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**Trends in family attitudes and values in Hong Kong**

**Final Report Submitted**

**To**

**Central Policy Unit**

**Hong Kong SAR Government**

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**August 22, 2008**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The family system in Hong Kong has undergone rapid transformation in the past three decades. Structurally, families have become smaller, averaging around 3 persons per household. Socially, with the emergence of different family types such as single-parent family, dual earner family, childless family, single-person family, and step-family, families have become more heterogeneous. This increasing heterogeneity of the family system in Hong Kong resembles the trend observed in other developed societies. It can be attributed to the increasing divorce and remarriage, rise in the age at first marriage, the increasing female participation in labor force, and the decreasing fertility and mortality rates. Economically, the family system in Hong Kong no longer serves as an economic production unit. For all these reasons, the protective role of a family unit has diminished.
2. There is little doubt that the family system in Hong Kong is facing immense challenges, both structurally and ideologically. With the rapid changes in family system, the family unit encounters complex and multifarious problems. Families are frequently faced with multiple difficulties involving multiple members. These difficulties may include but are not limited to: financial hardship, emotional discord, physical or mental ill-health, parental stress, intra-familial violence, and maladjustment in advance age. As a result of all these problems, the public sector found it necessary to step in and take up an increasing role to provide basic economic security and health care, protection for frail members, as well as other needed social services. Other than the above mentioned changes, which can be easily identified from various census and statistical reports, one should also recognize that these changes take place within the context of changing ideas and values that people hold regarding the family and family relations.
3. Past studies on the family system in Hong Kong have largely focused on family structure, family behavior and family relationship. Little has been done to understand the underlying attitudes and values. This report summarizes findings from a study on **“Trends in family attitudes and values in Hong Kong”** commissioned by the Central Policy Unit of the SAR government. We found that family values and attitudes in Hong Kong have become more heterogeneous over the last three decades. On one hand, the general public remained traditional, in that it is best to get married and have children, not to divorce, not to get involved in any extra-marital affairs or homosexual relationships, and to support the older generations. On the other hand, people are becoming more receptive, both for themselves as for others, towards divorce, remarriage, cohabitation, pre-marital sex, childlessness, and a less traditional gender role.

4. Base on these findings, we have the following recommendations: The traditional family values and attitudes should be strengthened while adequate support should be provided for people who do not wish to follow the majority's attitudes and values. Specifically, our services should be broad enough to assist those who wish to live according to the traditional family attitudes and values as well as those who wish otherwise.
5. First, we suggest the Government set up a limited-term task force to facilitate dialogues among public, private and non-profit sectors, as well as the general public on ways to make Hong Kong a family friendly city. The Government may use this task force to cultivate a culture that move Hong Kong from a money-oriented city to a family-friendly one – a city for raising family, a city for children to grow and to achieve, and a city for older persons to retire.
6. Second, we suggest the Government commission a study to review the various family-friendly public policies already in place in other developed countries and to consider the feasibility of adopting those suitable for in Hong Kong.
7. Third, we suggest the Government set up an internal review mechanism to systematically re-examine the family value assumptions in our public policies and the impact of these on family structure and dynamic.
8. Forth, we suggest the Government facilitate the development of a consensus on “maximum working hours” in our society through the Labor Advisory Board or other consultative mechanisms.
9. Fifth, we suggest the Government commission a “Happy Learning Initiative” aiming at reducing the amount of time spent on homework assignments for primary school students.
10. Sixth, we suggest the Government encourage private and public sectors to adopt family-friendly work practices. The Government should consider taking the lead in implementing these practices, such as granting employees paid paternity leave, allowing employees to work from home, encouraging job-sharing, and improving child-care services and facilities at work setting.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (IN CHINESE)

- 一、過去三十年，香港的家庭體制經歷了急速的變化。結構上，家庭變小了；社會方面，家庭變得更多元化；經濟方面，家庭不再是一個經濟生產的單元；功能方面，家庭的保護功能減少了。公營機構亦加入為家庭成員提供基本經濟保障、醫療、保護及其他照料有需要成員的社會服務。以上種種改變微妙地挑戰着香港的傳統家庭體制。
- 二、香港過去的家庭研究多集中於家庭結構、家庭行為及家庭關係上，很少研究涉及這些層面下的家庭觀念及價值。這個報告書總結了香港特別行政區政府中央政策組委託完成的「家庭觀念及價值趨勢」研究的結果。
- 三、我們發現在過去的三十年中，香港的家庭價值及觀念變得很多元化。一方面普羅大眾仍然較為傳統 – 他們仍覺得結婚較好，要有小孩子，不要離婚，不要有婚外情或同性戀，並應照顧年老一代。但另一方面，他們對於自己或其他人在離婚、再婚、同居、婚前性行為及沒有生孩子，和非傳統男女角色等方面卻較容易接受。
- 四、建議方面，我們提議支持傳統的家庭價值及觀念，原因是：我們的社會應付不了失去這些價值及觀念的沉重代價，但我們也應盡力幫助那些與大多數人觀念及價值不同的人。簡單來說，我們的服務要有足夠的廣範性，去幫助那些持守傳統觀念及價值的人和那些偏離的人。
- 五、首先，我們建議政府設立一個有時間性的工作小組，提供一個公共平台，讓公營、私營及非牟利機構及普羅大眾去討論如何使香港成為一個家庭友善的地方。我們建議政府用以上提議的工作小組去推動一個改變文化的運動，令香港成為一個不單是賺錢的地方，也是一個建立家庭的地方：一個讓小孩子成長的地方；一個讓老年人退休的地方。
- 六、第二，我們建議政府設立一個內部審查機制，有系統地審查我們的公共政策背後對家庭價值的假設及這些政策對家庭結構和功能的影响。
- 七、第三，我們建議政府委託一個研究，去調查其他發展國家不同的家庭友善的公共政策，並檢視把這些政策用於香港的可行性。
- 八、第四，我們建議政府在小學推行「快樂學習」計劃，目標在於減少小學生做功課的時間。
- 九、第五，我們建議政府透過勞工顧問委員會或其他顧問組織去推動社會發展「最高工

時」的共識。

十、第六，我們建議政府鼓勵私營或公營機構去推行一些家庭友善的政策及做法。政府應帶頭實行一些家庭友善的政策及做法，如給與男性僱員有薪產假，讓僱員在家裏工作，提供分擔工作及改善照顧兒童的服務及設施。

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Background:

- 1.1. Family system in Hong Kong has undergone rapid transformation in the past three decades. Structurally, families have become smaller, reducing from 4.2 people per household in 1976 to 3.0 person per household (HK Census and Statistical Department, 2007a). Socially, families have become more heterogeneous. Apart from the traditional extended family, the common family types to date include nuclear family, single-parent family, dual-earner family, childless family, single-person family, and step-parent family. Economically, families have ceased as an economic production unit as most people are working outside their families. Functionally, the care-providing role of family has diminished as most able adults are working outside their families, leaving the care-providing duties to domestic helpers or even strangers.
- 1.2. The public sector has also stepped in taking up an increasing role to provide basic economic security, health care, protection, and needed social services to its members. In fact, new social conflicts have been created when cash benefits from various welfare programs, largely distributed according to family size, exceed individual earnings from the labor market, for people in the lower socio-economic classes. All the above changes have subtly challenged the traditional family system in Hong Kong.
- 1.3. Past studies on family system in Hong Kong have largely focused on family structure, family behavior and family relationship. Little has been done to understand the underlying attitudes and values. **Family attitudes refer to attitudes towards a wide range of family issues, including the roles of men and women, cohabitation, marriage, divorce, parenthood, childlessness, premarital and extramarital sex, as well as childbearing. Family values refer to values towards autonomy and freedom of individual in family, equality of genders in family, tolerance and equality of diverse family structures and behaviors, and commitment to family, marriage, and children.** While long-term trends of changing family attitudes and values in other developed countries have been well documented, there is no reliable data available in Hong Kong. The lack of understanding of the continuing trends in family attitudes and values has hampered our ability to formulate family policy that addresses the changing family needs in Hong Kong.



