



香港明愛家庭服務

**STUDY ON MARRIAGES
AFFECTED BY
EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIRS**

**婚 外 情 問 題
研 究 報 告 書**



CARITAS FAMILY SERVICE

AND

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK & SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION

UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Katherine P.H. Young
Lianne Y.Y. Tai

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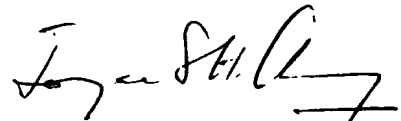
Foreword

In our present day society, the increasing incidents of extramarital affairs cause alarm and threaten the family, the basic unit of society. Starting from 1993, our caseworkers have reported increasing number of cases having problems related to extramarital affairs. The high ratio, together with the fact that two third of such cases involved a stable partner is a grave concern to us.

As Pope John Paul VI stated in his address to the World Summit for Social Development "it is essential to restore confidence in the family and to create a cultural climate which offers it the necessary stability to carry out its function of raising children and preparing them for life in society." (quote L'Osservatore Romano March 15, 1995) Being committed to the service objectives of 'preserving and strengthening the family as a unit, by empowering individuals and the family as a whole through different level of professional intervention, and to improve the quality of family life ', Caritas Family Service has further strengthened its work in the area of 'Services for Families Affected by Extramarital Affairs'.

The present research on '~~Marriages Affected~~ by Extramarital Affairs' conducted in cooperation with Department of Social Work and Social Administration of University of Hong Kong forms part of our overall strategy to search for further understanding of the critical impact of extramarital affairs on family life. It provides valuable reference to facilitate service development and stimulate efforts to address problems affecting the situation of these families.

We hope that this piece of work may render assistance to realize part of these objectives in Hong Kong.



Dr. Joyce S.H. Chang, J.P.
Director
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To ensure high quality services, it does not suffice to have just a grasp of sound theoretical base and micro-skills. Social work practitioners must also be sensitive to impending social problems and have a sound knowledge of the social context. The idea of this research originated from our social workers' reflection of their direct practises and experience. Faced with the increasing instances of families affected by extra-marital affairs, and concerned that this may be a growing trend, they sought further understanding to ensure delivery of service pertinent to the client's circumstances.

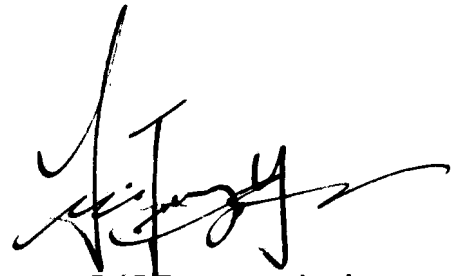
This report is the fruit of this quest and for this I would like to extend sincere gratitude to all those who have been involved in this research. We are especially grateful to Mrs. Katherine P.H. Young, consultant of this research who have all along given us invaluable support and expert advice. Our grateful thanks must go to the members of the Research Team from the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, University of Hong Kong, Ms. Lianne Y.Y. Tai, Ms. Bibiana C.H. Chau, Mrs. Vivian P.L. Yim, Mr. Li Chi Kei, Mr. Wong Yu Cheung, who under the able leadership of Mrs. Young have worked very hard and intensively during the past few months in finalising the questionnaire design, data-processing, analysis and in writing up the main body of the research report. We would also like to express sincere thanks to Mrs. Nancy Rhind for her constructive feedback and many helpful suggestions on the flow of the report. Dr. C.K. Law's encouragement and support of the project, and his advice on the statistical presentation and analysis of the research data are also greatly appreciated.

Special mention must be made of Mrs. Angela Nung, our legal consultant, who assisted us in formulating our recommendations over the legal aspects in addressing needs of families affected by Extra-marital affairs.

We are fortunate to have a team of very dedicated staff. Their heavy involvement in this research, while maintaining high standard in their routine work, is very much appreciated. Ms. Eliza Lam, Ms. Patricia Tai, Ms. Sira Ng and Mr. Michael Ip, who also sit on the Research Team, have contributed their professional input and generous use of time, in questionnaire design, in supervising data collection, coding and data entry and in formulating recommendations. Ms. Eliza Lam is also Publication Manager of this report. Her efficient coordination and planning work have made it possible for the report to be released on schedule. Mr. Albert Cheung has produced the research summary for easy-reading within a very short period, while the colleagues of our Tsuen Wan Unit helped to refine the Chinese version of the research summary and the

recommendation, and their hard work is acknowledged. Thanks must also go to the clerical staff of Tsuen Wan and Caine Road Units, especially Mr. Albert Yip and Ms. Rolina Sin for their help in word processing. Most of all, I must extend deep appreciation to the valuable input of more than 100 social workers from our different Family Service units. I am thankful to each one of them for going through the painstaking process in completing a 17 pages long, detailed questionnaire, for each case receiving counselling on extra-marital issues.

Last, but not the least, we owe a debt of gratitude to all those clients who have participated in this research completing the questionnaires, providing data without which this research cannot be materialized.



