

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service  
Working Group on Sexual and Domestic Violence

Handling Domestic Violence Case in Ethnic Minority Groups

Current Situation in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, ethnic minorities<sup>1</sup> (EM) coming from every part of the world contribute to about 5% of its population. Some of them are capable to use Chinese and/or English, while others are not. For those who cannot handle these two languages might experience language barriers for accessing to essential service.

Social service sector holds the mission of promoting social justice, social inclusion and is keen on eliminating social isolation, because of language and cultural difference.

Although people of the ethnic minority communities have been living in Hong Kong for decades, they are not always on the priority agenda of the policy makers. Researches show that EM's difficulties in communicating in the local languages and their cultural difference are the main impediments of accessing essential information and social services.

From gender perspective, women of EM groups are submissive to the traditional roles and have close adherence to the conservative norms of their cultures. The social needs of EM women seem to be invisible among the invisibles.

Domestic Violence in EM

There is no research done yet in the domestic violence situation in EM group in Hong Kong, but it is generally believed that EM woman may encounter great ambivalence and frustration when facing family violence. Due to language barrier and lack of information on social service, which further hinder them from seeking help. Most of the married EM women are full-time housewives due to cultural background, they are financially dependent on their husband, thus they would tend to choose to tolerate the abuse act, if happened.

Recommendation

Responding to the concern, the Council organized a meeting among service providers for preventing domestic violence and supporting EM in October, 2007. In order to empower and support EM women when facing domestic violence, concerned social service providers discussed and recommended a number of actions:

**Translation Service**

Facilitating EM with language barriers to use mainstream social service and public services, effective provision of interpretation support to them are needed. It was suggested that on-phone interpretation service and escort service should be provided in order to facilitate EM to overcome language barriers and to enhance opportunities of accessing to relevant services.

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<sup>1</sup> "Ethnic Minorities" refer to persons of non-Chinese ethnicity. The ethnic groups include "Asian (other than Chinese)", "White", "Mixed" and "Others".

### **Employment of EM Staff**

Hiring EM staff could help to develop cross-cultural environment which might enhance staff's knowledge in various culture and to facilitate EM service users in accessing the service. Agency could consider developing and implementing a strategy to recruit, retain and promote qualified, diverse and culturally competent administrative, clinical and support staff.

### **Establishment of Independent Counseling Team**

Promoting service collaboration between the mainstream and the specialized EM service could help to raise concern over service provision, but some opined that an independent counseling team for EM groups would be more suitable, especially in domestic violence cases. Due to the complexity of the case nature, translation might hinder the crisis case intervention and rapport building. It is recommended that serious cases should be handled by independent counseling team for EM groups.

### **Pamphlet for EM Service User**

Language seems to be the major barrier for EM to access service, it is advised that NGO should prepare service brief in various languages, so that EM could at least know about their service content and to seek help from relevant units, if needed. In refuge setting, translating signage and commonly used materials in different languages could help the EM women better integrate in refuge service.

Considering the need to raise the cultural sensitivity on professional level and promote exchange of professional experience, a leaflet named "Tips for Providing Services for Ethnic Minority Communities in Hong Kong" was produced by HKCSS and released to mainstream social service practitioners. The leaflet was comprised of basic information of major ethnic groups in Hong Kong, practice wisdom or experiences from colleagues working specifically for these groups of users and information list of current service providers.

### **Cultural Sensitivity Training**

Acquiring knowledge about other groups is the foundation of promoting cultural literacy. Apart from understanding other cultures, it is essential to understand how different cultural groups view one's own culture.

Understanding EM culture includes knowledge of their cultural norms, values, worldviews and the practicality of everyday life. Their social needs and perceptions over service provision are equally important.

### **Developing and Maintaining Cross-Cultural Skills**

It is suggested that service providers should always be aware, and respectful of the uniqueness of their clients' characteristics. In working with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is of paramount importance to understand the differences. It helps to respond to their needs more appropriately, sensitively and effectively. With the increased population diversity, cultural barriers should not limit our service accessibility. Developing cultural competence is a process that requires a long-term professional commitment.