- 1.4.** This report summarizes findings from a study on “**Trends in family attitudes and values in Hong Kong,**” which is commissioned by the Central Policy Unit of the HKSAR Government.

**The objectives of this study are:**

1. To understand the long term trends of family attitudes and values in Hong Kong between mid-1970s and mid-2000s.
2. To understand family attitudes and values across different age cohorts in Hong Kong, with particular emphasis on the young adults at marriage and child-bearing age.
3. To understand family attitudes and values across different socio-economic classes and geographic districts.
4. To understand how family attitudes and values relate to people’s expectation toward the roles of family and government in providing needed social services.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2. Method of Study:

- 2.1. To achieve the objectives, our research team conducted an extensive literature review to understand family values and attitudes in Hong Kong. We also developed a questionnaire and contracted the Public Opinion Program of the University of Hong Kong to conduct a randomized telephone survey. The fieldwork was conducted between February 29 and March 11, 2008. A total of 1,014 Hong Kong residents of 18 years of age or older were successfully interviewed. The overall response rate of this survey was 61.1%, and the standard sampling error for percentages based on this sample was less than 1.6 percentage points. In other words, the sampling error for all percentages is less than plus/minus 3.1 percentage points at 95% confidence level. To ensure the representativeness of our findings, the data collected have been adjusted according to provisional figures obtained from the Census and Statistics Department regarding the gender-age distribution of the Hong Kong population in mid-2007. All analyses in this report are based on the weighted data.
- 2.2. We also conducted 5 focus groups in March and April of 2008. Three groups consisted of helping professionals, including social workers, psychologists, teachers, and ministers. They were conducted in Sham Shui Po, Shau Kei Wan, and Tin Shui Wai. Two groups, consisted of the general public, were conducted in Sham Shui Po and Tin Shui Wai. Table 1 below summarizes the details of the focus groups.

**Table 1. Details of the focus group interviews.**

|                     | Group 1      | Group 2        | Group 3      | Group 4        | Group 5      |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| District            | Sham Shui Po | Sham Shui Po   | Tin Shui Wai | Tin Shui Wai   | Shau Kei Wan |
| Date                | 17/4/2008    | 7/4/2008       | 12/4/2008    | 12/4/2008      | 24/4/2008    |
| Nature              | Professional | General Public | Professional | General Public | Professional |
| Age group           | 18 or older  | 18 to 35       | 18 or older  | 36 or older    | 18 or older  |
| No. of participants | 9            | 7              | 8            | 7              | 7            |

- 2.3. Two researchers served as facilitators in the focus group discussion, which lasted approximately 2 hours. All sessions were audio taped, transcribed, and then coded by our research team to identify the main themes. The themes identified supplemented findings from our survey study to advance our understanding of family values and attitudes in Hong Kong.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MAJOR FINDINGS

#### 3. Presentation of Findings:

##### 3.1. Attitudes toward family.

**3.1.1. Nuclear family is the norm.** Many early studies have documented that nuclear family is the most prevalent type of family in Hong Kong. For example, an early study shows that 62.8 percent of all Hong Kong households were nuclear families (Barnett, 1961) and the percentage of nuclear families increased to 67 percent by 2006 (HK Census and Statistic Department, 2007a). In line with this, the average household size has decreased from 3.9 persons in 1981 to 3 persons in 2006 (HK Census and Statistic Department, 2008). Between 1990 and 2006, the proportion of domestic households consisting of one vertically extended nuclear family decreased from 10.7 percent in 1990 (HK Census and Statistic Department, 2001) to 7.4 percent in 2006 (HK Census and Statistic Department, 2007b).

**Table 2. Average household size between 1981 and 2006.**

|                        | 1981 | 1986 | 1991 | 1996 | 2001 | 2006 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Average Household size | 3.9  | 3.7  | 3.4  | 3.3  | 3.1  | 3.0  |

**Source:** HK Census and Statistics Department (2008)

**3.1.2. Most people see nuclear family as the ideal family type in Hong Kong.** While 86 percent of our survey respondents agreed<sup>1</sup> that a childless couple can be an ideal family, 69 percent indicated that a nuclear family (i.e. a couple and their children) is more ideal than a childless family. However, only 44 percent agreed that a three-generation extended family (i.e. a married couple, their children, and their parents) is more ideal than a nuclear family. About 30 percent disagreed<sup>2</sup> that an extended family is more ideal than a nuclear family. About 45 percent of our respondents agreed that a single parent family can also be an ideal family. Findings from our focus groups are consistent with findings from our survey. Most focus group participants described the picture of a nuclear family, with a couple and two children, when asked to describe an ideal family.

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<sup>1</sup> “Agreed” in this report includes both “agree” and “strongly agree” in the data table.

<sup>2</sup> “Disagreed” in this report includes both “disagree” and “strongly disagree” in the data table.

**Table 3. Attitude towards ideal family.**

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|--|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|  | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |             |            |
| A childless couple can be an ideal family.                         | 3<br>(0.3)        | 77<br>(7.6)   | 56<br>(5.6)   | 751<br>(74)   | 120<br>(11.9)  | 5<br>(0.5)  | 1<br>(0.1) |
| A nuclear family is more ideal than a childless couple.            | 6<br>(0.6)        | 138<br>(13.6) | 158<br>(15.6) | 576<br>(56.8) | 127<br>(12.6)  | 8<br>(0.8)  | 1<br>(0.1) |
| A 3-generation extended family is more ideal than a nuclear family | 17<br>(1.6)       | 282<br>(27.9) | 251<br>(24.7) | 390<br>(38.5) | 56<br>(5.5)    | 16<br>(1.6) | 2<br>(0.2) |
| A single parent family can also be an ideal family.                | 31<br>(3)         | 352<br>(34.7) | 163<br>(16)   | 437<br>(43.1) | 13<br>(1.3)    | 16<br>(1.6) | 2<br>(0.2) |

**3.1.3. Age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic district are related to attitude towards ideal family type.** Compared with middle age or older respondents, younger respondents (of 29 years or age or younger) were more likely to agree that childless-couple family is more ideal than nuclear family. Compared with younger respondents, older respondents (of 60 years of age or older) were more likely to agree that extended family is more ideal than nuclear family. Compared with female respondents, male respondents were more likely to agree that extended family is more ideal than nuclear family. Compared with those who had lower income, respondents who had higher income were more likely to agree that nuclear family is more ideal than extended family. Compared with those who received less education, respondents who received more education were more likely to agree that childless family is more ideal than nuclear family and nuclear family is more ideal than extended family. Compared with those living on the Hong Kong Island, respondents who were living in the New Territory East were more likely to agree that childless family is more ideal than nuclear family. This is possibly because most families in New Territory East are dual-earners and experience more difficulties in raising children.

**Table 4. Age difference in attitude towards family.<sup>3</sup>**

|  | <30 yr | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59  | 60 yr or older |
|--|--------|-------|-------|--------|----------------|
| A childless couple can be an ideal family.                         | 3.9    | 3.8   | 3.9   | 4.0    | 3.9            |
| A nuclear family is more ideal than a childless couple.            | 3.4    | 3.6*  | 3.7** | 3.8*** | 3.8***         |
| A 3-generation extended family is more ideal than a nuclear family | 3.0    | 3.1   | 3.0   | 3.1    | 3.5*           |
| A single parent family can also be an ideal family.                | 3.2    | 3.1   | 3.0   | 3.0*   | 2.9**          |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

**3.1.4. Most focus group participants perceived an ideal family as a harmonious nuclear family providing emotional and/or financial support, feeling of togetherness, happiness and fun to its members.** Harmony refers to effective communication, acceptance, and lack of conflict. Focus group participants in Sham Shui Po and Tin Shui Wai shared that lack of money is a major source of family conflict. However, they also suggested that money is a necessary but not sufficient condition for harmonious family relationship. Mutual support refers to both emotional and financial supports. Participants in the 3 professional focus groups typically weighted emotional support as more important than financial support. However, non-professional focus group participants in both Sham Shui Po and Tin Shui Wai considered financial support more important than emotional support. Togetherness refers to spending time together and doing something fun together. Many focus group members complained that people are busy nowadays and it is difficult to get together.

