

新聞稿 PRESS RELEASE

A Brief Report on Hong Kong Social Workers' Attitudes Towards the Future of Hong Kong

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Summary : A research on social workers finds that only 31.5% of respondents had confidence on the post-1997 political system of 'Hong Kong People Governing Hong Kong'; whilst a minimal 5.2% of the respondents agreed that the welfare system after 1997 will be improved. Most of the responding social workers were also pessimistic about freedoms of association and speech after 1997 : 60.8% of them agreed that freedom of association will be reduced and 67.1% of them held the same view towards freedom of speech.

The research was conducted by Dr. Wong Chack-kie, a lecturer on social work at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. It was found that 24.5% of respondents had applied or planned for emigration. The intention of emigration was associated with their pessimism about Hong Kong's future. Social workers' emigration was also associated with their job and career satisfaction.

Further, it was found that 75.9% of the respondents regarded their working responsibility as assisting their clients to adjust to the environment; whilst only 18.9% of them were to pursue social change. On the strategies of social change, only 29.6% of social workers in the sample perceived their working responsibility as actively organising client groups to conduct petitions and protests at concerned authorities. There was no association between radical social change strategy and the intention for emigration.

In conclusion, social workers in the sample held a pessimistic view about the future of Hong Kong especially about the post-1997 welfare system, freedom of association, as well as freedom of speech. In actual fact, the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has stipulated such promises. Definitely social workers' pessimism is a matter of confidence. This was also associated with their job satisfaction, but unrelated to social workers' use of radical social change strategy.

The Sample

The target group of this research was practising social workers at various ranks with a degree in social work (including post-graduate diploma in social work). Letters were sent to Government's Social Welfare Department and voluntary agencies requesting for relevant staff lists for dispatching the questionnaires; a total of 74 agencies returned with 1,290 names and 4 agencies promised to distribute the questionnaires to their 218 staff. This represented a total of 1,508 subjects, i.e. 82.7 per cent of 1,822 social work personnel with a social work degree as stated in the 1991 Social Welfare Manpower Report (Social Welfare Department & Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 1991). Between February and April 1992, three rounds of self-administered questionnaires with return-envelopes were sent directly to individual social workers or through their employing agencies. A very favourable return rate was recorded: 1,050 completed questionnaires (including 8 invalid returns), or a response rate of 69.6 per cent. A sample made up of the 962 respondents who had a social work degree was analyzed.

Basic Attributes of the Respondents

38.9% of the respondents were working in the Government's Social Welfare Department, whereas 61% were working in voluntary organisations. The largest two types of services that they were involved in were family and child welfare (33.9%), and children and youth services (27.5%); services to the elderly (5.2%), offenders/drug abusers (7%) and community development (7.1%) were the smallest three services types. About the age group of the respondents, 29.1% were between 30-34, and 27.2% were between 25-29. On the length of service years in the social work field, the largest group was over 5-10 years (25.6%) followed by over 2-3 years (12.9%) and over 10-15 years (12.4%). Most of the respondents were frontline workers (73.4%), whereas 19.4% of the respondents' main duty were supervising subordinates and 18.8% of them were agency administrators.¹

The above characteristics are quite similar to those revealed by the 1991 Social Welfare Manpower Report (Social Welfare Department and Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 1991) except that a higher percentage of this sample was working for the family and child welfare services. Nevertheless, this might be explained by the rare job opportunities offered to sub-degree graduates in this particular type of service in Hong Kong. On the whole, it can be said that this sample of respondents is fairly representative of social workers in Hong Kong.

1. A few respondents indicated more than one choice, therefore the total exceeds 100%.