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香港城市大學  
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of Hong Kong

Making Policy for Child Care in Hong Kong:  
Final Report

《制定香港兒童照顧的政策》研究報告

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## **Abstract**

Hong Kong has experienced profound social and demographic changes that present challenges for child care. Changing family structures have weakened extended family ties and reduced the support provided by the kinship network in caring for dependent children. At the same time, increasing participation in education and the labour market by women has resulted in an increased demand for social care for children and families. The aim of this study is to obtain a holistic view of child care patterns and the needs of families in Hong Kong in relation to child care to inform policy debates aimed at improving the care of children and the welfare of their carers.

In this study, we adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods composed of four major stages: 1) documentation, 2) telephone survey, 3) focus group interviews and 4) in-depth interviews. To understand the child care policies and measures in other countries, we reviewed child care support policies of four different countries including the UK, Australia, Japan and Korea. The telephone survey sought to obtain an overview of child care patterns in families from different social backgrounds in Hong Kong. The survey was based on a simple random sampling method to select respondents in households with a residential telephone line. We interviewed 509 respondents who had children aged 12 years or below. We also conducted 10 focus-group interviews to explore carers' perceptions of the different policies that support child care. To understand the views on child care policy development, inter-professional coordination and collaboration in providing care services in Hong Kong, we conducted in-depth interviews with government officials from the Labour and Welfare and Education Bureaus, and interviewed service providers from social service agencies, women's organisations, kindergarten and primary school.

The key findings of the current study are the following: (1) the family-based care model is still prevalent among the interviewed families, but support from grandparents is minimal. (2) Gender is still a significant factor affecting child care patterns as well as the perceptions on the roles and responsibilities of fathers and mothers in child care. (3) Affordable child care service provision is far from adequate. (4) Working women are unlikely to escape from caring duties even when they worked outside the family and these duties have an effect on their employment decision. (5) The proportion of total household expenditure allocated to child care expenses is high especially among low-income families. (6) Child care should not be regarded as the sole responsibility of a family but as a collaborative effort of the state, family, community and market. (7) The policy assumption of child care in Hong Kong is

based on the ‘breadwinner and ‘family care’ models, which are outdated and fail to respond to the social needs and social development in modern society.

In view of the existing problems in child care, we recommend policy changes to improve the situation: (1) revisit the policy assumption on child care; (2) review the distribution of roles among different sectors in providing care; (3) strengthen family friendly policies in Hong Kong; (4) introduce cash allowances and increase subsidised services for child care; (5) improve coordination among different government departments; (6) set up infrastructure to support child care and (7) promote gender education to encourage men to share the responsibilities of child care.

## 摘要

目前，香港經歷社會及人口的變遷所帶來的兒童照顧的問題。家庭結構的轉變削弱了傳統大家庭的連繫、親屬間的支援網絡以致影響核心家庭的兒童照顧。與此同時，由於婦女受教育及就業的機會增加，引致延遲生育、生育率下降及社會照顧的需求。是次研究的目的主要是探討本港家庭幼兒照顧的模式、需要及相關的政策，從而改善兒童照顧及照顧者的福利。

是次研究採用了量性及質性研究方法，共分四部份：(1)文獻審閱；(2)電話問卷訪問；(3)聚焦小組討論；(4)深入訪談。為了解不同國家的兒童照顧措施及政策的經驗，本研究選取了四個國家包括英國、澳洲、日本及韓國的資料作分析。電話問卷訪問的目的是要搜集香港不同階層及背景的家庭的育兒模式及經驗。本調查以簡單隨機抽樣方法，抽選擁有住宅電話線的合資格住戶進行訪問。我們一共訪問了 509 年齡在 18-60 歲、並育有至少一名 12 歲或以下子女之人士。除了電話訪問，我們亦進行了十次聚焦小組討論，旨在探討照顧者對幼兒政策及支援措施的看法。此外，為了解兒童發展的政策以及提供兒童服務業界之間的合作及協調，我們亦訪問了勞工及福利局及教育局的官員，以及社會服務、婦女團體、小學及幼稚園校長等不同業界的代表進行深入訪談。

研究的主要發現有以下幾點：(1)家庭模式的照顧模式仍普遍存在，然而由祖父母協助照顧的並不普遍。(2) 性別影響兒童照顧的方式及父母的責任分工上仍然是一個重要的因素。(3) 可負擔收費的兒童服務仍然非常欠缺。(4) 在職婦女仍需負擔大部份兒童照顧的工作，影響她家就業的機會及選擇。(5) 在兒童照顧的開支佔一般家庭特別是低收入家庭的開支的比例很高。(6) 兒童照顧並非家庭單獨的表責任，應該是政府、家庭、社區及私人市場互相協力的承擔。(7)目前的兒童政策背後的假設已經過時，未能有效回應社會的發展的需要。

基於此，我們有以下改善目前情況的建議：(1) 重新全面檢視目前的兒童政策及其背後的理念。(2) 檢討社會各層份在兒童照顧所應承擔的責任。(3) 強化家庭友善政策的措施。(4) 設立兒童津貼及提供低廉的資助兒童服務。(5) 改善政府各部門在推動兒童政策的合作和協調。(6) 在兒童發展需要一些硬件的配套才能夠提供有效的支援。(7) 推動性別教育，鼓勵男性參與照顧工作。

## **Introduction**

In recent years, declining fertility rate, increasing number of women participating in the labour market and changing values concerning welfare provisions have placed enormous demands and pressures on child care in East Asian countries (Chan et al., 2011; Wang, 2011; Chan, Takahashi & Wong, 2010). Similar to other East Asian countries, the changes in Hong Kong have been alarming and have spawned considerable public debates on child care policy, particularly on who should be responsible for child care.

In Hong Kong, the government adopts the traditional male breadwinner care model, in which women are regarded as natural carers in the family and caring duties are viewed as the responsibility of individual families. In 2011, the number of homemakers in Hong Kong was 673,300, among of which women comprised 97.8% (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). The traditional gendered division of labour in Hong Kong assumes that women are natural carers and thus, should take up the major duties associated with child care. According to a study by the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres (2011), some full-time carers spend more than 72 hours a week on caring tasks, which may result in ill health and emotional problems on the part of the carers. These caring duties also result in significant adverse consequences for women's personal development and their participation in society, the labour market and public affairs. Moreover, full-time carers are likely to experience economic dependency and be trapped in poverty because care work is unpaid (Leung & Chan, 2000).

Labour force participation among women in Hong Kong has remained relatively stable at around 48%. This figure is significantly lower than that for men. Women aged between 25 and 29 years have the highest rate of labour force participation, whereas the highest rate for men is between 30 and 39 years (Census and Statistics Department, 2011). These data indicate that the rate of economic participation of women is profoundly affected by the family life cycle. Official data reveal that women outnumbered men in part-time employment. For example, among the total number of part-time employees in 2005, 62.69% were female and 37.31% were male (Ngo & Pun, 2009). Married women are more likely to engage in part-time or casual work because these forms of employment enable them to combine work outside the family with their household duties (Women's Commission, 2011). Although the double burden of carers should not be overlooked, to date, the Hong Kong SAR government has done very little to ease their burden. Existing support for children is far from adequate, and is neither affordable nor accessible for most low-income

families in Hong Kong. Without affordable, high-quality child care provision, children are at risk of being neglected or living in poverty. The lack of adequate and affordable child care often compels women in low-income families to quit their jobs to care for their children. Research has shown that family friendly policies, such as child or family allowances, family-related tax provisions and child care arrangements, encourage parenthood (Keithley & Hattery, 2002). At the same time, evidence suggests that family friendly policies have had a positive effect on women's choices in paid work, which can help increase labour participation of women, ease work-family conflicts they experience and improve their work performance (Public Policy Research Centre, 2008; Leung & Chan, 2012).

Chan et al. (2011) suggested that care provision in five East Asian countries (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China) has moved from being the sole responsibility of the family to a responsibility shared by the four sectors. The concept of the 'care diamond' relates to the different roles of four sectors, the state, family, community and market, in providing care services. The 'care diamond' is a useful analytical tool for understanding the boundaries between the different sectors and their roles in providing and financing care (Zhang and Young, 2012). Zhang and Yeung's (2012) comparative study on child care policy also identified the rapid expansion of social care in response to the social and demographic changes in some Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea. However, child care policy is a relatively less studied topic in Hong Kong. Questions such as the following remain unanswered and deserve further study: what is the distribution of roles among the four sectors? How much financial responsibility should be shared by the different sectors? What effect does child care have on women's employment? What kinds of resources are available to support families in caring for children? Do parents in Hong Kong prefer home-based or social care? What kinds of support for child-rearing do couples want? Do Chinese families of different social backgrounds differ with regard to their child care practices and expectations of support?

## **Research objectives**

The overall objective of this study is to obtain a holistic view of child care patterns and the needs of families in Hong Kong in relation to child care and inform policy debates aimed at improving the care of children and the welfare of their carers. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. document child care policies in European and East Asian countries and review the effectiveness of such policies;
2. investigate the patterns and costs of child care for Hong Kong Chinese families;

3. understand the needs and problems of families in providing child care;
4. identify the gaps in existing service provision and financial support for child care; and
5. explore stakeholders' views of different measures for supporting child care in Hong Kong.

## **Research methodology**

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods. We believe both approaches have a significant role in understanding the complicated patterns of child care, the problems and needs of carers, the gaps in social service provision and carers' expectations for social support. The study is composed of four major methods: 1) documentation of census data and review of child care policies in other countries; 2) telephone survey of parents with children aged less than 12 years in Hong Kong; 3) focus group interviews with primary carers; and 4) in-depth interviews with government officials and service providers.

### Documentation

With the intention of understanding the child care policies and measures in other countries, we chose four different countries and reviewed their child care support policies. These countries include the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and Korea. We reviewed the child care support policies and measures in the United Kingdom and Australia because these two Western countries have long histories of providing carers' allowances and implementing family friendly policies (Williams & Owen, 2009; Daly, 2012). We also reviewed the policies in two other East Asian countries, Japan and Korea, because these countries share a Confucian heritage with Hong Kong and have undertaken family policy reforms in recent years (Peng, 2012). The way that different European countries have provided support for child care and the policy debates in East Asian countries will inform the development of child care policy in Hong Kong.

We also obtained mapping fertility rates and women's labour participation rates in Hong Kong and the four countries for the past 30 years. Reviewing census data will help depict the changing demographic structure, family structure, employment patterns and child care services in Hong Kong over the past 30 years. The data will also provide an important overview of the changing family situation in Hong Kong.

### Telephone Survey

This study adopted a telephone survey to obtain an overview of child care patterns in families from different social backgrounds in Hong Kong. The telephone survey was contracted out to the Centre of Social Policy Study of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which conducted the survey during the period from September to

December 2015. The telephone survey was based on a simple random sampling method to select respondents in households with a residential telephone line. The research team formulated the research questions, closely monitored the training of interviewers as well as the collection and analysis of the data. The survey data were analysed using the computer software SPSS. The contents of the survey focused on four main areas: (1) patterns of child care; (2) cost of child care; (3) child care support they have received; and (4) their views on different child care support measures.

We interviewed 509 respondents who were parents of children aged 12 years or below. Among the respondents, 63.1% were female while 36.9% were male. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 60 years. Among the respondents, 62.7% had ages between 36 to 45 years. Most of them were worked (68%), and only 30.3% were full-time carers. Among these respondents, 58% had one child, 36.3% had two children, 5.3% had three children and only 0.4% had four children.

### Focus group interviews

While the telephone survey provided an overview of families' experiences of providing child care, an in-depth understanding of the dynamic situations involved in the processes through which social inequality is constructed is necessary. We also aimed to explore carers' perceptions of different policies to support child care.

The content of the focus group interviews focused mainly on four areas: (1) The care patterns and dynamics involved in caring; (2) The experience of carers in child care; (3) The types of help that participants received from different care sectors, whether they have found the support helpful and what benefits or services are available for carers, if any and (4) Carers' opinions on different measures that support child care.

Including stakeholders from different social backgrounds is important in developing a holistic view of the issue. Therefore, we conducted ten focus group interviews each comprising around two to six participants and lasting about one and a half to two and a half hours. Each group was formed according to the social backgrounds of the participants, namely class, ethnicity, marital status, employment status and health/ability of their children. The ten groups included primary carers from 1) full-time working females; 2) low-income full-time carers; 3) middle income full-time carers; 4) new arrival carers; 5) carers with two-way permit; 6) lone parents; 7) parents on CSSA; 8) low-income full-time working mothers; 9) male carers and 10) parents with children with chronic illnesses/disabilities.