**3.1.5. Some focus group participants provided new definitions of family.** For instance, one participant in Sham Shui Po professional group suggested that a single person living alone can be regarded as a family. She also mentioned that some may regard a person living with a dog (or a cat) as a family. Two participants in Tin Shui Wai professional group suggested that cohabited couple can be regarded as a family. It appears that people in Hong Kong are ready to accept more diverse definitions of family.

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<sup>3</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

### 3.2. Attitudes towards marriage.

**3.2.1. Marriage norms have changed between 1981 and 2006.** The percentage of re-marriage to total marriage increased from 4 percent in 1981 to 34 percent in 2006. The percentage of first marriage to total marriage decreased from 81 percent in 1981 to 66 percent in 2006. The number of divorce decree granted increased by 746 percent, from 2,060 divorce decrees granted in 1981 to 17,424 divorce decrees granted in 2006. The percentage of marriage with one party from mainland China to total marriage increased from 2 percent in 1986 to 43 percent in 2006. The median age at first marriage increased from 27 to 32.1 years of age for male, and from 23.9 to 28.2 years of age for female between the year 1981 and 2006.

**Table 5. Changes in marriage in Hong Kong between 1981 and 2006.**

|      | All marriage | First marriage of both parties | Remarriage of either or both parties | First marriage % | Remarriage % | One party from Mainland China | %   | Divorce Decree |
|------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|-----|----------------|
| 1981 | 50,756       | 41,190                         | 2,196                                | 81%              | 4%           |                               |     | 2,060          |
| 1986 | 43,280       | 34,088                         | 3,333                                | 79%              | 8%           | 782                           | 2%  | 4,257          |
| 1991 | 42,568       | 34,522                         | 4,892                                | 81%              | 11%          | 680                           | 2%  | 6,295          |
| 1996 | 37,045       | 29,397                         | 5,896                                | 79%              | 16%          | 2,484                         | 7%  | 9,473          |
| 2001 | 32,825       | 25,285                         | 7,273                                | 77%              | 22%          | 5,892                         | 18% | 13,425         |
| 2006 | 50,328       | 33,352                         | 16,890                               | 66%              | 34%          | 21,588                        | 43% | 17,424         |

Source: HK Census and Statistic Department (2007c)

**Table 6. Median age at first marriage**

| Median age at first marriage | 1981 | 1986 | 1991 | 1996 | 2001 | 2006 |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Male                         | 27.0 | 28.0 | 29.1 | 30.0 | 30.2 | 31.2 |
| Female                       | 23.9 | 25.3 | 26.2 | 26.9 | 27.5 | 28.2 |

Source: HK Census and Statistic Department (2008)

**3.2.2. In spite of the increase in divorce rate, support for traditional marriage remains strong, particularly among younger and older adults:** Over 70 percent of our survey respondents agreed that marriage is a necessary step in life. Support for marriage is stronger among younger adults (of 29 year of age or younger) and older adults (of 60 years of age or older) than among middle age adults (of 40 to 49 years of age). There is also strong support for child bearing. Over 66 percent of our survey respondents agreed that having children is an important part of marriage. Support for child bearing was stronger among older than younger respondents. Eighty-five percent

of our respondents agreed that having a life-long partner is an important element in marriage. The support was stronger among younger and older respondents than among middle age respondents (of 40 to 59 years of age). Despite the strong support in marriage, 51 percent of our respondents agreed that good marriage is very rare nowadays. Such attitude is stronger among middle age people (of 50 to 59 years of age) than other age groups.

**3.2.3. Education, gender, and geographic district are related to attitude toward marriage and child bearing.** Higher education attainment was associated with lower support for marriage. Respondents who received more education were less likely to agree that marriage is a necessary step in life and that having children is an important part of marriage. However, they were more likely to agree that having a life long partner is an important reason for getting married. Female respondents showed lower support towards marriage and child bearing. They were less likely to agree that (1) marriage is a necessary step in life, (2) having children is an important part of marriage, and (3) having a life long partner is an important reason for marriage. However, they were more likely to agree that good marriage is very rare nowadays. Finally, compared with respondents living on Hong Kong Island, respondents living in Kowloon East were more likely to agree that having children is an important part of marriage. It is suspected that families in Kowloon East may be more traditional in their values and thus regard marriage without children as less ideal.

**3.2.4. There is no consensus on whether married people are happier than unmarried people.** We found that 39 percent of survey respondents agreed that married people are happier than unmarried people, an increase from 26.7% in 1993 (Lee, 1995). Older respondents (of 50 years of age or older) were more likely to agree that married people were happier than younger respondents. Similarly, only 36 percent of respondents agreed that unmarried people face more social pressure than married people. Again, older respondents (of 50 years of age or older) were more likely to agree that unmarried people may face more social pressure than married people. Respondents with higher education attainment and female respondents were less likely to agree that married people are happier than unmarried people and that unmarried people face more social pressure than married people.

**Table 7. Attitude towards marriage**

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|--|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|  | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |             |            |
| Marriage is a necessary step in life.                                      | 13<br>(1.3)       | 132<br>(13)   | 159<br>(15.7) | 592<br>(58.4) | 114<br>(11.2)  | 2<br>(0.2)  | 1<br>(0.1) |
| Child bearing is important in marriage.                                    | 11<br>(1.1)       | 160<br>(15.8) | 168<br>(16.5) | 564<br>(55.6) | 108<br>(10.7)  | 2<br>(0.2)  | 1<br>(0.1) |
| Marriage: Having a life long partner.                                      | 4<br>(0.4)        | 73<br>(7.2)   | 69<br>(6.8)   | 650<br>(64.1) | 212<br>(20.9)  | 5<br>(0.5)  | -          |
| Very few good marriages.   | 17<br>(1.7)       | 248<br>(24.4) | 211<br>(20.8) | 455<br>(44.9) | 65<br>(6.4)    | 18<br>(1.7) | -          |
| Unmarried people face more social pressure.                                | 19<br>(1.9)       | 465<br>(45.9) | 146<br>(14.4) | 338<br>(33.3) | 29<br>(2.8)    | 17<br>(1.7) | -          |
| Married people are happier than unmarried people.                          | 11<br>(1)         | 291<br>(28.7) | 304<br>(30)   | 360<br>(35.5) | 36<br>(3.5)    | 12<br>(1.2) | 1<br>(0.1) |
| 1993: Married people are happier than unmarried people (Lee, 1995)         | (38.9)            |               | (25.9)        | (26.7)        |                |             |            |
| 2008: Married people are happier than unmarried people (The present study) | (29.7)            |               | (30)          | (39)          |                |             |            |

**Table 8. Age difference in attitude towards marriage.<sup>4</sup>**

|   | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60 or older |
|---|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
|   | Mean          |       |       |       |             |
| Marriage is a necessary step in life.       | 3.66          | 3.57  | 3.48* | 3.66  | 3.89*       |
| Child bearing is important in marriage.     | 3.54          | 3.53  | 3.49  | 3.55  | 3.79*       |
| Marriage: Having a life long partner.       | 4.10          | 3.94  | 3.90* | 3.86* | 4.05        |
| Very few good marriages.                    | 3.24          | 3.22  | 3.34  | 3.48* | 3.32        |
| Married people are happier.                 | 2.95          | 2.97  | 3.03  | 3.17* | 3.38*       |
| Unmarried people face more social pressure. | 2.71          | 2.83  | 2.81  | 3.01* | 3.12*       |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

<sup>4</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.



