused by cross-border family issues and poverty not sufficiently and effectively handled by existing organisation.
- Lack of a Child Commission.

# 6. Policy implications