The research target was selected through availability sampling. In total, 41 of respondents participated in the focus group interviews, among whom, 7 were males

and 34 were females. Three male respondents were identified from the preceding telephone survey. In the last question for the telephone survey, they were asked about their willingness to take part in the focus group interviews. The rest of the respondents were recruited from social service agencies, women's organisations and personal contacts. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. A coding system was used to identify themes from the transcripts.

### In-depth interviews

We identify existing practices regarding inter-professional co-ordination and collaboration in providing care services in Hong Kong by interviewing the service providers from social service agencies, women's organisations, kindergarten and primary school. These interviews focused on the following aspects: (1) The difficulties encountered in providing child care services; (2) the problems encountered in collaborating with different professionals and organisations and (3) the kinds of support they expected from the government.

Understanding the roles and attitudes of government officials in policy formation and implementation processes is very important. Thus, we interviewed government officials from the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Education Bureau. The focus of the interviews was on the following aspects: (1) The coordination between government departments on child care; (2) the possibility to shift the boundary of care from family-based to social care in Hong Kong; (3) the feasibility of various policies and measures currently in operation in other countries and (4) future plans of the government to improve child care policies.

The in-depth interviews were conducted according to systematic qualitative research procedures using a semi-structured interview guideline. Most of the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for further analysis. We used a coding system to identify themes from the transcripts.

## Research findings and analysis

### 1. Child care support measures in four different countries

Creating measures to support parents to raise children and reduce the conflict between work and family is a global concern. Different countries have different conceptions of their roles and responsibilities, which depend considerably on the type of welfare regime of a country. This study chose four countries, namely, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and Korea for comparison. The United Kingdom and Australia can be classified as a liberalist welfare model while Japan and Korea can be classified as an Asian welfare model influenced by Confucian culture. In some ways, the welfare system in Hong Kong has been influenced by the two welfare models. In this study, we look into the four areas of child care support in the four countries, including tax benefits, financial support, social service and family friendly policy. The information is summarised in the table below.

**Table 1.1 Child care support in the UK, Australia, Japan and Korea**

Country	Tax benefits/ deduction	Financial support		Social service and health care provisions	Family-friendly policy
		Universal	Mean-tested		
UK	√ (1) Child Tax Credit (CTC) (2) Working Tax Credit (WTC)	√ (1) Child Benefit (2) Carer's Allowance	√ (1) Mean-tested income support	√ (1) Sure Start (2) Free child care and education in nursery school (3) Out-of-school hours care (OSH-care) (4) Sure Start programme	√ (1) Maternity leave (2) Paternity leave (3) Parental leave (4) Flexible working hours
Australia	√ (1) Family Tax Benefit (two-part payment) (a) Part A is paid for each child	√ (1) Parenting Payment (2) Carer Allowance	√ (1) Child Care Benefit (2) Child Care Rebate (3) Stillborn Baby Payment	√ (1) Long Day care (2) Family Day Care (3) In Home Care (4) Occasional Care (5) Child care waiting lists (6) Raising children Network (7) KidsMatter (8) Cybersmart	√ (1) Maternity leave (2) Paternity leave (3) Parental leave and home care leave (4) Flexible working hours (5) Breastfeeding in the workplace

	(b) Part B is extra aid to single parents and families with one main income			(9) Safe Schools Hub (10) Healthy Kids Check (11) Healthy Active (12) Healthdirect (13) Kidsafe (14) Australian Hearing (15) Immunisation Australia	
Japan	x	x	√ (1) Child Allowance System (2) Child Rearing Allowance	√ (1) Creation of Certified Child care Centre System (2) Maternal and Child Health Services	√ (1) Maternity leave (2) Paternity leave (3) Parental leave (4) Obligation to shorten working hours (5) Flexible working (6) Limitation on overtime (7) Exemption on overtime work (8) Limited late-night work
Korea	x	√ (1) Child care Costs (2) Child-rearing Allowance	√ (1) Social Service Voucher	√ (1) Free child care for all children aged 0–2 (2) i-Dolbom (one-to-one in-home child care system) (3) Mother/Infant Healthcare Support Program	√ (1) Maternity leave (2) Paternity leave (3) Parental leave (4) Working hour reduction (5) Flexible work time system (6) Child care leave benefits (7) Reduction of working hours reduction benefits

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<https://www.angloinfo.com/south-korea/how-to/page/south-korea-healthcare-pregnancy-birth-maternity-rights>

#### **1.1 Tax deduction/benefits**

Table 1.1 shows that among the four countries, the United Kingdom and Australia have introduced tax benefits to ease the financial burden of parents. For example, in the United Kingdom, parents are entitled to Child Tax Credit regardless of employment status if the family has at least one child under the age of 16, while the Working Tax Credit provides in-work support for low-paid working adults and families with children. Australia has similar measures; they offer Family Tax Benefits to help with the cost of raising children based on each family's individual circumstances. However, the two East Asian countries, namely Japan and Korea, do not provide any tax-related benefits for parents.

#### **1.2 Financial support**

Financial support for parents can be classified into two types, universal and mean-tested benefits. Among the four countries, Australia provided more child care benefits than the other three countries. The Australian government provides universal benefits, such as Parenting Payment (ranging from A\$ 486.8 to 725.4 per year) to help cover the cost of raising children, while

full-time carers are allotted a Carer Allowance of A\$121.7 per fortnight if they provide care for a child under 16 years old. The Australian government also provides three other kinds of mean-tested benefits, including Child Care Benefit, Child Care Rebate and Stillborn Baby Payment for low-income families. In the UK, the government provides universal financial support to parents, such as Child Benefit to all children under the age 16 years old and Carer's Allowance to carers who have given up their paid jobs to care for a family member. Income Support is also provided to families with financial difficulties.

Financial support for child care in Korea has improved significantly in recent years. For example, the Korean government has introduced two non-mean tested child care benefits, namely, Child Care Costs to support child care expenses for children aged 0–5 who use day care centres. Those who do not attend child care centres are provided with Child-rearing Allowances. A comparison of the financial support provided in the four chosen countries shows that Japan provides the most minimal financial benefits to support child rearing. The Japanese government provides two mean-tested benefits, namely Child Allowance System and Child Rearing Allowance to parents whose income is less than the limit.

### 1.3 Social service provision

In addition to tax benefits and financial support, social service support is another important support for parents in child care. Table 1.1 shows that among the four countries, the Australian government has taken the most active role in providing comprehensive and subsidised child care services and health care support to young children. Although the social service provision in Korea is not as considerable as that provided by Australia, Korea provides free child care services to all children aged 0-2 years old.

### 1.4 Family friendly policy

As mentioned earlier, the United Kingdom and Australia have long history of implementing family friendly policies in their own countries. The policy orientations of these two countries are geared toward gender equality in employment and the work-life balance of the parents, and therefore, both countries have legal protection on working hours, encourage flexible working hours and provide maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave. For example, in the United Kingdom, the total paid maternity leave is 39 weeks and paid paternity leave is 2 weeks. In Australia, the paid maternity leave is 6

weeks plus 12 paid parental and home care leave for mothers, and paid paternity leave is 2 weeks.

Even in countries that have adopted the Asian welfare model, paid leave for parents is still much higher than that in Hong Kong. In Japan, the paid maternity leave is 14 weeks, whereas paid parental and home care leave available to mothers is 44 weeks. Although Japan does not provide paid paternity leave for fathers, the country provides 55 weeks of paid parental leave for fathers. In Korea, mothers are entitled to 12.9 weeks of maternity leave, 52 weeks of paid parental leave for mothers, 0.6 weeks paid paternity leave, and 52 paid parental leave for fathers (OECD, <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>).

#### 1.5 Lesson from the experiences of the four countries

Certain lessons can be gained from the experiences of the four countries in developing child care policy. First, child care policies and degree of support vary among different countries. Child care support in the UK and Australia are noticeably better than that of in Japan and Korea. The reason for this disparity is largely related to the dominant welfare regime of these countries. The UK and Australia have a tradition of providing social care to support family in caring for children; hence, the governments of these two countries are willing to take more responsibilities to support parents in taking care of their children by implementing four kinds of measures. The removal of one of these types of support would make it difficult to meet the changing child care needs and family demands.

Second, government intervention has led to positive changes in terms of women's employment and fertility rate. For example, Japan and Korea adopt the Asian welfare model, which means these countries emphasise family care rather than social care. However, with reference to the recent development of the child care policy in these countries, we find that Japan and Korea have made some changes in their respective child care policies and have increased child care support in recent years. The changes may be because of the employment policy of encouraging women's participation in the labour force and the population policy geared at encouraging fertility rate of the country. Women's labour force participation rate in Korea in 2005 was 54.5%, but this number has increased to 57% in 2014. Japan underwent similar changes. The labour force participation rate in Japan in 2005 was 60.8% but increased to 66% in 2014 (OECD, 2016).

Compared with these four countries, Hong Kong lags behind in terms of child care support. Learning from the experiences of these four countries, the following changes need to be considered to improve child care policy in Hong Kong. First, the orientation of the child care policy should be reviewed. Second, the responsibility of government in child care should be increased. Third, more supportive measures such as child care benefits and social service provision should be provided to parents. Four, family-friendly employment should be strengthened to create a non-discriminatory working environment for parents in Hong Kong.

## **2. Findings on telephone survey**

### **2.1 Caring patterns**

#### **2.1.1 Physical care**

A total of 509 respondents were interviewed for this study. Among the respondents, 17.9% stated that the mother bore all the responsibility of providing physical care for the children while 35.7% answered that the mother bore most of the responsibility. A smaller number of respondents said that the mother bore a very small part of the responsibility (11.6%) or did not bear any responsibility at all (2.0%). The figures show that mothers continue to play the role of main caregivers in providing physical care for children.

As expected, the responsibility borne by fathers in providing physical care for children was less than that borne by mothers. A very small number of respondents stated that the father bore all the responsibility (1%) or most of the responsibilities (5.6%). In fact, 10% of the respondents stated that the father did not provide any physical care for children at all.

Grandparents, either paternal or maternal, helping in taking care of the children is not common. Among the respondents, 47.9% stated that the grandparents did not help at all, whereas 27.2% and 18.3% answered that the workload shared by grandparents was very little and fifty-fifty, respectively. Only 6.3% of the respondents stated that the grandparents shared most of the workload and 0.4% said that the grandparents bore all the workload of providing physical care for children.

Among the respondents in this study, 237 employed domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters but only 235 answered the question. Domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters did not play the most important role in providing physical care for the children. Among respondents who answered this question, 41.7% said that the workload shared by the domestic worker/part-time helper/babysitter was fifty-fifty, while 32.8% said that they shared most of the workload. Moreover, 18.7% of the respondents stated that they shared very little workload and 4.7% of the respondents said that they did not share any of the workload in providing physical care for children. (Table 2.1)

**Table 2.1: Share of Workload in providing physical care for children**

	Share of the workload					
	None No. of respondents (%)	Very little No. of respondents (%)	Fifty-fifty No. of respondents (%)	Most No. of respondents (%)	All No. of respondents (%)	Total no. of respondents (%)
Mother*	10 (2.0%)	59 (11.6%)	166 (32.7%)	181 (35.7%)	91 (17.9%)	507 (100%)
Father*	50 (10.0%)	229 (45.6%)	190 (37.8%)	28 (5.6%)	5 (1.0%)	502 (100%)
Paternal/ Maternal grandparent(s)*	236 (47.9%)	134 (27.2%)	90 (18.3%)	31(6.3%)	2 (0.4%)	493 (100%)
Domestic worker/ part-time helper/ babysitter*	11(4.7%)	44 (18.7%)	98 (41.7%)	77 (32.8%)	5 (2.1%)	235 (100%)

Notes: \*

Mother: Two respondents answered “I don’t know/ it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Father: Seven respondents said “I don’t know/ it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Grandparent: 16 respondents said “I don’t know/ it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Domestic worker/part-time helper/babysitter: 272 respondents did not employ any domestic worker/part-time helper/babysitter; 2 respondents who employed domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters said “I don’t know/ it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

### 2.1.2 Homework supervision

Among the respondents, 27.1% stated that the mother handled all the workload in supervising children’s homework, 40% stated that the mother shared most of the workload and 24.8% said that mother shared half of the workload. A very small percentage of the respondents stated that the mother shared very little or none of the workload (5.9% and 2.2% respectively). These numbers indicate that mothers continue to assume the main role in the supervision of children’s homework.

