



Press Release - For Immediate Release

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20 years Review: Government's policies are unable to meet the needs Significant rise in childhood and adolescent mental health problems; youth suicides remained serious 70% of parents experienced emotional disturbances when caring for their children Development of a comprehensive child health policy with a timeline and roadmap is crucial

Children are the future of Hong Kong. Those born in 1997, the same year as the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR) was established, are turning 20 this year. While we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of Hong Kong's Return, have we thought of the condition of our children? Are they growing up healthily and happily? In 2016, 33 students committed suicide. The life of the citizens will be affected by the society's policy so as children's life. The poor mental health status of our children and youth nowadays is probably related to the lack of a comprehensive child health policy in Hong Kong. The children of this generation have already suffered tremendously from growing up in a community without a child health policy, Children's Commission and Children's Commissioners in the past 20 years. It is time for the next government to rectify promptly to save our children.

20 years after HK's return, significant rise in childhood & adolescent mental health problems

The Hong Kong Paediatric Society and the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation have reviewed the child health data in the past 20 years and found that children and adolescents in Hong Kong are facing serious mental health problems. According to the statistics of the Hospital Authority, the case number of psychiatric services for children and adolescents in 2015/2016 increased by more than 50% (18,900 to 28,200) in five years. Student suicides seemed to be closely related to mental health problems. Based on the study conducted by the Hong Kong Paediatric Society and the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation last year, 27% of secondary school students had thought of self-harm or suicide over the past 6 months.

"The upsurge of student suicide last year had aroused public attention again. When reviewing the youth suicide statistics in the past 20 years, we found a fluctuating trend. The government would introduce short term remedial measures once the figure rose but there was no long term policy to tackle the underlying problems of youth suicide." said Dr. WONG Hiu Lei, Lilian, Past President of the Hong Kong Paediatric Society, Secretary General of the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation.

The poor mental health status of school children can be related to the stressful situation created in the education system. The Hong Kong Paediatric Society and the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation conducted a survey on 1,327 parents of kindergarten and primary students in May - early Jun this year. The survey revealed that 65% of parents ranked the current education policy as worse than before the handover, while majority (88%) of parents felt that the government support provide to them was inadequate.

Academic achievement and parental expectation make our children collapsed

Unsatisfactory policies and high expectation from the society on both children and parents formed a vicious cycle driving parents and children as sufferers. Survey found that the stress level of kindergarten students was 3.6 (maximum 10), however, the stress level of primary students rose to 5.8, with 60% increment. The sources of stress of kindergarten and primary school students were different: parents of kindergarten-age children ranked parental expectation (48%) as the major source of stress; and children's own expectation (41%) came second. In primary school, academic achievement (76%) and parental expectation (51%) were the two major stressors.

94% parents experience stress-related symptoms when caring for their children

In addition to children, parents are also stress out. According to the survey, 94% of parents experienced stress-related symptoms such as loss of temper (78%), emotional outburst (67%), headache/dizziness (67%), and insomnia (59%) when caring for their children over the past six months. The major sources of stress for parents with kindergarten children were children's emotional and behavioral problems (71%) and children's health (54%). The major stressor of parents with primary school children was the same as their kids - academic performance (79%); the second main stressor was children's emotional and behavioral problems (70%).

"Mr Tung Chee-hwa initiated education reform at his term with emphasis on academic performance. The policies changed overnight and became worse and worse each time. Both children and their parents have stressed out. The two successors did not make timely rectification, nor allocated sufficient resources or launch any comprehensive program to tackle childhood and adolescent mental health problems. In fact, only short-term remedies were implemented and the root causes were never handled. A typical example was the "School Drug Testing Program" initiated by Sir Donald Tsang Yam-kuen which resulted in more hidden drug users. Mr Leung Chun-ying only focused on the mainland exchange programmes for young people and ignored the emerging mental health problems for children and youth", Dr. Wong criticized.

All the three Chief Executives did not recognize the importance of a Child Health Policy

Over the years, the HKSAR Government has only provided scattered and disorganized child health services with no coordination among departments, resulting in overlapping and even competition in services and resources. There are significant service gaps. Despite children are our future, child health has never been the major concern of the three Chief Executives.

Policies related to children (including education policy) accounted for only 12% of the policy addresses over the years. "Elderly was the major concern of government policies in the past 20 years. Children were only considered under the policies for the underprivileged group and education. There was no designated section for children in the policy addresses, not to mention a comprehensive child health policy and the Children's Commission", said Dr. CHAN Chok Wan, Chairman of the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation and the Past President of the International Pediatric Association.

Three major appeals from the Hong Kong Paediatric Society and Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation

1. Appointment of the Children's Commissioner

For the policy to be implemented smoothly and effectively, there must be an independent mechanism above all bureaus and directly report to the Chief Executive of HKSAR Government. The Children's Commissioner, is responsible to lead the Children's Commission and supervise, monitor, evaluate the implementation of the Child Health Policy and deal with all the child-related matters.

2. Establishment of the Children's Commission

The Children's Commission should be part of the government hierarchy but operate independently of all bureaus, like the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) and report directly to the Chief Executive. The Commission will be empowered with resources to participate in policy formulation, action planning, evaluation and supervision of the implementation of the Child Health Policy.

3. Formulation of a Child Health Policy for Hong Kong with a clear Timetable and Roadmap

The Child Health Policy should include medical, social, education, legal, economic aspects and youth voices. The Policy should be children-centred, family-focused with the best interests of children as the main target and list out a clear timetable and roadmap for implementation.

The role of a "Commissioner" as illustrated by the success of the OPRS Pilot Scheme; HKPF and HKPS urge the next Chief Executive to formulate a Child Health Policy for Hong Kong

The "Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS), 2015" led by Mrs. Carrie Lam, the last Chief Secretary for Administration, was a good example to illustrate the function of a "Commissioner" as to co-ordinate the relevant bureaus and departments to review existing policies, lay down guidelines, consolidate action strategies, coordinate resources, monitor progress and evaluate service effectiveness. The success of this project has clearly demonstrated the important role of a "Children's Commissioner".

We sincerely hope that Mrs Lam, being the next Chief Executive of the HKSAR government, would extend her experience as the "Commissioner" for OPRS Pilot Scheme to formulate a "Child Health Policy", set up a "Children's Commission" and appoint a "Children's Commissioner". "Our children in Hong Kong should be nurtured with love, appropriate policy and strategic actions now in order for us to witness "healthy children and healthy community" at the 50th Anniversary in 2047." Dr. Chan stated.

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The Hong Kong Paediatric Society

Formed in 1962, the objectives of the society are to advance the knowledge of child health care, to maintain high standard of child health care, to promote child health through public education and to foster comradeship. www.medicine.org.hk/hkps/

The Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation

The Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation is a charitable organization wholly owned by the Hong Kong Paediatric Society. It was established in 1994 by child health professionals from intersectoral domains and community celebrities for promotion of child health and child advocacy through public education. www.hkpr.org.hk