### **3.2.5. Attaining legal identity for spouse and children is the main reason for marriage.**

Most participants in our focus group believed that marriage is a life-long commitment even though they were well aware of the increasing divorce rate. Focus group participants who received more education typically focused more on “commitment” when discussing marriage, while those who received less education typically focused more on need fulfillment. For example, participants in our Tin Shui Wai focus group saw marriage as a way to fulfill financial, emotional, and procreation needs. They did not mention the word “commitment” throughout their discussion. Instead, they shared a lot about power struggle within marital relationship - those who had economic power also had more power in family.

### **3.3. Attitude towards divorce.**

**3.3.1. There is an increasing acceptance for divorce.** In a survey conducted in 1988, 47 percent of the respondents were against divorced while 22 percent accepted it (Lee, 1992). We found in our survey that 49.3 percent of respondent were against divorce despites 38 percent of the respondents agreed that divorce is the best solution when a couple has irresolvable marital problems. We found that middle age and older respondents (of 40 years of age or older) reported higher acceptance towards divorce than younger respondents. When children are involved, over 48 percent of the respondents in the present study agreed that a couple should remain married even though they are not happy together as compared with 28 percent in 1993 (Lee, 1995). The acceptance of divorce with children decreased among older respondents (of 60 years of age or older). Over 53 percent of our survey respondents agreed that divorce affects woman more than man. This attitude was more common among older respondents (of 50 years of age or older). About 51 percent of the respondents agreed that they would divorce their spouse if the latter had an extra-marital relationship. Respondents of 50 to 60 years of age were most likely to agree that they would divorce their spouse because of extra-marital relationship than other age groups. Older respondents were less likely to divorce their spouse for this reason. About 53 percent of respondents agreed that they would seek professional help if they had marital problem.

**Table 9. Attitude towards divorce.**

|   | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|---|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|   | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |             |            |
| Divorce is the best solution for irresolvable marital problems.           | 67<br>(6.6)       | 432<br>(42.6) | 115<br>(11.3) | 342<br>(33.7) | 44<br>(4.3)    | 13<br>(1.3) | 1<br>(0.1) |
| A couple should stay together for their children.                         | 19<br>(1.8)       | 299<br>(29.4) | 192<br>(19)   | 460<br>(45.5) | 28<br>(2.8)    | 14<br>(1.4) | 2<br>(0.2) |
| Divorce affects woman more than man.                                      | 15<br>(1.5)       | 312<br>(30.8) | 129<br>(12.8) | 493<br>(48.6) | 46<br>(4.5)    | 17<br>(1.7) | 2<br>(0.2) |
| Consider divorce if spouse has an extra-marital relationship.             | 39<br>(3.8)       | 124<br>(12.2) | 303<br>(29.9) | 290<br>(28.6) | 225<br>(22.2)  | 31<br>(3.1) | 2<br>(0.2) |
| Will seek professional help for marital problem.                          | 83<br>(8.2)       | 242<br>(23.9) | 138<br>(13.6) | 388<br>(38.3) | 148<br>(14.6)  | 14<br>(1.4) | 1<br>(0.1) |
| 1988: Divorce (Lee, 1992) <sup>1</sup>                                    | (7.4)             | (39.7)        | (30.9)        | (21.3)        | (0.7)          |             |            |
| 1993: Married people with children should not divorce (Lee, 1995)         | (37.2)            |               | (27.9)        | (27.7)        |                | (7.2)       | -          |
| 2008: Married people with children should not divorce (the present study) | (31.1)            |               | (19)          | (48.3)        |                |             |            |

<sup>1</sup> The five response categories were: very much against accepting, against accepting, it depends, accepting, very much accepting.

**3.3.2. Gender and education are related to attitude towards divorce.** Female respondents were more likely to agree that divorce is the best solution for irresolvable marital problem. They were less likely to agree that a couple should stay together for their children even though they are not happy together. They were more likely to agree that divorce affects woman more than man. There is no gender difference on whether the respondents would divorce their spouse if the latter have an extra-marital relationship or whether they would seek professional help in face of marital problem.

**3.3.3.** Respondents who received more education were less likely to accept that divorce is the best solution for irresolvable marital problem. They were less likely to agree that a couple should stay together for their children even though they are not happy together. They were less likely to agree that divorce affect woman more than man.

**Table 10. Age difference in attitude towards divorce.<sup>5</sup>**

|   | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60 or older |
|---|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Divorce is the best solution for irresolvable marital problems. | 2.48          | 2.72  | 2.90* | 3.19* | 3.24*       |
| A couple should stay together for their children.               | 3.06          | 3.01  | 3.12  | 3.16  | 3.45*       |
| Divorce affects woman more than man.                            | 3.09          | 3.21  | 3.27  | 3.31* | 3.41*       |
| Consider divorce if spouse has an extra-marital relationship.   | 3.59          | 3.50  | 3.52  | 3.64* | 3.53*       |
| Will seek professional help for marital problem.                | 3.26          | 3.21  | 3.29  | 3.28  | 3.22        |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

**3.3.4. Divorce is less a stigma in our society.** We found that 64 percent of our survey respondents accepted marrying a divorced person. Middle age respondents (of 40 to 49 years of age) showed higher acceptance towards marrying a divorced person than other age groups. Similarly, while 49 percent of survey respondents accepted marrying a divorced person with children, the acceptance is also higher among middle age respondents (of 40 to 49 years of age) than other age groups. There is no gender difference in acceptance towards divorce. Respondents with higher income were more likely to accept marrying a divorced person with or without children. Education and geographic district have no statistically significant relation with stigma towards divorce in this study.

**Table 11. Stigma towards divorce.**

|   | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|---|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|   | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |             |            |
| Will marry a divorced person.               | 23<br>(2.2)       | 174<br>(17.1) | 148<br>(14.6) | 624<br>(61.5) | 22<br>(2.2)    | 22<br>(2.2) | 1<br>(0.1) |
| Will marry a divorced person with children. | 56<br>(5.6)       | 237<br>(23.4) | 202<br>(19.9) | 486<br>(47.9) | 11<br>(1.1)    | 20<br>(1.9) | 3<br>(0.3) |

<sup>5</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

**Table 12. Age difference in acceptance towards divorce<sup>6</sup>**

|   | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60 or older |
|---|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Will marry a divorced person.               | 3.44          | 3.42  | 3.62* | 3.46  | 3.36        |
| Will marry a divorced person with children. | 3.11          | 3.13  | 3.31* | 3.20  | 3.06        |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

**3.3.5. Many people think both marriage and divorce are choices.** While having these choices is a social progress, our focus group participants suggested that people are not prepared to make the right choices, thus leading to high divorce rate. They also voiced that social changes, such as female financial independence, individualism, availability of welfare programs, and social acceptance toward divorcee, contributes to the increase in divorce rate. Participants in Shau Kei Wan professional focus group shared that instead of staying in a lousy marriage, children are better off to grow up in a single-parent family.

#### **3.4. Attitude towards cohabitation.**

**3.4.1. Cohabitation is widely accepted in our society, particularly among younger people.** Early study reported that 36 percent of respondents accepted cohabitation and 56 percent against it (Wu, 1981). Lee (1992) reported that in 1988, 26 percent accepted cohabitation while 42 percent against it. In this study, we found that 69 percent of our survey respondents accepted cohabitation of two adults who planned to marry. The acceptance lowered to 45 percent if they did not have a plan to marry. Interestingly, 51 percent of the respondents accepted a long term cohabitation relationship without being legally married.