Fathers’ share of workload in supervising children’s homework is still relatively small. Among the respondents, 13.4% said that the father did not share in the workload at all, 33.7% stated that the workload shared by the father was very small, and 34.8% said that the father shared half of the workload. Although fathers contributed less than mothers in supervising their children’s homework, they had a larger contribution in this respect than in providing physical care for children.

Grandparents did not share much of the workload in supervising children in their homework. Among the respondents, 76% stated that the grandparents did not share any of the workload, while 19.7% said that the workload shared by the grandparents was very little. Only 4.1% of the respondents stated that grandparents shared half of the workload and only 0.2% said that the grandparents borne most of the workload. These numbers show that grandparents helping to supervise children's homework were highly uncommon.

A total of 237 respondents employed domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters, but only 229 respondents answered this question. According to their response, domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters played a very small part in supervising children in their homework. Among those who responded to this question, 79% said that the domestic worker did not share in the workload at all while 17.9% said that the share of the workload of the worker was very small. Among those who answered this question, 2.6% said that the workload shared by the worker was fifty-fifty and 0.4% said that the worker shared most of the workload. These results show that in most cases, domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters rarely assume the role of supervising children's homework. (Table 2.2)

**Table 2.2: Share of Workload in Supervising Children’s homework**

	Share of Workload					Total N (%)
	None N (%)	Very little N (%)	Fifty-fifty N (%)	Most N (%)	All N (%)	
Mother*	11 (2.2%)	29 (5.9%)	123 (24.8%)	198 (40.0%)	134 (27.1%)	495 (100%)
Father*	66 (13.4%)	166 (33.7%)	171 (34.8%)	71 (14.4%)	18 (3.7%)	492 (100%)
Paternal/ Maternal Grandparent(s)*	367 (76.0%)	95 (19.7%)	20 (4.1%)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	483 (100%)
Domestic worker/ part-time helper/baby sitter *	181 (79.0%)	41 (17.9%)	6 (2.6%)	1 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	229 (100%)

Notes: \*

Mother: 14 respondents said “I don’t know/it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Father: 17 respondents said “I don’t know/it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Grandparent(s): 26 respondents said “I don’t know/it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Domestic worker/part-time helper/babysitter: 272 respondents did not employ any domestic worker/part-time helpers/babysitter. The question was therefore irrelevant. Among those who employed domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters, 8 respondents said “I don’t know/it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

### 2.1.3 Keeping Children Company

Among the respondents, 16.2% stated that all responsibility of keeping the children company was borne by the mother, 41.6% said that most of the responsibility was borne by the mother and 36.7% said that the responsibility borne by the mother was fifty-fifty. The percentage of respondents who answered that the responsibility borne by the mother was very small or none at all was 4.1% and 1.2%, respectively. These results indicate that mothers still bear the main responsibility in terms of keeping children company.

With regard to the role of the father, 4.9% of the respondents answered that the father did not share any responsibility in keeping children company. The percentage

of the respondents who stated that the father shared a very small part or none at all is 30.2% and 44.9%, respectively. Only 15.6% stated that the father shared most of the responsibility and 4.3% said that the father bore all the responsibility. These results indicate that in terms of keeping children company, the responsibility shared by fathers is smaller than that shared by mothers. However, a comparison with their role in providing physical care for children indicated that fathers shared more in the responsibility of keeping children company.

In the case of grandparents, 52.9% of the respondents said that the grandparents did not share in the responsibility of keeping children company while 29.1% of the respondents said the grandparents shared only a very small part. However, 14.1% of the respondents said that the responsibility shared by the grandparents was fifty-fifty, 3.2% said the grandparents shared most of the responsibility and 0.6% said the grandparents bore all the responsibility. These figures indicate that sharing the responsibility of keeping children company was uncommon for grandparents.

Among the 237 respondents who employed domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters, 235 answered this question. Among those who answered the question on whether the domestic worker/part-time helper/babysitter shared the responsibility of keeping their children company, 31.9% said that they did not share the responsibility, 37% said they shared a very small part of the responsibility and 26% said the responsibility borne by the domestic worker/part-time helper/babysitter was fifty-fifty. Only 4.7% said that they bore most of the responsibility and 0.4% stated that they borne all the responsibility. The figures show domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters rarely shouldered the responsibility of keeping children company. (Table 2.3)

**Table 2.3: Share of Workload in Keeping Children Company**

	Share of Workload					Total N (%)
	None N (%)	Very little N (%)	Fifty-fifty N (%)	Most N (%)	Full N (%)	
Mother	6 (1.2%)	21 (4.1%)	187 (36.9%)	211 (41.6%)	82 (16.2%)	507 (100%)
Father	25 (4.9%)	153 (30.2%)	227 (44.9%)	79 (15.6%)	22 (4.3%)	506 (100%)
Paternal/Maternal Grandparent(s)	262 (52.9%)	144 (29.1%)	70 (14.1%)	16 (3.2%)	3 (0.6%)	495 (100%)
Domestic worker/ part-time worker/ babysitter*	75 (31.9%)	87 (37.0%)	61 (26.0%)	11 (4.7%)	1 (0.4%)	235 (100%)

Notes: \*

Mother: 2 respondents said “I don’t know/it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Father: 3 respondents said “I don’t know/it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Grandparents: 14 respondents said “I don’t know/it’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

Domestic worker/part-time helper/babysitter: 272 respondents did not employ any domestic worker/part-time helper/babysitter, and so the question was irrelevant; 2 respondents refused to answer the question.

## 2.2 Double burden of working mothers

We found that the employment status of respondents had a significant effect on their assessment value of their burden. Among the male respondents, only five were not working. Because the number was too small for analysis, we focused on analysing the response of the working and non-working female respondents.

With regard to providing physical care for children, the average assessment value of the non-working female respondents on the role played by the mother is higher than that of the working female respondents (4.00 vs. 3.39), indicating that when a mother does not have a paid job, she is usually the one to provide physical care for the children. With regard to the role played by grandparents, the average assessment value of working female respondents is higher than that of non-working

female respondents (2.06 vs. 1.77). As to the role played by domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters, the average assessment value of working female respondents is also higher than that of non-working female respondents (2.71 vs. 2.19). These values indicate that working mothers have a greater need for help from grandparents or domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters in sharing the burden of providing physical care for children. Notably, not much difference was observed between the two groups of respondents in terms of their assessment of fathers' contribution to the physical care of children. This absence of significant difference indicates that the husband's contribution to the physical care of their children was not affected by whether or not a mother is working. Hence, no significant change has occurred in the gender division of labour in the family, and many working mothers face the pressure of a double burden.

With regard to supervising children's homework, a significant difference was observed between working and non-working female respondents in their assessment of their husbands' contribution (2.72 vs. 2.23). These results show that when a woman has a paid job, her husband would contribute more to supervising children's homework. In the case of grandparents and domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters, no significant difference was observed in the two groups of female respondents in terms of their assessment values of their share of the workload of supervising children's homework. As mentioned earlier, generally speaking, grandparents and domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters assume a relatively small role in supervising children's homework, which is why the workload of supervising children's homework is similar for working and non-working mothers.

With regard to the burden of keeping children company, the assessment value of their share of the burden by working mothers is lower than that of non-working mothers (3.66 vs. 3.94). A difference was also observed in their assessment of the contribution of their husbands (2:91 vs. 2:52). These results show that when a woman has a paid job, her husband would have to contribute more to the responsibility of keeping their children company. The contribution of grandparents and domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters in this respect is relatively small. Not much difference was observed in their assessment of the contribution of grandparents and domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters regardless of whether or not the female respondents had a paid job. (Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4: Comparison of the mean assessment values of working female respondents and non-working female respondents**

	Female respondents (working)#		Female respondents (non-working) #	
	No. of respondents	Mean	No. of respondents	Mean
Share of workload by the following persons in providing physical care for children				
Mother	166	3.39*	155	4.00*
Father	166	2.43	153	2.28
Paternal/Maternal Grandparent(s)	165	2.06*	150	1.77*
Domestic worker/ part-time helper/ babysitter	142	2.71*	95	2.19*
Share of workload by the following persons in supervising children's homework				
Mother	165	3.98	154	4.12
Father	165	2.73*	152	2.23*
Paternal/Maternal Grandparent(s)	164	1.39	149	1.43
Domestic worker/ part-time helper/ babysitter	142	1.33	94	1.41
Share of workload by the following persons in keeping children company				
Mother	166	3.66*	155	3.94*
Father	166	2.91*	153	2.52*
Paternal/Maternal Grandparent(s)	165	1.88	150	1.66
Domestic worker/ part-time helper/ babysitter	142	1.83	95	1.77

Notes: # Employed and self-employed are included in the category of “working respondents” while home carers, retirees and unemployed persons are included in the category of “non-working respondents”

\* significance < 0.05, please refer to Table 2.5

**Table 2.5: Independent samples t-test statistics**

	t	Mean difference	Significance (two-tailed)
Share of workload by the following persons in providing physical care for children			
Mother	-5.732	-.608	.000
Father	1.517	.153	.130
Paternal/Maternal Grandparent(s)	2.337	.287	.020
Domestic worker/ part-time helper/	2.967	.522	.003
Share of workload by the following persons in supervising children's homework			
Mother	-1.219	-.135	.224
Father	4.149	.497	.000
Paternal/Maternal Grandparent(s)	-.388	-.390	.699
Domestic worker/ part-time helper/	-.596	-.084	.552
Share of workload by the following persons in keeping children company			
Mother	-3.000	-.279	.003
Father	3.906	.393	.000
Paternal/Maternal Grandparent(s)	1.945	.219	.053
Domestic worker/ part-time helper/	.412	.063	.681

### 2.3 Gender perception on workloads shared by mothers and fathers

A huge difference between male and female respondents could be observed in their assessment of who shared more workload in taking care of the children. To analyse the difference, a numeric value between 1 and 5 was assigned to each answer choice, which ranged from “none” to “all” with regard to the workload shared by different persons. For example, the answer choice of “none” was coded as 1, “very little” was coded as 2 and so forth, and “all” was coded as 5. A value for the share of workload was computed based on the respondents’ answer choices. The average value of the workload of different groups of people was computed. Using the T-test, the average

values of different groups of people were compared and analysed to determine if any difference could be observed in their share of workload.

Not much difference was observed between male and female respondents in their assessment of the workload shared by grandparents and domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters. The mean values of respondents' assessment of the workload of grandparents and domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters in different types of child caring tasks were all lower than the share of workload of mothers and fathers in these tasks. These results indicate that even though grandparents and domestic workers/part-time helpers/babysitters share in some caring tasks, they cannot replace the parents, particularly mothers, in terms of the workload that the latter bear. (Table 2.6)

From a gender perspective, the assessment of female respondents of their share of the workload in providing physical care for their children is obviously relatively high (mean value is 3.69), while their assessment of the share of the workload of the fathers is relatively low (mean value is 2.36). Male respondents believed that mothers shared more workload than fathers in providing physical care for children. The mean value of their assessment of mothers' workload is 3.36, which is higher than their assessment of fathers' workload (2.62). However, compared with the assessment of female respondents, male respondents tended to underestimate the mothers' workload (3.36 vs. 3.69) and overestimate fathers' workload (2.62 vs. 2.36).

With regard to the supervision of children's homework, a similar difference between the assessments of female and male respondents could be observed. The mean value of female respondents' assessment of mothers' workload is 4.05, whereas that of the fathers' workload is 2.49. The workload of mothers was considered to be much higher than that of fathers. However, the mean value of male respondents' assessment of mothers' workload is only 3.58, whereas that of the fathers' workload is 3.02. A considerable difference can be observed in the assessment of the male respondents and that of the female respondents.

Their assessment of the share of workload in keeping children company has similar results. The mean value of female respondents' assessment of mothers' workload is 3.80, which is much higher than the mean value of their assessment of fathers' workload at 2.72. The mean value of male respondents' assessment of mothers' workload is only 3.48, whereas that of fathers' workload is 3.06.

Mothers undeniably have the larger share of workload in all three types of child care tasks (providing physical care for children, supervising children’s homework, and keeping children company). These results indicate that the traditional gender division of labour continues to prevail. Fathers shared more in the task of supervising children’s homework and keeping children company than providing physical care for children. These results also highlight the gender division of labour in the types of child care tasks that women and men handle. Men are more ready to supervise children’s homework and keep them company, and are less willing to provide physical care for children.