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Study on Marriages

Affected by Extramarital Affairs

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STUDY ON MARRIAGES

AFFECTED BY EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIRS

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Chapter One

Marriages Affected by Extramarital Affairs

INCREASING NUMBERS OF MARRIAGES AFFECTED BY AFFAIRS IN THE COUNSELLING CASELOAD

As a community, Hong Kong has consistently valued the family as the vital unit in society which "provides an intimate environment in which personal care, mutual support and emotional security are normally available to its members" (Five Year Plan Review 1993). The extent to which the family can meet these expectations depends on the health and stability of the marital relationship. In the last few years, many societal changes have added to the daily demands of married living. Amongst the various threats that can jeopardise the spousal relationship is infidelity. The increase in the number of reported affairs seems to be a growing Asian trend as reported in Japan (Goozner, 1995), and in China (達1993). In Hong Kong, this trend is reflected in the caseloads of family service agencies.

A one shot study of marital problems at intake conducted by the Family Service Division of the Hong Kong Council of Social Services Clientele Information Service (1988-1990) reported that extramarital affairs constituted 26.1% of the cases (245 of 940 marital cases studied). The Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council Annual Reports show the numbers of extramarital affairs on their caseload to be 39.8% in 1991/2; 36% in 1992/3; 38% for 1993/4 of which 32% were husbands' affairs and 6% wives' affairs.

According to the Case Profile of Caritas Family Service, out of 851 cases related to marital difficulties handled in the financial year of 93/94, 341 cases were involved in extramarital affairs (data as at March 31, 1994). The high ratio (40%), together with the fact that two-third of such cases involved a stable partner caused alarm.

Emerging Trends

From the nineteen eighties increasing numbers of Hong Kong residents have been going to the Mainland to participate in the economic development of China. The numbers are such that three Special Topics Reports on Hong Kong residents working in China have been conducted through the General Household Surveys.

	Aug 1988-Mar 1989	Oct-Dec 1989	April-June 1992
	<u>Report IV</u>	<u>Report VII</u>	<u>Report X</u>
Numbers	52,300	45,600	64,200
% Labour Force	1.9%	1.6%	2.3%

For 31.12.1994, the Social Welfare Department, and the NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) coordinated by the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, identified cases known to Family Service units receiving counselling for affairs occurring in China.

Cases of Spouses having Affairs in Mainland as at 31.12.1994

Social Welfare Department	- 160
NGO Family Service Units	- 314
Total	- 474

Divorce statistics have grown tremendously from 2060 in 1981, to 6295 in 1991, and in the last few years 5650 for 1992, 7454 for 1993, and 7735 for 1994. The Hong Kong Marriage Mediation Service reported that the most prominent issue dealt with on their caseload was extramarital affairs leading to divorce proceedings, noting that 29.7% of the 155 cases closed between April 1993 to 1994 related to extramarital affairs (CMAC Annual Report 1993/4).

The Hong Kong Family Welfare Society Survey of Single Parent Case Profiles (1995) covering lone parents served by four services, Family Counselling, School Social Work, Foster Care and Home Help, reported that 28.1% of the single parents attributed affairs of one spouse as one of the main reasons contributing to the break-up of their marriages.

Growing Attention from the Community

Family services sensitive to changing trends that impact on the family responded as early as 1991 with group programmes for separated families which focused on the theme of the high risk of alternative relationships associated with the life style of separated families. With caseload statistics across a number of family service agencies reflecting the impact of extramarital affairs on families, the Hong Kong Council of Social Services organised a seminar in 1993 with the theme "Hong Kong Family in Focus - the Split Families". In August 1994, the tragedy of a murder and suicide at Lai Yiu Estate galvanised the community to an awareness of the serious repercussions that could arise from affairs.

A two pronged response followed in which the service agencies, the press, TV stations, legislative counsellors and political parties joined in partnership to respond at the personal, social, medical, legal and policy levels. One thrust focused on the prevention/reduction of EMA, the other on the empowerment of the spouse and the family to deal with disruptions associated with affairs.