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<sup>6</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

**Table 13. Attitude towards cohabitation.**

|   | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|---|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|   | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |             |            |
| Cohabitation with a plan to marry.                              | 31<br>(3)         | 201<br>(19.8) | 69<br>(6.8)   | 649<br>(64)   | 52<br>(5.1)    | 13<br>(1.3) | -          |
| Cohabitation without a plan to marry.                           | 74<br>(7.3)       | 362<br>(35.7) | 113<br>(11.2) | 430<br>(42.4) | 22<br>(2.1)    | 11<br>(1.1) | 2<br>(0.2) |
| Long term cohabitation instead of marriage.                     | 73<br>(7.2)       | 299<br>(29.5) | 114<br>(11.3) | 493<br>(48.6) | 21<br>(2.1)    | 13<br>(1.3) | -          |
| 1988: Cohabitation <sup>1</sup> (Lee 1992)                      | (6.6)             | (35.5)        | (24.6)        | (26.5)        | (1.9)          | -           | -          |
| 1994 - working youth sample: Cohabitation (Yeung & Kwong, 1994) | (61.3)            |               | -             | (38.7)        |                | -           | -          |

1. The five categories are: very much against accepting, against accepting, it depends, accepting, very much accepting.

**3.4.2. Age and gender are related to attitude towards cohabitation.** Younger respondents were more likely to accept cohabitation than older respondents. These findings are consistent with our focus groups results. Most young adults in our focus groups saw cohabitation as either a probation period before marriage or a natural transitional period from dating to marriage. However, cohabitation does not replace marriage. Most of them thought they would eventually marry. Female respondents were less likely to accept cohabitation than their male counterparts.

**Table 14. Age difference in attitude towards cohabitation.<sup>7</sup>**

|   | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59  | 60 or older |
|---|---------------|-------|-------|--------|-------------|
| Cohabitation with a plan to marry.          | 3.7           | 3.7   | 3.4** | 3.3*** | 3.3***      |
| Cohabitation without a plan to marry.       | 3.2           | 3.3   | 3.0   | 2.7*** | 2.5***      |
| Long term cohabitation instead of marriage. | 3.1           | 3.2   | 3.2   | 2.9    | 2.8*        |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

<sup>7</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

**3.4.3. Higher income and higher education attainment are associated with higher acceptance towards cohabitation.** Respondents who received more education were more likely to accept cohabitation with or without a plan for marriage and long term cohabitation instead of marriage. Respondents who had higher income were more likely to accept cohabitation without a plan to marry and long term cohabitation instead of marriage. Participants in our Tin Shui Wai non-professional focus group were more traditional than participants in other professional or nonprofessional focus groups. None of them accepted cohabitation for themselves and most of them did not accept cohabitation for their children. Cohabitation is more accepted by most participants in our professional groups. Finally, many parents in our focus groups said they would accept cohabitation of their children provided they have a stable relationship and are financially independent.

**3.5. Attitude towards pre-marital sex.**

**3.5.1. Premarital sex is widely accepted.** The Family Planning Association (2001) reported that the percentage of young man (of 18 to 27 years of age) who had pre-marital sex increased from 26.8 percent in 1986 to 39.7 percent in 2001. The percentage of women who had pre-mental sex increased 18.9 percent in 1986 to 31.4 percent in 2001. An earlier study by the HK Council of Social Services in 1981 reported that about 55 percent of female and 60 percent of male respondents accepted pre-marital sex between two adults who were planning to get married (Wu, 1981). The Family Planning Association (2006) reported that 69 percent of male and 71 percent of female who age between 18 and 27 years accept premarital sex.

**Table 15. Percentage of young people (of 18 to 27 years of age) who had premarital sex.**

| % have premarital sex | 1986 | 1991 | 1996 | 2001 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Male                  | 26.8 | 29.3 | 31.1 | 39.7 |
| Female                | 18.9 | 22.8 | 30.9 | 31.4 |

**Source:** Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (2001)

**3.5.2.** In this study, we found that 69 percent of our survey respondents accepted pre-marital sex between two adults with plan to marry. About 50 percent accepted pre-marital sex between two adults with stable relationship even though they had no plan to marry. However, only 14 percent accepted sexual relationship between two adults who did not have a stable relationship.

**Table 16. Attitude towards premarital sex.**

|   | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|---|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|   | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |             |            |
| Premarital sex with a plan to marry.                            | 29<br>(2.9)       | 168<br>(16.6) | 103<br>(10.2) | 666<br>(65.7) | 34<br>(3.4)    | 11<br>(1.1) | 2<br>(0.2) |
| Premarital sex with a stable relationship but no plan to marry. | 59<br>(5.8)       | 301<br>(29.7) | 124<br>(12.2) | 495<br>(48.8) | 14<br>(1.4)    | 19<br>(1.9) | 3<br>(0.3) |
| Premarital sex without a stable relationship.                   | 210<br>(20.7)     | 537<br>(52.9) | 108<br>(10.6) | 143<br>(14.1) | 2<br>(0.2)     | 13<br>(1.3) | 2<br>(0.2) |

**3.5.3. Age, gender, and socioeconomic status are related to attitude towards pre-marital sex.** Younger and middle age respondents were more likely to accept premarital sex than older respondents. Female respondents were less likely to accept pre-marital sex than male respondents. Respondents who had higher income were more likely to accept pre-marital sex. Similarly, respondents with higher education attainment were more likely to accept pre-marital sex.

**Table 17. Age difference in attitude towards pre-marital sex.<sup>8</sup>**

| Statement   | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60 or older |
|---|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Premarital sex with a plan to marry.                            | 3.6           | 3.7   | 3.6   | 3.4** | 3.2***      |
| Premarital sex with a stable relationship but no plan to marry. | 3.2           | 3.5   | 3.2   | 3.0*  | 2.5***      |
| Premarital sex without a stable relationship.                   | 2.3           | 2.3   | 2.2   | 2.0** | 2.1*        |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

### 3.6. Attitude towards same-sex sexual relationship.

**3.6.1. Same-sex sexual relationship is not accepted by most people.** We found that only 14 percent of respondents accept sexual relationship between two adults of the same sex. Seventy-six percent of survey respondents did not accept such sexual relationship, among which 46 percent were against it and 30 percent were strongly against it. Respondents who were younger, and who received more education were more likely to accept sexual relationship between two same sex adults.

<sup>8</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

**Table 18. Attitude towards sexual relationship between two same-sex adults.**

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends     | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|--|-------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|  | N (%)             |               |             |               |                |             |            |
| Sexual relationship between two same sex adults. | 300<br>(29.6)     | 465<br>(45.9) | 87<br>(8.6) | 142<br>(14.1) | 3<br>(0.3)     | 14<br>(1.4) | 2<br>(0.2) |

**Table 19. Age difference in attitude towards sex between two same sex adults.<sup>9</sup>**

|  | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59  | 60 or older |
|--|---------------|-------|-------|--------|-------------|
| Sexual relationship between two same sex adults. | 2.4           | 2.2   | 2.1** | 1.9*** | 1.8***      |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

### 3.7. Attitude towards extra-marital relationship.

#### 3.7.1. Most people still value loyalty and commitment within marital relationship. We

found that 68 percent of our survey respondents did not accept intimate relationship between a married person and another person of opposite sex even when no sexual relationship is involved. About 90 percent of respondents did not accept extra-marital sex. There is no age and socioeconomic status different in the attitude towards loyalty and commitment within marital relationship. Male respondents had higher acceptance towards extra-marital relationship with or without sexual involvement than female respondents.