**Table 2.6: Workload of different groups of persons in different types of child care tasks: a comparison of the mean values of the assessment of male and female respondents**

	Male respondents		Female respondents	
	No. of respondents	Mean value of workload	No. of respondents	Mean value of workload
Share of workload by the following persons in providing physical care for children				
Mother	187	3.36*	321	3.69*
Father	188	2.62*	319	2.36*
Paternal/ Maternal grandparent(s)	184	1.84	315	1.92
Domestic worker/part time helper/ babysitter	145	2.57	237	2.50
Share of workload by the following persons in supervising children’s homework				
Mother	185	3.58*	319	4.05*
Father	186	3.02*	317	2.49*
Paternal/ Maternal grandparent(s)	182	1.38	313	1.41
Domestic worker/part time helper/ babysitter	144	1.51	236	1.36

Share of workload by the following persons in keeping children company				
Mother	187	3.48*	321	3.80*
Father	188	3.06*	319	2.72*
Paternal/ Maternal grandparent(s)	184	1.65	315	1.77
Domestic worker/part time helper/ babysitter	145	1.95	237	1.81

Notes: \* significance<0.05, refer to Table 2.7

**Table 2.7: Independent samples t-test statistics**

	t	Mean difference	Significance (2-tailed)
Share of workload by the following persons in providing physical care for children			
Mother	-3.657	-.327	.000
Father	3.438	.257	.001
Paternal/ Maternal grandparent(s)	-.884	-.087	.377
Domestic worker/part time helper/ babysitter	.494	.070	.622
Share of workload by the following persons in supervising children's homework			
Mother	-5.152	-.463	.000
Father	5.317	.533	.000
Paternal/ Maternal grandparent(s)	-.288	-.024	.773
Domestic worker/part time helper/ babysitter	1.189	.149	.236
Share of workload by the following persons in keeping children company			
Mother	-4.224	-.322	.000
Father	4.255	.343	.000
Paternal/ Maternal grandparent(s)	-1.389	-.122	.166
Domestic worker/part time helper/ babysitter	1.199	.146	.231

## 2.4 Cost of caring

### 2.4.1 Child care expenditure as a percentage of total household expenditure

When estimating expenditure on child care for children aged 12 years or below, 44% of the respondents said that 20% or less of the total household expenditure was spent on child care, 38.9% of the respondents said the figure was 21%–40% and 13% of the respondents said the figure was 41%–60%. Only 4.1% of the respondents said that 61% or more of the total household expenditure was spent on child care. (Table 2.8)

**Table 2.8: Proportion of Total Household Expenditure Spent on Children Aged 12 or Below**

As a percentage of total household expenditure	No. of respondents	Valid Percentage
20% or below	367	44.0
21% – 40%	95	38.9
41% – 60%	20	13.0
61% or above	1	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: 18 respondents said “I don’t know/It’s hard to say”, or refused to answer the question.

#### 2.4.2 Relationship between child care expenditure and average monthly household income

The lower the household income, the higher the proportion of total household income allocated to expenditure on children. Among respondents whose total monthly household income was \$0–\$19,999, 32.9% said that 41% of the total monthly household income was spent on their children aged 12 years or below. Among respondents whose total monthly household income was \$60,000 or above, only 8.6% said that 41% or more of the total household income was spent on the children. (Table 2.9)

**Table 2.9: Relationship between the expenditure on children aged 12 or below and average monthly household income**

Average total monthly household income		Percentage of total household income spent on children aged 12 or below			Total
		20% or less	21%–40%	40% or more	
\$0– 19,999	No. of respondents	21	30	25	76
	As a percentage of this income group	27.6%	39.5%	32.9%	100.0%
	As a percentage of ‘total expenditure on children aged 12 years or below’	10.7%	17.3%	32.1%	17.0%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	4.7%	6.7%	5.6%	17.0%
\$20,000– 29,999	No. of respondents	20	30	16	66
	As a percentage of this income group	30.3%	45.5%	24.2%	100.0%
	As a percentage of ‘total expenditure on children aged 12 years or below’	10.2%	17.3%	20.5%	14.8%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	4.5%	6.7%	3.6%	14.8%
\$30,000– 59,999	No. of respondents	68	62	24	154
	As a percentage of this income group	44.2%	40.3%	15.6%	100.0%
	As a percentage of ‘total expenditure on children aged 12 years or below’	34.7%	35.8%	30.8%	34.5%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	15.2%	13.9%	5.4%	34.5%

\$60,000 or more	No. of respondents	87	51	13	151
	As a percentage of this income group	57.6%	33.8%	8.6%	100.0%
	As a percentage of 'total expenditure on children aged 12 years or below'	44.4%	29.5%	16.7%	33.8%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	19.5%	11.4%	2.9%	33.8%
Total	No. of respondents	196	173	78	447
	As a percentage of this income group	43.8%	38.7%	17.4%	100.0%
	As a percentage of 'total expenditure on children aged 12 years or below'	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	43.8%	38.7%	17.4%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square = 34.889; Significance = .000

#### 2.4.3 Monthly expenditure on children aged 12 or below

The findings indicate that for the monthly expenditure of the respondents on children aged 12 years or below, the most expensive item is tuition fee and other school fees, which averages \$4,630. The second most expensive item is learning and extracurricular activities, which averages \$3,446. Expenditure on food and clothing is \$2,175 and that on health care is \$840. From the median, standard deviation, minimum value and maximum of each expenditure item, we can observe that their differences are quite significant. For example, the median of tuition fee and other school fees is \$3,000, but the standard deviation is \$6,363 and the maximum value is \$50,000. (Table 2.10)

**Table 2.10: Monthly expenditures of all children aged 12 or below**

	Tuition and other school fees	Learning and extracurricular activities	Medical expenses	Food/ Clothing
Average	\$4,630	\$3,446	\$840	\$2,175
Standard deviation	\$6,363	\$3,844	\$1,349	\$1,923
Median	\$3,000	\$2,000	\$500	\$2,000
Minimum value	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Maximum value	\$50,000	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$15,000
Total number of families interviewed	466	479	422	441

#### 2.4.4 Relation between monthly family income and expenditure on children

We also compared the expenditures of the four income groups of respondents on their children by comparing their spending on each child in various expenditure items. The difference between the expenditure of the four income groups was analysed by ANOVA. A huge gap between different income groups was observed in their total spending on each child. The average spending on each child in the lowest income group (\$0–\$19,999) is \$3,754, whereas that of the highest income group (\$60,000 or more) is \$10,366. A huge gap between different income groups could also be observed in terms of their spending on each child as a percentage of the total income of the family. With regard to other expenditure items, such as tuition fee, other school fees, extracurricular activities, food and clothing, children in the high income group obviously enjoyed more favourable conditions. (Table 2.11)

The average health care expenditure of the four income groups (from the lowest to the highest income group) are \$434, \$507, \$594 and \$694 respectively. The difference is not significant statistically, indicating that parents in all income groups attach significance to the health care needs of their children. Even low income families are generous in spending money on children's health care. Hence, their spending on health care of their children is close to the amount spent by families in the high income group. However, these results also indicate that children's health care is a heavy burden for low income families. (Table 2.12)

**Table 2.11: Monthly expenditure on each child of respondents aged 12 or below and monthly household income**

Monthly household income	Total expenditure	Tuition and other school fees	Learning and extra-curricular activities	Medical expenses	Food and clothing
\$0– \$19,999	\$3,754*	\$1,375*	\$1,218*	\$434	\$1,158#
\$20,000–\$29,999	\$5,098*	\$1,636*	\$1,940*	\$507	\$1,453#
\$30,000–\$59,999	\$6,242*	\$2,530*	\$2,108*	\$594	\$1,419#
\$60,000 or above	\$10,366*	\$4,890*	\$3,533*	\$694	\$1,778#

Note: \* significance = .000

# significance = .001

**Table 2.12: Monthly expenditure on each child of respondents aged 12 or below and monthly household income**

		N	Mean	Significance
Total expenditure	\$0–19,999	83	3754.2972	.000
	\$20,000– 29,999	67	5098.2090	
	\$30,000– 59,999	155	6242.4301	
	\$60,000 or more	151	10365.6071	
	Total	456	6986.7763	
Tuition and other school fees	\$0–19,999	75	1374.5556	.000
	\$20,000–29,999	61	1636.3934	
	\$30,000–59,999	148	2530.0225	
	\$60,000 or more	146	4890.2968	
	Total	430	3003.1124	
Learning or extracurricular activities	\$0–19,999	79	1217.6160	.000
	\$20,000– 29,999	65	1940.3077	
	\$30,000–59,999	150	2108.0000	
	\$60,000 or more	145	3532.8736	
	Total	439	2393.5725	
Medical expenses	\$0–19,999	64	433.8281	.237
	\$20,000– 29,999	59	507.1186	
	\$30,000– 59,999	134	594.2786	
	\$60,000 or more	135	693.6296	
	Total	392	589.1794	
Food and clothing	\$0–19,999	73	1158.3333	.001
	\$20,000– 29,999	59	1452.8814	
	\$30,000– 59,999	139	1419.4245	
	\$60,000 or more	138	1777.6570	
	Total	409	1498.5208	

## 2.5 Effect of child care on parents

When asked on the extent of the effect of their role in child care, a larger number of respondents stated that their personal development was most affected, with an average value of 3.52. The next is choice of jobs with an average value of 3.10. The effects of economic pressure and familial conflicts were comparatively small, with average values at 2.96 and 2.52, respectively. (Table 2.13)

**Table 2.13: Indicators of the effects of child care burden on respondents**

	<b>Least strong</b>	<b>Not strong</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Very strong</b>	Average value	Total N
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)		
Economic pressure	74 (14.6%)	88 (17.4%)	194 (38.3%)	88 (17.4%)	63 (12.4%)	2.96	507
Choice of Job	95 (19%)	71 (14.2%)	121 (24.2%)	113 (22.6%)	99 (19.8%)	3.10	499
Personal development	36 (7.1%)	65 (12.8%)	134 (26.4%)	144 (28.4%)	128 (25.2%)	3.52	507
Familial conflict	102 (20.2%)	156 (30.8%)	159 (31.4%)	62 (12.3%)	27 (5.3%)	2.52	506

### 2.5.1 Relationship between income groups and the effect of child care burden on choice of jobs

Table 35 shows that respondents in different income groups have different views on the effects of child care on their choice of jobs. In the low income group (\$0–19,999), 54.5% of the respondents stated that child care had a strong or very strong effect on their choice of jobs. In the lower middle income group (\$20,000–299,999), 55.2% of the respondents stated that child care had a very strong or strong effect. In the high income group (\$60,000 or above), only 33.8% of the respondents said that the effect was strong and very strong. These results indicate that the low income and lower middle income groups are the most constrained in their choice of jobs. (Table 2.14)

**Table 2.14: Relationship between income groups and the effect of child care burden on choice of jobs**

Income group		Effect on choice of jobs			Total
		Least strong and not strong	Moderate	Strong and very strong	
\$0–19,999	No. of respondents	16	19	42	77
	As a percentage of this income group	20.8%	24.7%	54.5%	100.0%
	As a percentage of ‘effect on choice of jobs’	10.7%	17.4%	22.1%	17.1%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	3.6%	4.2%	9.4%	17.1%
\$20,000–29,999	No. of respondents	19	11	37	67
	As a percentage of this income group	28.4%	16.4%	55.2%	100.0%
	As a percentage of ‘effect on choice of jobs’	12.7%	10.1%	19.5%	14.9%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	4.2%	2.4%	8.2%	14.9%
\$30,000–59,999	No. of respondents	53	41	60	154
	As a percentage of this income group	34.4%	26.6%	39.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of ‘effect on choice of jobs’	35.3%	37.6%	31.6%	34.3%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	11.8%	9.1%	13.4%	34.3%
\$60,000 or above	No. of respondents	62	38	51	151
	As a percentage of this income group	41.1%	25.2%	33.8%	100.0%
	As a percentage of ‘effects on job choice’	41.3%	34.9%	26.8%	33.6%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	13.8%	8.5%	11.4%	33.6%

Total	No. of respondents	150	109	190	449
	As a percentage of this income group	33.4%	24.3%	42.3%	100.0%
	As a percentage of 'effect on choice of jobs'	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	33.4%	24.3%	42.3%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=17.361; significance=.008

### 2.5.2 Relationship between gender of respondents and the effect of child care on choice of jobs

The study highlights the obviously strong connection between the gender of the respondents and the effect of child care on their job choice. Among female respondents, 50.8% said that the effect on their job choice was strong or very strong. Only 26.8% of the female respondents answered that the effect was not strong or least strong. In contrast, 44.1% of the male respondents said the effect was not strong or least strong, while 28.5% said that the effect was strong or very strong. These results show that child care burden has a stronger effect the job choice of women than men. (Table 2.15)

**Table 2.15: Relationship between gender of respondents and the effect of child care burden on job choice**

Level of effect		Gender of respondents		Total
		Male	Female	
Not strong or least strong	No. of respondents	82	84	166
	As a percentage of respondents grouped under level of effect	49.4%	50.6%	100.0%
	As a percentage of male/female respondents	44.1%	26.8%	33.3%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	16.4%	16.8%	33.3%
Moderate	No. of respondents	51	70	121
	As a percentage of respondents grouped under level of effect	42.1%	57.9%	100.0%
	As a percentage of male/female respondents	27.4%	22.4%	24.2%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	10.2%	14.0%	24.2%
Strong and very strong	No. of respondents	53	159	212
	As a percentage of respondents grouped under level of effect	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of male/female respondents	28.5%	50.8%	42.5%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	10.6%	31.9%	42.5%
Total	No. of respondents	186	313	499
	As a percentage of respondents grouped under level of effect	37.3%	62.7%	100.0%
	As a percentage of male/female respondents	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of total number of respondents	37.3%	62.7%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=25.325; significance=.000

### 2.5.3 Relationship between gender of respondents and the effect of child care on personal development

The indicators' average value of the effect of child care burden on the personal

development of the respondents is 3.52 (Table 2.13) and is the item with the most effect. However, although the value is high for both male and female respondents, the gender difference is also obvious. Among female respondents, 59.6% said that the effect was strong or very strong while a lower percentage of the male respondents (43.6%) gave similar answers. Hence, child care burden has a clearly larger effect on women than on men because women take on more child care responsibilities.