Community Response

PREVENTION

FLE Programmes

Marriage Enrichment Groups

Promoting Health Awareness

Legislative prohibitions

- Eric Li

Advocating with the Chinese/

Hong Kong Government

EMPOWERMENT

Activating Social Welfare

Legal Aid, Housing, Education

Medical & Health Departments

Mutual Help Groups

Lobbying Political

Parties e.g.: Democratic Party

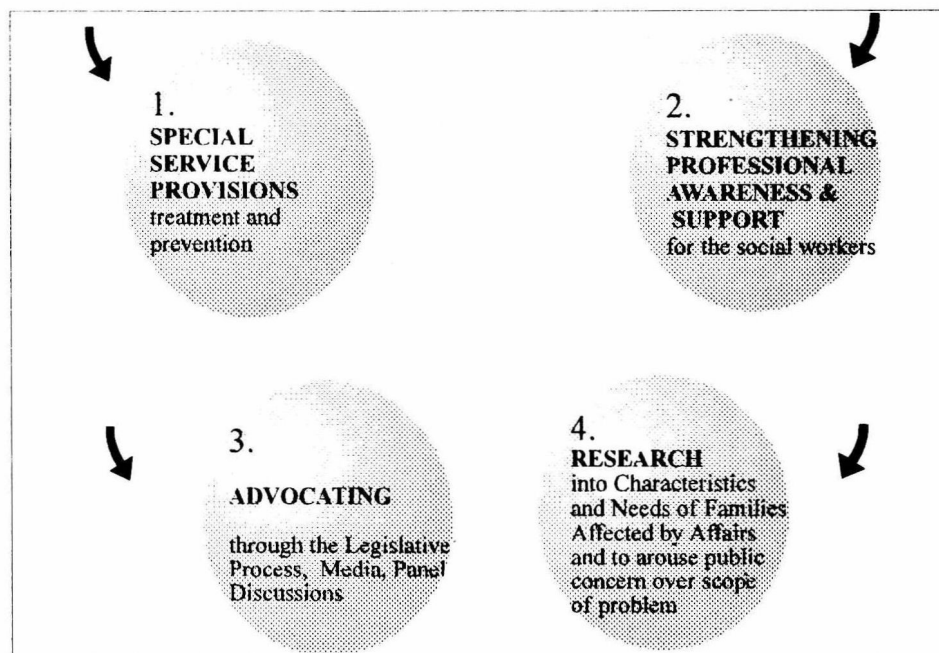
- approach to Law

**- tenancy rights for
custodian parent**

**- community property
clause**

The response of Caritas Family Service to Clients' Needs

In response to the dilemmas generated by affairs on the caseload, Caritas Family Service adopted a four pronged approach.



Approach One. Special Service Provisions.

Marriage counselling has always been an important aspect of the Caritas Family Service. The social workers intensified their work with marriages affected by affairs, organised group sharing and mutual help efforts for families having to respond to the extra demands of these circumstances.

In December 1993, a 'Working Group on Extra marital Affairs' was set up in order to launch various projects in response to the need of the families affected by Extramarital affairs. At the same time, the first mutual support group, named as 'Beyond Marriage', was formed by Tuen Mun (South) Family Service. The group offers an opportunity for members to ventilate their feelings and release their stress, empowering and helping them to understand their situation more objectively. Their efforts to arouse public awareness on the rising trend and damaging effects of extramarital affairs have attracted the interest of mass media to explore the problem.

Various special service provisions of Caritas Family Service launched in the period are described as below:-

1. Project for Women In Need

Financial support from the Essen Diocese fund from 1995 enabled Caritas to mount the project for Women in Need.

The Project includes the following services:-

1.1 Public Education

1.1.1 Hotline Service

A hotline service offering information on preventive measures and methods of handling the crisis of extra marital affairs. It is an effective channel to approach women in need at the preliminary stage of crisis as they tend to be passive and treat the affairs as stigmatizing their families which sometimes end in more tragedy because of the delay in intervention.

1.1.2 Production of Educational Pamphlets and Booklets

Educational pamphlets and booklets, for example, '面對婚外情' '預防及處理婚外情問題' with theme on the prevention of extra marital affairs are designed and distributed for families whose male members very often need to go on work trips to Mainland China. According to the workers' frontline experience, this is the potential target group facing the problem of involvement in extra marital affairs.

1.2 Mutual Support Group

Mutual support groups for women facing the crisis of spouses involved in extra marital affairs have been organised. Through empathetic sharing with others having the same problem, members gradually regained

self-esteem, and are confident enough to respond to social issues related to the marriage as a group. Their effort to arouse public awareness on the rising trend and damaging effect of extra marital affairs is significant.

1.3 Networking Services

In order to encourage and facilitate the women's efforts , especially those who tend to isolate themselves from the community, a reserve fund has been established to provide allowances for the women joining community activities, offering an honorarium for volunteers providing occasional child care service for children.

2. Marriage and Family Resource Centre

The Resource Centre is sponsored by Archdiocese of Cologne. It is a non-subservient service unit. Its purpose is to promote and enhance the inherent strengths of families, and stimulate self-sustaining activities on their behalf, through:

- 2.1 Providing information on services available to the adults in the families when they wish to improve their marital relationship or quality of family communication;
- 2.2 Providing reference materials on knowledge and skills to improve marital and family relationship;
- 2.3 Providing resources for social workers to run programs on topics of marriage and family relationship.

3. EMA services provided by Family Units in different district

In response to the need of the families suffering from the problem of EMA, various programmes are launched in different districts. These included conducting groups and seminars. The themes focused on empowering the clients, helping them to regain self-esteem, work out their emotional blockade, search for positive alternatives to handle the crisis of extramarital affairs, rebuilding marital relationship etc. Details of program organized in the districts are described in Appendix Four.

Approach Two. Strengthening Professional Awareness and Support

Various approaches in working with one or both spouses, and with the extra marital partners were promoted through a series of workshops, and through developing resource material.