**Table 20. Attitude towards extramarital relationship.**

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|--|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|  | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |             |            |
| Intimate relationship when no sex involved.          | 148<br>(14.6)     | 540<br>(53.2) | 118<br>(11.7) | 188<br>(18.5) | 2<br>(0.2)     | 16<br>(1.5) | 3<br>(0.3) |
| Extra-marital sex.                                   | 340<br>(33.5)     | 566<br>(55.8) | 41<br>(4.1)   | 54<br>(5.4)   | 1<br>(0.1)     | 9<br>(0.9)  | 3<br>(0.3) |
| 1988: Men having extra-marital affairs (Lee, 1992)   | (20.8)            | (64.3)        | (7.8)         | (7.1)         | (0)            | -           | -          |
| 1988: Women having extra-marital affairs (Lee, 1992) | (25.7)            | (64.6)        | (5.9)         | (3.8)         | (0)            | -           | -          |

Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.



**Table 21. Age difference in attitude towards extramarital relationship.<sup>10</sup>**

| Statement                                   | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60 or older |
|---|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Intimate relationship when no sex involved. | 2.3           | 2.3   | 2.3   | 2.3   | 2.4         |
| Extra-marital sex.                          | 1.7           | 1.8   | 1.8   | 1.8   | 1.8         |

1. Strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. depends, 4. agree, 5. strongly agree.

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

### 3.8. Attitude toward child-bearing.

**3.8.1. Most people think child-bearing is a necessary step in life.** Sixty-two percent of our survey respondents agreed that child-bearing is a necessary step in life. When asked of the ideal number of children, 5 percent reported that they did not want any, 12 percent reported that they wanted one, 61 percent reported that they wanted two, and about 20 percent reported that they wanted more than two children. Fifty-nine percent of respondents did not accept having children out of wedlock. Older respondents (of 50 years of age or older) were more likely to accept child bearing as a necessary step in life and not accept out of wedlock children.

### 3.8.2. Gender and socioeconomic status are related to attitude towards child bearing.

Female respondents were less likely to agree that child bearing is a necessary step of life. Respondents who received more education were less likely to agree that child bearing is a necessary step in life. Respondents who received more education also wanted to have fewer children. Similarly, respondents who had higher income were less likely to agree that child bearing is a necessary step in life. Respondents who had higher income also wanted fewer children.

**Table 22. Attitude towards child bearing.**

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|--|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|  | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |             |            |
| Child bearing is a necessary step in life. | 13<br>(1.2)       | 228<br>(22.4) | 143<br>(14.1) | 544<br>(53.7) | 82<br>(8.1)    | 3<br>(0.3)  | 1<br>(0.1) |
| Out of wedlock children.                   | 116<br>(11.5)     | 476<br>(46.9) | 114<br>(11.3) | 289<br>(28.5) | 5<br>(0.5)     | 12<br>(1.2) | 2<br>(0.2) |

<sup>10</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

**Table 23. Age difference in attitude towards child bearing.<sup>11</sup>**

|  | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59  | 60 or older |
|--|---------------|-------|-------|--------|-------------|
| Child bearing is a necessary step in life. | 3.3           | 3.3   | 3.2   | 3.6**  | 3.8***      |
| Out of wed lock children.                  | 1.8           | 1.9   | 2.0   | 2.1*** | 2.3***      |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

**3.8.3. Long working hours, harsh environment for family and children, and lack of money are reasons for not having children as suggested by focus group participants.** Many focus group members, particular women, shared that long working hours and demanding jobs made it very difficult for them to get pregnant and to juggle between work and family duties. A few of them shared that they needed to change to a less demanding job or even quitted working in order to get pregnant and to take care of their family. Apart from long working hours, many participants shared that Hong Kong is not a family and children friendly city. They voiced that education is too demanding and requires a lot of efforts from parents. They also suggested that it is very difficult to bring up a good child in Hong Kong. Furthermore, many participants shared that it costs too much to raise a child. They often cited the TV commercial that it needs 4 million dollars to raise a child in Hong Kong. Many participants though that they do not have such financial resources for more than one child.

### **3.9. Attitude towards traditional gender role.**

**3.9.1. Support for traditional gender role is weak.** Early study by Lee (2000) reported that 70 percent of the respondents agreed that the family suffers when the woman has a full-time job. Fifty-six percent of the respondents agreed that a working woman cannot establish as good a relationship with her children as mother who does not work. Thirty-nine percent agreed that a woman will be happier if she does not go out to work.

**3.9.2.** In this study, we found that only 22 percent of survey respondents agreed that important family decisions should be made by man, while 57 percent disagreed with that statement. Similarly, only 29 percent of respondents agreed that man's role is to

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<sup>11</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

earn money and support the family and woman's role is to take care of the family. An overwhelmingly 89 percent of respondents agreed that women can actively participate in their community even when their children are young. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents agreed that married women should keep working outside their home even their husband can financially support the family. Eighty six percent agreed that a working mother can still develop close relationship with her children. However, support for unconventional gender role in family is still weak. Only 38 percent of our survey respondents accepted the arrangement of woman works outside the family while her husband stays home to take care of the family.

**Table 24. Attitude towards traditional gender role.**

|   | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends       | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know | No Answer  |
|---|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|------------|------------|
|   | N (%)             |               |               |               |                |            |            |
| Man makes all important decisions in family.  | 54<br>(5.3)       | 527<br>(52)   | 205<br>(20.2) | 201<br>(19.8) | 26<br>(2.5)    | 2<br>(0.2) | -          |
| Man earns money outside while woman stays home to take care of the family   | 58<br>(5.8)       | 445<br>(43.9) | 212<br>(20.9) | 265<br>(26.1) | 31<br>(3.1)    | 2<br>(0.2) | -          |
| Woman can still be active in her community when her children are young.   | 5<br>(0.5)        | 53<br>(5.2)   | 46<br>(4.6)   | 805<br>(79.4) | 100<br>(9.9)   | 5<br>(0.5) | -          |
| Married woman should remain working outside even her husband can support her.   | 4<br>(0.4)        | 63<br>(6.2)   | 181<br>(17.8) | 679<br>(66.9) | 77<br>(7.6)    | 8<br>(0.8) | 2<br>(0.2) |
| Man stays home to take care of the family while woman works outside.  | 84<br>(8.2)       | 359<br>(35.4) | 176<br>(17.4) | 375<br>(36.9) | 13<br>(1.3)    | 7<br>(0.7) | -          |
| Working mother can have a warm and secure relationship with her children.   | 4<br>(0.4)        | 63<br>(6.2)   | 67<br>(6.7)   | 749<br>(73.9) | 127<br>(12.5)  | 3<br>(0.3) | -          |
| 1988: Wives making all important decisions in family (Lee, 1992)  | (3.6)             | (39.6)        | (32.7)        | (16.8)        | (0.9)          |            |            |
| 2000: Family suffers when women have full time job (Lee, 2000)  | (11.9)            |               | (14)          | (70)          |                | (4.1)      | -          |
| 2000: A woman who works cannot establish as good a relationship with her children as mother who does not work (Lee, 2000) | (18.3)            |               | (17.4)        | (55.4)        |                | (8.7)      | -          |

**3.9.3. Age, gender, and socioeconomic status are related to attitude towards traditional gender role.** We found that older people were more likely to accept traditional gender role than younger respondents. We also found that male respondents were more likely to accept traditional gender role than female respondents: Female respondents were less likely to agree that important family decisions should be made by man, less likely to agree that man's role is to earn money and support the family and woman's role is to take care of the family; more likely to agree that woman can actively participate in

her community when her children are young; more likely to agree that married woman should keep working outside her home even her husband can financially support the family; more likely to accept the arrangement of woman works outside the family while her husband stays home to take care of the family; and more likely to agree that a working mother can develop close relationship with her children.