**Table 2.16: Relationship between gender of respondents and effect of child care burden on personal development**

Level of effect		Gender of respondents		Total
		Male	Female	
Not strong or least strong	No. of respondents	51	50	101
	As a percentage of respondents grouped under level of effect	50.5%	49.5%	100.0%
	As a percentage of male/female respondents	27.1%	15.7%	19.9%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	10.1%	9.9%	19.9%
Moderate	No. of respondents	55	79	134
	As a percentage of respondents grouped under level of effect	41.0%	59.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of male/female respondents	29.3%	24.8%	26.4%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	10.8%	15.6%	26.4%
Strong or very strong	No. of respondents	82	190	272
	As a percentage of respondents grouped under level of effect	30.1%	69.9%	100.0%
	As a percentage of male/female respondents	43.6%	59.6%	53.6%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	16.2%	37.5%	53.6%
Total	No. of respondents	188	319	507
	As a percentage of respondents grouped under level of effect	37.1%	62.9%	100.0%
	As a percentage of male/female respondents	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	37.1%	62.9%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=14.297; significance=.001

## 2.6 Child care support

### 2.6.1 Child allowance in income tax

Among respondents who answered the questions, 71.9% received child allowance in their income tax, whereas 28.1% did not. (Table 2.17)

Table 2.17: Whether respondents received child allowance in their income tax

	No. of respondents	Valid percent
Yes	350	71.9
No	137	28.1
Total	487	100.0

Note: 22 respondents said “I don’t know/It’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

### 2.4.2 Cash allowance or assistance

Among respondents who answered the question, 35.9% received cash allowance or assistance for child care while 64.1% did not. (Table 2.18)

Table 2.18: Whether respondents received cash allowance or assistance

	No. of respondents	Valid percent
Yes	182	35.9
No	325	64.1
Total	507	100.0

Note: 2 respondents said “I don’t know/It’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

### 2.6.2 Amount of cash allowance or assistance

Among respondents who received cash allowance or assistance, 8.6% stated that the amount they currently receive was \$4,001 or higher. Moreover, 5.7% received \$3,000–\$4,000, 20% received \$2,001–\$3,000, 32.1% received \$1,001–\$2,000, 14.3% received \$501–\$1,000 and 19.3% received \$500 or less. (Table 2.19)

**Table 2.19: Amount of cash allowance or assistance received by respondents**

	No. of respondents	Valid percent
\$500 or less	27	19.3
\$501– \$1,000	20	14.3
\$1,001– \$2,000	45	32.1
\$2,001– \$3,000	28	20.0
\$3,001– \$4,000	8	5.7
\$4,001 or more	12	8.6
Total	140	100.0

Note: Among 182 respondents who received cash allowance/assistance, 42 said “I don’t know/It’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

### 2.6.3 Service used

Most respondents tackled the problem of child care by using services provided in the private market or resorted to personal means. Among the respondents, 46.6% employed foreign or local domestic workers, part-time helpers and babysitters while 35.8% used private child care services (such as after school tutorial class and play groups). Only 35.2% of the respondents had never used any service and shouldered the burden of child care by themselves or with the help of other family members. A very small number of respondents used government service or services offered by voluntary agencies, such as child care centres (4.3%), neighbourhood support child care projects (0.4%), and after school care programmes (1.8%). These results show that the respondents rarely used child care services provided by the government and voluntary agencies. (Table 2.20)

**Table 2.20: Services that respondents had used**

	No. of respondents	Valid percent
Child care centres run by government or voluntary agencies	22	4.3
Neighbourhood support child care projects (Nanny Buddy) run by government or voluntary agencies	2	0.4
After school care programmes run by government or voluntary agencies	9	1.8
Employment of foreign or local domestic workers, part-time helpers, babysitters	237	46.6
Private child care service (after school tutorial class, play groups)	182	35.8
None of the above	179	35.2
Do not know/ hard to say/ refuse to answer	1	0.2

#### 2.6.4 Relationship between family income and employment of foreign or local domestic helpers, part-time helpers, babysitters

In this study, 46.7% of the respondents employed foreign or local domestic helpers, part-time helpers and babysitters to take care of their children. Most of these respondents belonged to the high income group. For example, 78.9% of the respondents in the high income group (average monthly income of \$60,000 or above) employed domestic workers or babysitters while only 3.6% of the families in the low income group (average monthly income of \$0–\$19,999) did. The results show that few low income families can afford to employ someone to take care of their children. (Table 2.21)

**Table 2.21: Relationship between income group and employment of foreign or local domestic workers, part-time helpers and babysitters**

Average monthly family income		Whether respondents employed foreign or local domestic workers, part-time helpers and babysitters		Total
		No	Yes	
\$0–\$19,999	No. of respondents	80	3	83
	As a percentage of this income group	96.4%	3.6%	100%
	As a percentage of ‘respondents who employed /did not employ helpers’	32.8%	1.4%	18.1%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	17.5%	0.7%	18.1%
\$20,000–\$29,999	No. of respondents	52	15	67
	As a percentage of this income group	77.6%	22.4%	100%
	As a percentage of ‘respondents who employed /did not employ helpers’	21.3%	7.0%	14.6%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	11.4%	3.3%	14.6%
\$30,000–\$59,999	No. of respondents	80	76	156
	As a percentage of this income group	51.3%	48.7%	100%
	As a percentage of ‘respondents who employed /did not employ helpers’	32.8%	35.5%	34.1%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	17.5%	16.6%	34.1%
\$60,000 or more	No. of respondents	32	120	152
	As a percentage of this income group	21.1%	78.9%	100%
	As a percentage of ‘respondents who employed /did not employ helpers’	13.1%	56.1%	33.2%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	7.0%	26.2%	33.2%
Total	No. of respondents	244	214	458
	As a percentage of this income group	53.3%	46.7%	100.0%
	As a percentage of ‘respondents who employed /did not employ helpers’	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	53.3%	46.7%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=141.559; significance=.000

### 2.6.5 Relationship between income group and use of private child care service

The study shows that 36.7% of the respondents use private child care service (after school tutorial class, play groups). These results indicate that families in the higher income group (average monthly income of \$60,000 or above) use private child care service (44.7%) more than respondents in other income groups. However, only 13.3% of families in the low income group (average monthly income of \$0–\$19,999) use private child care service. (Table 2.22)

**Table 2.22: Relationship between income groups and use of private child care service**

Average monthly family income		Whether currently using private child care service or not		Total
		No	Yes	
\$0–19,999	No. of respondents	72	11	83
	As a percentage of this income group	86.7%	13.3%	100%
	As a percentage of respondents who used/did not use private child care service	24.8%	6.5%	18.1%
	As a percentage of total respondents	15.7%	2.4%	18.1%
\$20,000–29,999	No. of respondents	36	31	67
	As a percentage of this income group	53.7%	46.3%	100%
	As a percentage of respondents who used/did not use private child care service	12.4%	18.5%	14.6%
	As a percentage of the total respondents	7.9%	6.8%	14.6%
\$30,000–59,999	No. of respondents	98	58	156
	As a percentage of this income group	62.8%	37.2%	100%
	As a percentage of respondents who used/did not use private child care service	33.8%	34.5%	34.1%
	As a percentage of the total respondents	21.4%	12.7%	34.1%

\$60,000 or more	No. of respondents	84	68	152
	As a percentage of this income group	55.3%	44.7%	100%
	As a percentage of respondents who used/did not use private child care service	29.0%	40.5%	33.2%
	As a percentage of the total respondents	18.3%	14.8%	33.2%
Total	No. of respondents	290	168	458
	As a percentage of respondents in this income group	63.3%	36.7%	100%
	As a percentage of respondents who used/did not use private child care service	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of the total number of respondents	63.3%	36.7%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=26.530; significance=.000

#### 2.6.6 Paternity leave

Among the respondents, only 22.3% answered that fathers had taken paternity leave. Most respondents (77.7%) stated that fathers had never taken any paternity leave. In Hong Kong, room for improvement in family friendly policies, such as the implementation of paternity leave still exist. (Table 2.23)

**Table 2.23: Whether the fathers had ever taken paternity leave**

	No. of respondents	Valid percent
Yes	110	22.3
No	384	77.7
Total	494	100.0

Note: 15 respondents said “I don’t know/ It’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

#### 2.6.7 Current work schedule and child care obligations

When the 384 respondents who answered this question were asked whether their work schedule could accommodate their child care obligations, 18.5% said that it could while 15.1% said it could very well accommodate their child care obligations. Moreover,.8% and 9.6%, answered that it could or could not all, respectively whereas 35.9% of the respondents said that it was average. (Table 2.24)

**Table 2.24: Whether the work schedule of respondents could accommodate their child care obligations**

	No. of respondents	Valid percent
Accommodate very well	58	15.1
Accommodate	71	18.5
Average	138	35.9
Could not accommodate	80	20.8
Could not accommodate at all	37	9.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: 3 respondents said “I don’t know/ It’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question; 122 respondents said that it was not a relevant question because they did not have a job, etc.

#### 2.6.8 Work schedules of spouses and child care obligations

Many respondents stated that the work schedule of their spouses could not accommodate their child care obligations. In particular, 24.1% of the respondents said that it could not accommodate their child care obligations; whereas 13.3% said that it could not accommodate them at all. When compared with their assessment of whether their own work schedule could accommodate their child care obligations, a larger number of respondents were displeased with the work schedules of their spouses and wished their spouses could have more time to take care of their children. (Table 2.25)

**Table 2.25: Whether the work schedules of spouses could accommodate their child care obligations**

	No. of respondents	Valid percent
Accommodate very well	47	10.4
Accommodate	64	14.2
Average	172	38.1
Could not accommodate	109	24.1
Could not accommodate at all	60	13.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: 12 respondents said “I don’t know/ It’s hard to say” or refuse to answer the question. 45 respondents said that it was not a relevant question because their spouses did not have a job.

### 2.6.9 Relationship between the genders of the respondents and whether the work schedules of their spouses could accommodate their child care obligations

When asked whether the work schedules of their spouses could accommodate their child care obligations, a higher percentage of female respondents replied that the work schedules of their spouses could not accommodate in part or could not accommodate at all their child care obligations (43.7%). Only 19.9% of the female respondents said that the work schedule of their spouses could accommodate or accommodate very well their child care obligations. In contrast, only 24.7% of the male respondents said that the work schedules of their spouses could not accommodate in part or could not accommodate at all their child care obligations; whereas 34% said that the work schedule of their spouses could accommodate or accommodate very well their child care obligations. The results indicate that female respondents were more dissatisfied than male respondents in the work schedule of their spouses. The higher rate of dissatisfaction can be attributed to the difference between men and women in their expectations of how much their spouses should share in child care, but could also be because of the difference between men and women in their share of child care burden in reality. (Table 2.26)

**Table 2.26: Relationship between the gender of the respondents and whether the work schedule of their spouses could accommodate their child care obligations**

		Gender of respondents		Total
		Male	Female	
Accommodate very well / Accommodate	No. of respondents	51	60	111
	As a percentage of 'accommodate child care obligations'	45.9%	54.1%	100.0%
	As a percentage of gender of respondents	34.0%	19.9%	24.6%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	11.3%	13.3%	24.6%
Average	No. of respondents	62	110	172
	As a percentage of 'accommodate child care obligations'	36.0%	64.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of gender of respondents	41.3%	36.4%	38.1%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	13.7%	24.3%	38.1%
Could not accommodate in part /Could not accommodate at all	No. of respondents	37	132	169
	As a percentage of 'accommodate child care obligations'	21.9%	78.1%	100.0%
	As a percentage of gender of respondents	24.7%	43.7%	37.4%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	8.2%	29.2%	37.4%
Total	No. of respondents	150	302	452
	As a percentage of 'accommodate child care obligations'	33.2%	66.8%	100.0%
	As a percentage of gender of respondents	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of total no. of respondents	33.2%	66.8%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=18.505; significance=.000

2.6.10 Relationship between the employment statuses of women and whether the work schedules of their spouses could accommodate their child care obligations

A further analysis of the perspective of female respondents of their husbands' work schedules shows a significant difference between the views of women who have a paid job and those who do not have one. Among employed female respondents, 41.9% said that the work schedules of their husbands could not accommodate in part or could not accommodate at all their child care obligations. Only 15.1% of employed female respondents said that the work schedule of their husbands could accommodate or could accommodate very well their child care obligations. Among female respondents who were not employed, 37.8% said that the work schedule of their husbands could not accommodate in part or could not accommodate their child care obligations at all, while 25.1% said that the work schedule of their husbands could accommodate or could accommodate very well their child care obligations. The results shows that compared with the non-working female respondents, female respondents who had a job had higher expectations of their husbands in sharing child care. (Table 2.27)

**Table 2.27: Relationship between the employment status of women and whether the work schedule of their spouses could accommodate their child care obligations**

		Female respondents		Total
		Employed	Not employed	
1 Accommodate very well/ Accommodate	No. of respondents	24	36	60
	As a percentage of 'accommodate child care obligations'	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of 'employed/not employed'	15.1%	25.2%	19.9%
	As a percentage of total number of female respondents	7.9%	11.9%	19.9%

2 Average	No. of respondents	57	53	110
	As a percentage of 'accommodate child care obligations'	51.8%	48.2%	100.0%
	As a percentage of 'employed/not employed'	35.8%	37.1%	36.4%
	As a percentage of total number of female respondents	18.9%	17.5%	36.4%
3 Could not accommodate in part /Could not accommodate at all	No. of respondents	78	54	132
	As a percentage of 'accommodate child care obligations'	59.1%	40.9%	100.0%
	As a percentage of 'employed/not employed'	49.1%	37.8%	43.7%
	As a percentage of total number of female respondents	25.8%	17.9%	43.7%
Total	No. of respondents	159	143	302
	As a percentage of 'accommodate child care obligations'	52.6%	47.4%	100.0%
	As a percentage of 'employed/not employed'	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As a percentage of total number of female respondents	52.6%	47.4%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=6.078; significance=.048

## 2.7 Support measures

### 2.7.1 Support measures that could best alleviate the burden of child care

Among the four types of support measures, the highest percentage of respondents said that cash allowance could best alleviate their burden of child care (41%). The second highest percentage of respondents said that tax deductions were most helpful (26.2%). The third was family friendly policies, such as flexible working hours, maternity and paternity leave (24.9%). Only 7.9% of the respondents mentioned non-profit making child care service. (Table 2.28)

**Table 2.28: Support measures that respondents thought could best alleviate their burden of child care**

	No. of respondents	Valid percent
Tax deductions	129	26.2
Cash allowance	202	41.0
Non-profit making child care service	39	7.9
Family-friendly policies (such as flexible working hours, maternity/paternity leave)	123	24.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: 16 respondents said “I don’t know/ It’s hard to say” or refused to answer the question.

### 2.7.2 Relationship between income groups and support measures to alleviate the burden of child care

Further analysis of the relationship between income groups and measures to alleviate the burden of child care indicate that respondents from different income groups prefer different measures. Table 33 shows that most respondents in the high income group (\$60,000 or more) thought that tax deductions could best alleviate the burden of child care (62.4%). Family friendly policies were the second most popular measure among respondents in the high income group (37.4%). In the lower-middle income group (\$20,000–\$29,999), most respondents chose non-profit making child care services (20.6%). The second most popular measure was cash allowance (16.9%). In the low income group, most respondents chose cash allowance (30.3%), while the second most popular measure was non-profit making child care service (29.4%).

To sum up, tax deductions are considered the most important measure among respondents in the high income group (\$60,000 or more). The answer accounts for 49.75% of the total number of respondents in the high income group. In contrast, only 6.2% of the respondents in the low income groups (\$0–19,999) thought that tax deduction was the most important measure. In contrast, cash allowance was considered the most important measure by respondents in the low income group (66.7%) while only 17.7% of respondents in the high income group had the same answer. With regard to family friendly policies, 29.3% of the respondents in the high income group stated it was the most important measure while only 14.8% of

respondents in the low income group agreed. With regard to non-profit making child care services, a higher percentage of respondents in the low income group than respondents in the high income group considered it to be the most important measure. The percentage was 12.3% and 3.4%, respectively. (Table 2.29)

**Table 2.29: Relationship between income group and four support services**

Income group		Which support service could best alleviate your child care burden?				Total
		Tax deductions	Cash allowance	Non-profit making child care service	Family-friendly measures	
\$0–19,999	No. of respondents	5	54	10	12	81
	As a percentage of this income group	6.2%	66.7%	12.3%	14.8%	100.0%
	As a percentage of this support service	4.3%	30.3%	29.4%	10.4%	18.2%
	As percentage of total respondents	1.1%	12.2%	2.3%	2.7%	18.2%
\$20,000–29,999	No. of respondents	7	30	7	17	61
	As a percentage of this income group	11.5%	49.2%	11.5%	27.9%	100.0%
	As a percentage of this support service	6.0%	16.9%	20.6%	14.8%	13.7%
	As percentage of total respondents	1.6%	6.8%	1.6%	3.8%	13.7%
\$30,000–59,999	No. of respondents	32	68	12	43	155
	As a percentage of this income	20.6%	43.9%	7.7%	27.7%	100.0%

	group					
	As a percentage of this support service	27.4%	38.2%	35.3%	37.4%	34.9%
	As percentage of total respondents	7.2%	15.3%	2.7%	9.7%	34.9%

\$60,000 or more	No. of respondents	73	26	5	43	147
	As a percentage of this income group	49.7%	17.7%	3.4%	29.3%	100.0%
	As a percentage of this support service	62.4%	14.6%	14.7%	37.4%	33.1%
	As percentage of total respondents	16.4%	5.9%	1.1%	9.7%	33.1%
Total	No. of respondents	117	178	34	115	444
	As a percentage of this income group	26.4%	40.1%	7.7%	25.9%	100.0%
	As a percentage of this support service	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	As percentage of total respondents	26.4%	40.1%	7.7%	25.9%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square=96.084; significance=.000

### 2.7.3 Importance of different stakeholders in terms of their responsibility in child care

A numeric value between 1 and 5 was assigned to the answer of each respondent to determine their views respect to the importance of different stakeholders in terms of their responsibility in child care. For example, the answer choice of “least important” was coded as 1, “important” was coded as 2, and so forth. The answer choice of “most important” was coded as 5. In this way, the value of each stakeholder in the assessment of each respondent was calculated, and an average value subsequently computed. The result shows that the respondents view family as the most important in terms of its responsibility in child care, with an average value is 4.72. The government/or government subsidised service is considered the second most important, with an average value of 3.67. The private market, such as employing

foreign domestic workers or buying private child care service, and mutual help in the neighbourhood are considered less important. Their average values are 3.37 and 3.01, respectively. (Table 2.30)

**Table 2.30: Indicators of importance of different stakeholders in terms of child care responsibility**

	<b>Least important</b>	<b>Not important</b>	<b>Fifty-fifty</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very important</b>	Average value	Total N
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)		
Family	8 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	15 (3.0%)	82 (16.1%)	403 (79.3%)	4.72	508
Government/ Government subsidised service	12 (2.4%)	46 (9.2%)	149 (29.7%)	186 (37.1%)	109 (21.7%)	3.67	502
Mutual help in neighbourhood	25 (5.0%)	123 (24.4%)	210 (41.6%)	115 (22.8%)	32 (6.3%)	3.01	505
Private market (e.g. foreign domestic workers or private child care service)	20 (4.1%)	81 (6.5%)	165 (33.7%)	147 (30%)	77 (15.7%)	3.37	490

### **3. Findings on focus group interviews**

We conducted ten focus group interviews with primary carers from different socio-economic backgrounds. The ten groups include 1) full-time working mothers, 2) low-income full-time carers, 3) middle income full-time carers, 4) new arrival carers, 5) carers with two-way permit, 6) lone parents, 7) parents on CSSA, 8) low income full-time working mothers, 9) male carers and 10) parents of children with chronic illnesses/disabilities. The aim of the focus group interviews was to explore the dynamic situations involved in child care and carers' perceptions of the different policies that support child care. The following section is a thematic analysis of the findings.

#### **3.1 Caring practice**

Child care involves considerable work load, including physical care, homework supervision and accompanying children. All these tasks are time consuming and require considerable energy. The workload varies according to the developmental stage of children. For example, parents have to expend considerable effort in the physical care of infants. As reported by Mr. Ku, a father with a new born baby:

I need to help out in feeding the baby, almost non-stop in a day.....breast feeding is very time consuming, need much energy....  
I have to take a bath [for the baby], changing napkins, comforting him to sleep.... (Mr. Ku, male carer)

Parents with children in primary school have to spend more time on homework supervision and accompanying children to tutorial class or extra-curricular activities. In the focus group interviews, Ms. Fung and Ms. Chin gave the following statements:

They [children] have too many homework, from Monday to Thursday, they may not be able to finish all the homework .....therefore they can only join extra curriculum activities on Friday and Saturday.....I have to take them out [for those activities], and Sunday is a family day. (Ms. Fung, middle income full-time carer)

I woke up at six in the morning, because my son is too young, I need to feed him [for breakfast]. After that, I go to market to buy

food and cook. Then pick up my elder son from school, supervise his homework.....and I have to prepare dinner. After dinner, I will take the kids to a park. They go to bed around 9:30pm, it is time for storytelling..... Not enough time really. I said: “too late, next time”, they won’t let me go. After they have slept, I start to clean the house, to do some washing..... no time for myself. (Ms. Chin, low income full-time carer)

The findings of this study indicate that mothers were the key persons who shoulder most of the caring tasks in the family. For the low-income group, the reason for mothers taking most of the caring tasks is largely because of the long working hours of fathers, or because they were the lone parents at home. Ms. Zen’s husband is one of the examples. He is a driver and needs to work for very long hours.

He [husband] got to wake up at 5 o’clock, then leave home. He came back at 12am sometimes. But normally came back at 9 or 10 pm, very long hours.... Work on Saturday as well (Ms. Zen, two-way permit carer)

However, the gendered practice in child care is not only performed in low-income families, but also performed in middle income families. In the focus group interviews, we found that middle income respondents who received high education also took on more caring tasks than their husbands. Even working mothers were unlikely to escape from caring duties after work. As explained by the respondents, Ms. Au and Ms. But, they need to take care of their children after work or during the weekends.

I will take care of my baby after work, and at the time I am on leave. (Ms. Au, middle income working mother)

On Saturday and Sunday, I have to take care of children on my own. (Ms. But, working mother)

Low-income group mothers have to work odd hours to manage both paid work and unpaid caring duties. For example, Ms. Mei had to work night shift from 9pm to 6am the next day morning.

I sent them (children) to school at 7am, then I return home at

8am, and wake up at 2:30pm. After that, go to pick up my daughter at school.....sometime, get up early and go to market to buy vegetables. (Ms. Mei, low-income full-time working mother)

Were the female carers satisfied with the division of labour in child care? Apparently, they were not, because of the respondents expressed their wishes that their husbands shared more in the caring duties. One of the respondents, Gigi, shared the following:

If my husband in Hong Kong, the workload distribution is much better. For example, he can take up more on homework supervision, more balance. (Gigi, middle income full-time carer)

[My husband] seldom help out to do washing. On Sunday, he only looked at his mobile phone and would not go out with us. (Ms. Yu, two-way permit carer)

In the study, we interviewed a group of male carers who identified themselves as the primary carer in the family. Observing the differences between the attitudes and caring patterns of male carers and female carers was interesting. These differences include the following: (1) Male carers are more focused on the academic performance of children than physical need. (2) Male carers are more likely to have support from other family members or domestic helpers than female carers.