**Table 25. Age difference in attitude towards traditional gender role.<sup>12</sup>**

|   | 29 or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59   | 60 or older |
|---|---------------|-------|-------|---------|-------------|
| Man makes all important decisions in family.                                  | 2.53          | 2.54  | 2.54  | 2.66    | 2.69        |
| Man earns money outside while woman stays home to take care of the family     | 2.53          | 2.61  | 2.68  | 2.76*   | 3.23***     |
| Woman can still be active in her community when her children are young.       | 3.98          | 4.06  | 3.96  | 3.92    | 3.71**      |
| Married woman should remain working outside even her husband can support her. | 3.73          | 3.79  | 3.80  | 3.80    | 3.69        |
| Man stays home to take care of the family while woman works outside.          | 3.12          | 2.92  | 2.93  | 2.65*** | 2.70***     |
| Working mother can have a warm and secure relationship with her children.     | 3.89          | 3.86  | 3.89  | 4.01    | 4.01        |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

**3.9.4.** Respondents who had higher income were less likely to support traditional gender roles. They were less likely to agree that man’s role is to earn money and support the family and woman’s role is to take care of the family; more likely to agree that woman still can actively participate in her community when her children are young; more likely to agree that married woman should still keep working outside her home even her husband can financially support the family; and more likely to accept the arrangement of woman works outside the family while her husband stays home to take care of the family.

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<sup>12</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

**3.9.5.** Respondents who received more education were less likely to agree that important family decisions should be made by man; less likely to agree that man's role is to earn money and support the family and woman's role is to take care of the family; and more likely to accept the arrangement of woman works outside the family while her husband stays home to take care of the family; and less likely to agree that a working mother still can develop close relationship with her children.

### **3.10. Attitude towards parent support.**

**3.10.1. Result on respondent's willingness to live with parents is inconclusive.** Early study by the HK Council of Social Services in 1981 reported that 38 percent of respondents accepted living with their parents after marriage while 38 percent against it. As for in-laws, they found that only 15 percent accepted living with in-laws while 57 percent were against it. Another study by the HK Federation of Youth Groups (1996) found that 63 percent of male and 50 percent female were willing to live with parents after marriage. A more recent study by Lee (2000) reported that 47 percent of people agreed that newly married couples should live away from their parents. Sixty-eight percent agreed that children are obliged to support their parents and 94 percent agreed that children should have a sense of filial obligation to their parents.

**3.10.2.** Our survey and focus group studies yielded inconsistent results on this topic. Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents were willing to live with their parents and 72 percent of them were willing to live with their adult children when their adult children became economically independent. However, in our focus groups, all participants except one said they would not want to live with their parents or parent-in-laws. These included several individuals who had lived with their parents or parent-in-laws after marriage. Most participants said they wanted to have more privacy in their own home. Furthermore, they also shared that living with parents or parent-in-laws created a lot of family conflicts. The ideal arrangement suggested by focus group participants was to have parents or parent-in-laws living in the same district or even same housing estate so that they could visit them frequently. However, they should not live right next door or even in the same building in order to protect their privacy.

**Table 26. Attitude towards living with parents.**

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends     | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know | No Answer  |
|--|-------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|------------|------------|
|  | N (%)             |               |             |               |                |            |            |
| Willing to live with parents.  | 5<br>(0.5)        | 106<br>(10.4) | 93<br>(9.2) | 698<br>(68.8) | 105<br>(10.3)  | 7<br>(0.6) | 1<br>(0.1) |
| Willing to live with adult children.   | 9<br>(0.9)        | 153<br>(15.1) | 112<br>(11) | 653<br>(64.4) | 75<br>(7.4)    | 9<br>(0.9) | 3<br>(0.3) |
| 1988: Newly-wed couple living away from their parents (Lee, 1992)  | (0.9)             | (7.8)         | (37.0)      | (47.2)        | (5.2)          |            |            |
| 1996: Are you willing to live with family members of older generation after you get married (HK Federation of Youth Groups,1996) | (21)              |               | (33)        | (63.4)        |                |            |            |
| Newly-wed couple living away from their parents (Lee, 2000)  |                   |               |             | (46.6)        |                |            |            |
| Children are obliged to care for their parents (Lee, 2000)   |                   |               |             | (68.3)        |                |            |            |

**3.10.3. Age, gender, and education are related to attitude towards living with parents.**

Older respondents (of 60 years of age or older) were more willing to live with their parents or their spouse's parents. Age is also associated with willingness to live with adult children. In general, older respondents were less willing to live with their adult children. Female respondents were less willing to live with parents or adult children. Respondents who received more education were more willing to live with their adult children. However, they were not more willing to live with their parents or their spouse's parents.

**Table 27. Age difference in willingness to live with parents.<sup>13</sup>**

|                                      | 29 yr or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59  | 60 or older |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------------|
| Willing to live with parents.        | 3.8              | 3.8   | 3.7   | 3.7    | 3.9*        |
| Willing to live with adult children. | 3.8              | 3.6** | 3.7   | 3.5*** | 3.5**       |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; p<0.001 (F-value)

<sup>13</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.

### 3.11. Attitude towards filial piety.

**3.11.1.** Filial piety is defined in accordance with the teaching of Confucius in that children should treat their parents with reverence and obedience. The practice of filial piety is divided into three levels. The first level includes providing parents with the necessary materials for the satisfaction of their physical needs and comforts, including attending to them when they are ill. The second level includes paying attention to parents' wishes and obeying their preferences. The third level includes behaving in such a way as to make parents happy and to bring them honor and the respect of the community (Chow, 2001).

**3.11.2. Support for filial piety is mixed.** Sixty percent of our survey respondents agreed that family disgrace should be kept within the family. Fifty-nine percent agreed that one should work hard to move up in order to bring honor to the family. Seventy-three percent agreed that children should consult their parents before major decision. However, only 36 percent agreed that one should seek help from elders to settle conflict. Only 39 percent agreed that it is important to have a son to continue the family name. Seventy two percent of respondents disagreed that it is better to have a son than to have a daughter.

**Table 28. Attitude toward filial piety.**

|   | Strongly disagree | Disagree      | Depends        | Agree         | Strongly agree | Don't know  | No Answer  |
|---|-------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
|   | N (%)             |               |                |               |                |             |            |
| Family disgrace should be kept within the family. | 18<br>(1.8)       | 219<br>(21.6) | 160<br>(15.8)  | 547<br>(53.9) | 62<br>(6.1)    | 7<br>(0.7)  | 1<br>(0.1) |
| Work hard to bring honor to the family.           | 20<br>(1.9)       | 253<br>(25)   | 1387<br>(13.6) | 508<br>(50.1) | 88<br>(8.7)    | 6<br>(0.6)  | 1<br>(0.1) |
| Consult parents for major decision.               | 3<br>(0.3)        | 107<br>(10.5) | 152<br>(15)    | 637<br>(62.8) | 100<br>(9.8)   | 14<br>(1.4) | 1<br>(0.1) |
| Seek elder's help to resolve family conflict.     | 14<br>(1.4)       | 385<br>(37.9) | 235<br>(23.2)  | 327<br>(32.2) | 38<br>(3.7)    | 14<br>(1.4) | 2<br>(0.2) |
| Having son to continue family name                | 19<br>(1.9)       | 356<br>(35.1) | 237<br>(23.4)  | 343<br>(33.9) | 53<br>(5.3)    | 3<br>(0.3)  | 2<br>(0.2) |
| Having a son is better than having a daughter.    | 98<br>(9.7)       | 631<br>(62.2) | 199<br>(19.7)  | 66<br>(6.5)   | 9<br>(0.9)     | 8<br>(0.8)  | 3<br>(0.3) |

### 3.11.3. Age, gender, and socioeconomic status are related to attitude towards filial piety.

In general, support toward filial piety had a “U” shape relationship across age groups. For example, compared with younger adults (of 29 years of age or younger), middle age adults (of 40 to 49 years of age) were less likely to agree that it is important to work hard to bring honor to the family. However, older adults (of 60 years of age or older) were more likely to agree with it. Similarly, compared with younger adults, middle age adults were less likely to agree seeking help from elder’s to settle conflict and having a son to continue family name while older adults were more likely to agree to these attitudes. Female respondents and those who received more education were less likely to agree to the filial piety value. Respondents who had higher income were less likely to agree the importance of working hard to bring honor to the family, of seeking elder’s help to settle conflict, and of having a son to continue family name.