We had hired domestic helper [for a long time], I take more caring work than my wife. The helper responsible for cooking and cleaning, pick up service, and I responsible for homework supervision and accompanying them to join extra-curricular activities. (Mr. Ip, male carer)

### **3.2 Support in caring**

The findings of the study show that low-income groups, such as low-income full-time working mothers, low-income full-time carers, new arrival women, two-way permit women and parents on CSSA were unlikely to have family support in child care. The reason is that most of these carers were not locally born, and their parents are living

in mainland China. Hence, it would rather be difficult for their parents to support them in child care, even if their parents were willing to do so, because their parents can only stay in Hong Kong for the short term.

However, middle income full-time carers and working mothers were likely to get support in child care. For middle income families, most of them can afford to hire foreign domestic helpers.

I have hired domestic helper. She is mainly responsible for doing household chores. (Daisy, middle income full-time carer)

When I go to work, the maid will take care of my child. (Ms. Au, working mother)

Grandmother is mainly responsible for taking care of my children, the maid is the assistance. Our maid is helpful, for example, cleaning, she is mainly to do this so far. (Ms. But, working mother)

In addition to hiring a foreign domestic helper, middle income working mothers also have support in child care from grandparents. Some respondents even prefer to live near their parents to get support from the grandparents.

We deliberately choose to live near my mom. More support. She arrived to my home at around seven o'clock, and I left home at eight o'clock. ....then I arrived home at around seven to eight o'clock. She cooked for us [before she left], she just like a superwoman. (Ms. Chau, working mother)

Grandmother will help [pick up service to tutorial class] sometimes. If she is not free, I will ask the help from my father. (Ms. But, working mother)

From the discussion above, we noticed that middle income working mothers were more likely to get more support from grandparents and domestic helpers compared to low-income group carers.

### **3.3 Social service support**

From the focus group interviews, we found that most parents regardless of their socio-economic background were less likely to use child care services provided by the social service agencies. Their reasons for not using the services are not because they do not have the need or trust the services but rather are because of the reasons listed in the table below.

**Table 3.1 Reasons of respondents for not using the child care services**

<b>Service nature</b>	<b>Reasons for not using the services</b>
Standalone Child Care Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has sufficient support from the family</li> <li>- No vacancy</li> <li>- Inaccessible location of the child care centre</li> <li>- Service charge is relatively expensive than getting the services of a domestic helper</li> <li>- Limited resources for low-income families</li> <li>- Not able to fit the schedule of parents</li> <li>- Complicated application procedure in mean-test assessment</li> <li>- No service on Saturday and Sunday or even public holiday</li> <li>- No service for emergency cases</li> <li>- Inflexible service/time limit of the service</li> <li>- Not sure about the service quality</li> <li>- Enough support from domestic worker</li> <li>- Worries the children will have difficulties getting used to the environment/service</li> </ul>
Occasional Child Care Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited resources</li> <li>- Restriction in application procedures</li> <li>- Long waiting time</li> <li>- Applied but failed to match the time schedule</li> <li>- Not accessible to the service</li> </ul>
Residential Child Care Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No pick up service for schooling</li> </ul>
Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complicated application procedures</li> <li>- Unable to deal with emergency cases</li> <li>- Selection of case (exclude naughty children)</li> <li>- Not accessible to social resources</li> <li>- Can handle by her own</li> <li>- Not very clear about the service nature</li> <li>- Not sure about the quality of service</li> <li>- Limited quota</li> </ul>

	- Expensive
After School Care Programme	- Inaccessible service

Among the respondents, only a handful of them had ever used child care services. The most commonly used services were Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, After School Care Programme and Special Child Care Centre. Their views on the existing services are summarised in the following table.

**Table 3.2 Comments on the existing child care services**

<b>Social service nature</b>	<b>Comments on the existing services</b>
Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secured and good experience, affordable price</li> <li>- Public health issue, she had used the services but she gave up because of the public health issue</li> <li>- Helpful but limited quota</li> <li>- Helpful but he gave up. Service did not match long working hours</li> <li>- Helpful but long waiting time</li> <li>- Positive comments on the service providers</li> <li>- Children have difficulty getting used to the service/ environment</li> </ul>
After School Care Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helpful for parent to balance work and family</li> </ul>
Special Child Care Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Useful</li> <li>- Mismatch service arrangement</li> <li>- Need to expand the service scope</li> <li>- More therapists are needed</li> <li>- Limited quota</li> <li>- long waiting time</li> <li>- No supportive information/ service provided</li> </ul>

### **3.4 Work-family conflict**

A family friendly working environment is one of the factors that affect the work decision of a mother. As reported by Ms. But, a social worker working in a social service agency, she found that the agency and her colleagues were sympathetic and helpful to her.

Not much pressure from work, colleagues were sympathetic.  
(Ms. But, middle income working mother)

However, not all working women have been fortunate to work in a supportive working environment. Some women who had experienced pressure from work had to quit their jobs eventually. Ms. Hui is one of these examples.

Sometimes I would receive a call from school: “your daughter has fever” Then I have to go to school and take her back home....I would like to work as part-time, but they [children] have long holidays, such as Easter, examination, they [employers] will not let you go early. (Ms. Hui, middle income full-time carer)

### **3.5 Cost of caring**

Raising a child can be very costly because Hong Kong has very high living standards; for example, the cost of other expenses, such as extra-curricular activities and tutorial class are still a big concern for most low-income families.

My daughter has joined church activities, sometimes they go to day camp, it costs about 500 dollars. I have four kids. How can I afford to pay for this? (Ms. Sham, lone mother)

I have applied 1500 from the Social Welfare Department for my son’s Kudo class, but just enough for the costume. The teacher asked him to attend the assessment test, but I could not afford to pay for the examination fee....he was very disappointed. (Ms. Xie, two-way permit carer)

No money, it is very expensive to join tutorial class. Very expensive, one thousand something. (Ms. Mei, low-income full-time working mother)

### **3.6 Expectation on child care support**

In general, child care support can be in four different forms: (1) cash allowances, (2) tax allowances, (3) social services and (4) family friendly policy. In this study, most respondents preferred financial assistance to other forms of support. For example, low-income carers suggested child or study allowances, lone parents suggested lone-parent allowances while middle income carers suggested child medical allowance.

[I prefer] child allowance at a reasonable level, for example, besides spending on study, we can use it for extra-curriculum activities....We need support in buying school uniform. Uniform is a big problem for me. School dress and shoes should follow the instruction of school. We have to buy one whole set in a year.... The jacket costs about two hundred something, and the shoe is about one hundred something, really a huge money. (Ms. Tan, single mother)

It is very expensive to see a doctor.... Will be helpful if we have child medical allowance, infants are weak and need to see doctor very often (Ms. But, middle income working mother)

As for low-income group respondents, they also welcomed affordable social service provision such as day care centres, temporary care services and after school care services. Ms. Mei, a low-income full-time working mother who works the night shift, expressed the need for after-school service in the interview:

I think that it will be helpful if my child can stay longer at school. Then I can work in daytime. (Ms. Mei, low-income full-time working mother)

In this study, parental leave and flexible working hours appear to be policies that would be most welcomed by working parents and parents with a disabled child. Ms. Kate and Ms. Lo shared their views in the interviews:

Flexible working hours, my husband will have more time to help out. (Kate, carer with disabled child)

If mother sick and father can work in flexible hours, I will feel less pressurised. (Ms. Lo, carer with disabled child)

However, tax reduction is not a priority concern for most parents, particularly those from low-income families. In the interview, Mr. Kwong stated:

I think that the tax reduction would not help much, too little...it cannot benefit low-income families because they have financial difficulties, earning not enough to pay tax. Tax reduction is meaningless for them. (Mr. Kwong, male carer)

### 3.7 Views on child care policy

What should be done to improve the child care policy in Hong Kong? The child care policy in Hong Kong has long been criticised for being piecemeal, fragmented and for lacking long term strategies. In this study, some respondents raised insightful suggestions in the interviews. The suggestions are summarised as follows: (1) Do not put the blame on the family, but support the family to take care of children. (2) Review the education system and reduce the competitiveness in the learning environment. (3) Encourage self-support child care services in the community and provide financial support instead of imposing too many restrictive rules. (4) Address the housing problem so that children can have more space for development. At the same time, respondents also suggested concrete child care support measures, as listed in the following table.

**Table 3.3 Suggestions on child care support by respondents**

<b>Child care support</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
Financial allowances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical allowance</li> <li>- Subsidy for tutorial class</li> <li>- Carer allowance</li> <li>- Increase subsidy for the School Textbook Assistance Scheme</li> <li>- Subsidy on school uniform</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To cover special education training</li> </ul>
Tax allowances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase tax deduction rate</li> <li>- Extend the tax allowance</li> <li>- tax deduction</li> </ul>
Family friendly policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parental leave to take children to see doctor</li> <li>- Flexible working hours</li> <li>- Extend maternity leave</li> </ul>
Social service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- District-based service provision</li> <li>- Extended hours</li> <li>- Increase temporary care service</li> <li>- Increase the quota of crèche and child care services</li> <li>- Quality improvement</li> </ul>

## 4. Findings on in-depth interviews

The in-depth interviews sought to identify existing practices regarding inter-professional coordination and collaboration in providing care services in Hong Kong, as well as the role and attitudes of government officials in policy formation and implementation processes. We interviewed three high ranking government officials from the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and three high ranking government officials from the Education Bureau (EDB), four representatives from social service agencies, day care service centres, child care service for special need children, women's organisations and kindergarten-cum-child care centre, and three representatives a primary school. The following is the summary of the different views of service providers and government officials on the four aspects: (1) policy orientation, (2) service planning, (3) service coordination and (4) support for child care.

### 4.1 Policy orientation

Views of service providers:

- Child care services in Hong Kong should focus on improving the welfare of children, and should not have the hidden agenda of pushing the parents to take up paid work.
- The welfare of children can be considered a 'public good'. That is, this is a social investment for the future development of our society. The government, the family and society as a whole should share in the responsibilities in children's development.
- Child care does not only refer to physical care. We need a family friendly community that can enhance the development and protection of children in every aspect. If we have a good supportive community network, unlimited possibilities for child development abound.
- Child care policy should include many aspects, such as physical care, education and social investment in manpower development. However, we do not have a clear child care policy in Hong Kong at the moment. A comprehensive child care policy should be formed as soon as possible.

Response from the LWB:

- The existing orientation of the child care policy was laid down in the

white paper in 1981, which stipulated that family is the best place for child care and hence, the family should take up the major responsibility. This policy orientation may no longer be applicable, and we need to review and revise this policy.

- Because of the demographic changes in Hong Kong, an increasing number of women are joining the labour force. However, the rate of participation of women in the labour force is still lower than that of men. The fertility rate is also low. Most families nowadays only have one or at most two children, indicating that the motivation to have children is lower.
- When we talk of the social needs of child care services, we need to put this into context, and not merely pursue the ideal. We need to consider child development while encouraging the family to take care of the children.
- The LWB will commission a consultant to conduct a study to understand the needs of parents, determine the right proportion of public services and private responsibility and design the proper informal support for child care.

## 4.2 Service planning

Views of service providers:

- Three criteria to determine whether child care services are adequate include (1) accessibility, (2) affordability and (3) quality.
- Social service agencies should have a unified position in developing child care services. Second, the government should implement the planning promised, and the promise is to provide 10 more child care centres within 10 years.
- NGOs have a mission to provide the 'first centre' for child caring, meaning that they have to play the role of community building and community support. This is better than depending on the private market to provide services. However, we need to think very carefully on the service model and resource allocation.
- I think the most important thing is to increase the provision of subsidised nursery. Of course, these would lead a number of questions, all those old questions, such as whether we have enough land to develop these services.
- Many parents hope that more subsidised child care services will be

provided. Without these services, it is really very difficult for them.

Response from the LWB:

- Because many parents are working full time, they have difficulties in child care and they need these services.
- If we have a correct direction for child care policy, and improve the services for children to support the family, we could also encourage women to give birth to children, and help them to return to the labour market. We could also encourage men to take more active role in child caring through family life education.
- Children of different ages have different needs. For ‘education vs. care’, children below the age of 3 need more ‘care’; while older children need half-half, care plus education.

Response from the Education Bureau:

- The Social Welfare Department encourages parents to take care of their children aged between 0-3 years. The Kindergarten com Child Care Centre aims to support parents to work.
- Most of the kindergartens and child care centres in Hong Kong are run by private agencies. The service planning is therefore depending on market demand. The role of EDB is to monitor the quality of service.
- In 2005/06, the EDB started to implement School-based After-school Learning and Support Programmes (SALSP), public sectors schools and NGOs are provided with the School-based Grant and Community-based Grant respectively to organize after school activities for students who are CSSA recipients.
- The EDB has increased the subsidies to the SALSP from 10% to 25 % starting from 2014/15. More flexibility in using the subsidies such as crafting out 5% of the subsidies in purchasing necessary equipment and travelling allowances.

#### 4.3 Service coordination

Views of service providers:

- The ‘Harmonisation Unit’ only served as a registration unit and has no other functions.
- The ‘Harmonisation Unit’ created a joint office under the Education Bureau. We have classes for children of different ages, class for

children aged 2 and for aged 3. The Kindergarten Policy is not applicable to child care centres and they do not know anything about the nursery. No integration was done after the establishment of the Harmonisation Unit and the services remain separated and fragmented. The joint office is useless and the government has wasted 8 million dollars in starting this office.

- The existing policy on subsidising kindergarten has many problems and many grievances from service providers. However, the government appear to not consult or listen to service providers and professionals.

Response from the LWB:

- The government need to be very clear on the role it plays in different child care services. The contribution of the services provided in the private market should not be underestimated. In reviewing child care service policy, the government needs to consider the division of labour between the government and the private market. The government continues to support the NGOs to provide subsidised services, monitor the private services systematically and establish channels for complaints and suggestions to ensure that these services meet the expectations of the public.

Response from the EDB:

- The coordination between the EDB and LWB is very smooth, no major problem has been identified. In fact, our work is blinded by law. The EDB is taking charge of education of children aged three or above while the Social Welfare Department is responsible for providing services for children aged below 3 years. The Joint Office is mainly for monitoring the KG cum CCC service.

#### 4.4 Support for child care

Views of service providers:

- The government needs to introduce carer allowances, increase child care service provision, increase the level of subsidies to service users and relax the assessment of means-tested benefits.

- Increasing tax incentives may not be helpful for low-income families because they do not need to pay tax, and this step will only benefit the middle income group.

Response from the LWB:

- The government needs to consider the supply and demand in the private market as well as the amount of resources that should be placed in different services to balance the demand in different sectors. In the near future, the government will conduct research to understand the present situation and project the demand and supply in the future. Another problem is searching for land to use in the services.
- The government has reservations in promoting family friendly policies. For example, in crafting labour policies, the government needs to balance the interest of employers and employees, particularly in Hong Kong, where the majority of the employers are small and medium enterprises. They thought that they have to be very careful in policy planning, and need to consider the economic environment. Some social policy may lead to the closing down of business firms, for example, employees will get higher pay after the implementation of the minimum wage policy, but at the same time this has pushed up the inflation.

Response from the EDB:

- The EDB focuses more on the school curriculum and after-school care support. It is out of their capacity to work on the long-term child care policy.

## **Conclusion**

### **1. Family-based care model**

Child care involves three major tasks, including physical care, homework supervision and accompanying for leisure activities. Findings of this study show that all these tasks were mainly taken up by parents, specifically by mothers. As expected, grandparents do not commonly share in caring responsibilities, particularly in low-income families. Although some grandparents would help out in taking care of the grandchildren, they are only responsible for physical care but their involvement in homework supervision and accompanying is very limited. This study suggests that the family-based care model is still prevalent among families interviewed in this study. However, such child care model has been challenged by the changing family structure and employment situations of women.

### **2. Gender division of labour in child care**

Gender remains a significant factor that affects child care patterns as well as the perceptions of the role and responsibility of fathers and mothers in child care. Findings of this study show that mothers were likely to take more caring duties than fathers. More than half of the respondents in telephone survey reported that mothers took all or most of the physical care, homework supervision and accompanying for leisure activities. Compared with mothers, fathers had limited responsibilities in caring particularly for the physical care of children. One of the reasons for fathers not being involved in child care is because of their own long working hours. The findings suggest that the traditional gender division of labour in the family is still common in Hong Kong, which means that the father takes the role as breadwinner while the mother is the primary carer. Family care is actually women care. The breadwinner model of care is reinforced by the lack of social service support and employment policy in Hong Kong.

### **3. Inadequate affordable child care service provision**

This study shows that the utility rate of social services including child care centres, neighbourhood support services and after school care services were very low. The reasons for the low utility rate can be attributed to problems in service provision, such as limited quota and long queues, unaffordable fee charging, inaccessibility of the service, complicated procedures in application, inflexible service etc. As a result, families who can afford to do so opt to pay for private child care services or hire foreign domestic helpers to solve their problems in child care. Women from low

income families are unlikely to work outside the family, and they have to quit their jobs or work part-time because of the lack of support in child care.

#### **4. Double burden of working mothers**

Working women were unlikely to escape from caring duties even if they worked outside the family. Findings of the study indicate the limited differences in the child care responsibilities of full-time carers and working mothers, particularly in homework supervision and accompanying. The physical care duties of middle income mothers are often shared by domestic helpers or grandparents. Working mothers have to shoulder a double burden in the family and in work; therefore, the government should provide more support to working parents and balance the needs of paid and unpaid work.

#### **5. Child care expenses are high**

Child care expenses are one of the common concerns for parents in this study. The findings of this study show that child care expenses in low-income families were very high, higher than the respondents who spend more than 20% of the total family income on their children aged below 12 years. The larger amount of expenses was for school fees and study-related expenses, the rest were for extra-curricular activities, food and medical expenses. The findings show that education in Hong Kong is a problem. Although the Hong Kong government introduced 12 years of free education, parents still have to spend a considerable amount to support their children in education and extra-curricular activities under the highly competitive education system. Hence, the government has to review the education system and the subsidizing policy in pre-school education and child care services.

#### **6. Collaborative effort in child care**

Caring is laborious work; it is very time consuming and requires expending considerable energy to complete the tasks. This study shows that caring duties has a significant effect on parents including the personal development and career choice and development. Many studies have pointed out that child caring responsibilities in modern society should not be limited to the individual family, but rather should involve collaboration between four sectors: the state, family, community and market. The government needs to provide support and facilitate the development of all four sectors, and not over rely on a single sector. These four sectors are inextricably linked and supplement each other.

#### **7. Outdated child care policy assumption**

The existing child care policy hinges on the assumption that child care is the sole responsibility of the family. Coupled with the dominant welfare principle of 'helping those less able to help them', government-run or subsidised child care services are limited to those with very low income or are the most vulnerable. This policy assumes a 'male-breadwinner model' in which the family has a carer (usually a woman) and a breadwinner (usually a man), and that family care (caring by the mother) is the best form of caring. The policy assumption of child care in Hong Kong is based on the 'breadwinner' and 'family care' models, which are both outdated and failed to respond to the social needs and social development in modern society.

## **Policy implications and recommendations**

### **1. Revisit the policy assumptions on child care**

Hong Kong is an international city facing the ever increasing challenge of globalisation and rapid social development. The city is facing a rapidly changing demographic structure, family structure, cultural practice and economy. The city needs more pro-active family and child care policies to help families face this age of austerity. In fact, investments in child care and family support services can be regarded as a long term social investment geared toward enhancing healthy and balanced social development. Many countries have already implemented family friendly and child-friendly policies that have yielded positive results. Under international standards, Hong Kong is relatively left behind. Hence, the child care, family, welfare and population policies of the city need to be reviewed to develop long term strategies to promote positive child development.

### **2. Review the distribution of roles among different sectors in providing care**

The government should review their role in providing care for children. Various options are available for the government to consider. For example, to strengthen the role of the state, the government needs to improve legislation on pre-primary education and provision of subsidised child care services.

However, to support the family, child care service should not be limited to the most 'vulnerable' or families with very low income. Collective child care service should be considered an integral part and essential supplement to individual family care. The government needs to provide more financial support, such as carer allowance and parental leave, as well as review the availability and accessibility of child care service.

To support the community, the government needs to encourage the development of social enterprises, community support groups and NGO services. Mutual support between neighbours is an essential element of child care and an integral part of a happy childhood. Community support cannot be developed without proper facilities and resources. In fact, social service policy in recent decades has neglect community support and networking, which has had a negative effect on family care.

Child care service in the market is facing considerable difficulties, such as rising rent and lack of child caring workers. The government needs to support private child care services by providing venues with cheaper rent, which is especially important for

non-profit making child care services. Monitoring of service quality and training of related professional and workers are also issues important to the survival of private or non-profit making child care services.

### **3. Strengthen the family-friendly policy**

Learning from the experiences of other countries, this study showed that family friendly policies are essential to support the family in providing care. Although Hong Kong has started to implement several family friendly policies in recent years, most of these policies are piecemeal, fragmented, ineffective and lack statutory status. We suggest that the SAR government take a step forward by reviewing and implementing the following measures:

**Paternity leave** – Hong Kong began to implement paternity leave in 2015. However, the leave is limited to three days, with four-fifths of the average daily wage. This change is far from adequate. The government needs to extend the paternity leave to improve support for families with newborns.

**Parental leave** – many countries have implemented parental leave for parents who need to care for their young children. This leave could range from a short leave such as one day per month, or an extended period of leave after child birth. Hong Kong does not have this leave at present. However, this leave is an important measure to support family care and its inclusion into current child care policies.

**Standard working hours/Maximum working hours** – Hong Kong is notorious for long working hours, which could have a serious effect on child care. In fact, many studies have shown that long working hours have a significant effect on family relations, child care and health of employees. Hong Kong needs to implement standard/maximum working hour policy as soon as possible.

**Flexible working hours** – Flexible working hours is beneficial to family care. The government needs to provide more encouragement for employers to implement the flexible working hours policy. However, ‘flexible working hours’ is not equal to casualisation of work. Therefore, when flexible working hours are promoted, full protection should also be provided to flexible workers.

### **4. Introduce cash allowances and increase subsidised service for child care**

Findings of this study also show that child allowance is important to release part of the burden of the carer. Children of different ages require different expenses. In our study, children with ages below 3 years require relatively higher expenditure on

medical and health. This burden is especially heavy for lower income families. Parents of children aged 3 to 12 years need to spend more on school and extra-curricular activities. Children in lower income families are relatively deprived in this area. Therefore, providing adequate child care support and child development subsidies is essential in preventing poor children from lagging behind as well as to reduce the problem of intergenerational poverty. Carer allowance will help reduce the burden of the carer, and will serve as recognition of their contribution to the family. At the same time, affordable and accessible child care services should be increased drastically to meet the enormous demands in the community.

#### **5. Improve coordination among different government departments**

Child care services and policy in Hong Kong have long been criticised as lacking an effective mechanism to implement services and policies. For example, the Education Department and the Social Welfare Department currently implement different services without much coordination. Although a ‘Harmonisation Unit’ to coordinate the services of these two departments exists, the unit is ineffective and no obvious improvement of the service can be observed. Hence, the city needs to establish a more powerful and functional coordinating system capable of developing long term child care policy and coordinating various government departments to implement this policy.

#### **6. Set up infrastructure for child care**

Good child care service need to build on a favourable infrastructure. One of the difficulties for child care services providers is the exorbitant rental rates for nursery and kindergarten in Hong Kong. Even NGOs providing services often have to pay expensive rent, making it difficult for them to maintain high quality and low cost services. Hence, the government needs to play a more active role in providing venues for child care services. For example, the government could compel private and public housing developers to provide venues for child care services (or other social services). Incentives should be provided for developers providing social service venues. The availability of premises with lower rental rates can assist NGOs and the private sector in providing more low cost and high quality services.

The government should legislate for compulsory child care facilities in large corporation as well as in government and quasi-government institutions. Corporation and institutions employing a certain number of workers should provide child care facilities for their employees. For small and medium scale employers, the government could consider providing child care facilities near the workplace when appropriate.

One difficulty in developing child care services is the recruitment of proper child care workers and kindergarten teachers. This difficulty is related to the lack of prospects and professional development in this field. Hence, the government needs to restructure the field of child care professionals and workers. With better prospects, social status and job security, child care manpower could be stabilised.

## **7. Promote gender education**

A fundamental and long term improvement of child care is the promotion of gender equality and foster change in the gender division of labour in the family and workplace. Research in the Western countries found that encouraging men to participate in child care duties could help to improve family relations and the quality of child caring. The current study also shows that families who share caring duties between the two parents more equally could reduce the stress of carers significantly. Hence, the government needs to encourage men to become more involved in child care and family affairs.

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