**Table 29. Age difference in attitude toward filial piety.** <sup>14</sup>

| Statement   | 29 yr or younger | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60 or older |
|---|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Family disgrace should be kept within the family. | 3.4              | 3.3   | 3.3   | 3.4   | 3.6**       |
| Work hard to bring honor to the family.           | 3.4              | 3.3   | 3.1** | 3.3   | 3.8***      |
| Consult parents for major decision.               | 3.7              | 3.7   | 3.8   | 3.8   | 3.7         |
| Seek elder’s help to settle conflict.             | 2.9              | 2.9   | 2.7*  | 3.0   | 3.4***      |
| Having son to continue family name                | 3.1              | 2.9   | 2.8** | 2.9   | 3.4***      |
| Having a son is better than having a daughter.    | 2.2              | 2.1   | 2.2   | 2.3   | 2.4*        |

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001 (F-value)

### 3.12. Expectation toward family and government in providing needed social services

**3.12.1.** The focus group participants did not focus their discussion on social services. Instead, they focused most of their discussion on family friendly work place and social policy that support family.

**3.12.2. Many focus group participants want to see more family friendly work policy and practice that allow working parents spending more time with their children.** They suggested the government to consider using tax incentive to encourage employers to provide family friendly work place for their employees. For example one participant

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<sup>14</sup> Participants rated whether they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5 point scale with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 representing disagree, 3 representing depends, 4 representing agree, and 5 representing strongly agree. Numbers in table represent average scores for participants in each age categories who agree / disagree with a particular statement.



shared that many large corporations in Japan also provide onsite day care center and nursery for their employees. Participants also shared that there is very few opportunity for part time job or job sharing arrangement.

**3.12.3.** Some participants suggested the government to provide more resources for family life education programs. One participant particularly highlighted the need to provide pre-marital counseling in order to help people make the right choice in marriage and divorce.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 4.1.** Family values and attitudes in Hong Kong have become more heterogeneous over the last three decades. On one hand, the general public is still rather traditional in their attitudes and values towards the family, like it is best to marry, to have children, to support older generations, not to divorce, and not to have extra-marital affair. On the other hand, they are more receptive than before, both for themselves and for others, towards divorce, remarriage, cohabitation, pre-marital sex, childlessness, and a less traditional gender role.
- 4.2.** In our recommendations, **we suggest that traditional family values and attitudes should be strengthened while adequate support should be provided for people who do not wish to follow the majority's attitudes and values.** Specifically, our services should be broad enough to assist those who wish to live according to the traditional family attitudes and values as well as those who wish otherwise.
- 4.3.** **First, and most important, we suggest that the Government set up a limited-term task force to provide a public platform for the dialogues among public, private and non-profit sectors, as well as the general public on ways to make Hong Kong a family friendly city.** In order for Hong Kong to thrive as a city with its unique local culture and identity, as compared with the culture in other Asian cities, such as Tokyo, Shanghai, and Singapore, we need to be able to regenerate our residents by having more babies born to Hong Kong families, to support parents to educate and socialize their children to become good citizens, not just hard working laborers.
- 4.4.** Hence, though we need to maintain the economic competitiveness of Hong Kong, we also need to make our city more family friendly for children, parents, and other members of the household. We suggest that the Government use the proposed Task Force to create a culture change to make Hong Kong not only a city simply to make money, but also a city to raise family, a city for children to grow, and a city for older people to retire. If it is not yet the time to set up such a task force, we suggest the government re-tune the function of the Family Commission to focus on creating such a dialogue and culture change. Indeed, making Hong Kong a family friendly city is

beyond the capacity of the Government alone and needs consensus and support from the general public. We believe that only a special task force can achieve the purpose of building consensus.

- 4.5. Second, we suggest the Government commission a study to review the various examine the various family friendly public policies and practices already in place in other developed countries and to consider the feasibility of adopting those suitable for Hong Kong.** Many developed countries have been struggling with similar issues such as decline in traditional family values, increase in divorce rate, etc. A lot of valuable lessons can be learnt from how these societies responded to the challenges.
- 4.6. Third, we suggest the Government set up an internal review mechanism to systematically re-examine the family value assumptions in our public policies and the impacts of these on family structure and dynamic.** For instance, our public housing and long term care policies have certain assumptions toward how family members take care of their elderly people and these, in turn, shape the values underlying the policies. Again, we want to stress that our public policies should not be limited to these assumptions but should be broad enough to encompass the needs of those who have different values and practices.
- 4.7. Fourth, we suggest the Government facilitate the development of a consensus on “maximum working hours” in our society through the Labor Advisory Board or other consultative mechanisms.** Long working hours is one of the most cited reasons from our focus group participants on why they are not having any child or not having more children. Some developed countries have developed maximum working hour regulations. For example, the European Union's working time directive imposes a 48 hour maximum working week that applies to every member state except the United Kingdom. In the United States of America, while there is no maximum working hour regulation at the Federal level, the Fair Labor Standards Act requires that most non-executive and non-professional employees be paid overtime-pay at one-half the regular rate of pay for all hours worked over 40 in a workweek. But in Hong Kong, many low income services jobs require workers to work 12 hours a day and six days a week, a total of 72 hours a week. Such long working hours is not conducive to having good family life.
- 4.8. Fifth, we suggest the Government commission a “Happy Learning Initiative” aiming at reducing the amount of time spent on homework assignments for primary school age children.** Education is often cited as the source of parent-child

conflicts and parent-parent conflicts by our focus group participants. A study by the Hong Kong Baptist University found that primary school students in Hong Kong spent about 3 hours on homework and revision each day (Tam & Chan, 2005), which is higher than the 1.5 to 2.5 hours optimum suggested by education scholars after systematic review of existing research evidences (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). Our focus group parents also told us that their children are too busy as they have too many homework assignments and the demands from school always dictate their family activities and schedules. In some developed countries, the government has guideline on how much homework teachers should assign to their students (McEntire, 2006). The education system in Hong Kong is not family friendly. In fact, it may even be harmful to family relationship. The “Happy Learning Initiative” should aim at reducing the amount of homework time for primary school students.

**4.9. Sixth, we suggest the Government encourage private and public sectors to adopt family friendly work policy and practice. The Government should consider taking the lead in implementing family-friendly work policy and practices.** Due to the changing nature of the work force brought about by increasing numbers of working mothers, single parent households and dual career families, some developed countries have enacted family friendly work policy and practice. For example, in the U.S.A., 33 states have enacted unpaid family and medical leave laws. Three states, California, Minnesota and Washington, have enacted laws that grant employees the right to use paid sick-days to care for an ill family member. For instance, the California Family Rights Act of 2002 provides eligible employees with up to six weeks of partial pay family leave equal to 55 percent of their weekly earnings. Many employers also enacted flexible working schedules that allow employees to vary their arrival and/or departure times. A study by the U.S. Department of Labor found that in 2001, 28.8 percent of full-time wage and salary workers had flexible work schedules, and about one-third of these workers worked flexible hours as part of a formal employer-sponsored flexi-time program (US Department of Labor, 2002). We believe that the Government should consider taking a lead in implementing family-friendly work policies and practices, such as granting paid paternity leave to employees, arrangements for employees to work from home; providing job-sharing; and improving child-care services and facilities.

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