

What Can the Government Do To Help Young People

Mok Ka Hon, Jonathan
Associate Degree of Arts, Year 2
Lingnan University

摘要

外界對傳媒、教師、社工和僑界如何為下一代創造一個良好的生長環境爭論不休。然而常常忽視作為社會基礎的家庭的角色。本文指出，現行的有關法律加劇家庭分化。政府應通過改善法律、稅制、社會福利和教育體制來維護家庭的完整。

In recent years, there have been a lot of discussions focusing on the development of young people in Hong Kong. Most people have been deeply concerned about the ability of young people to compete in the era of globalized economy and about youth unemployment problems.

The government has worked with business sector and NGOs to provide short-term jobs to alleviate the problem of youth unemployment. This effort should be appreciated.

Unfortunately, too much attention has been focused on the language abilities, global outlook and attitude of young people in workplaces, the declining moral standards of teenagers, such as indicated by their susceptibility to drug abuses and selling pirated entertainment products. The building block of the society—the family, has been largely neglected.

The education system and the quality of education are also in a mess. But I would like to discuss the breakdown of the family first, because this has certainly a big impact on the development of young people.

The sorry state of families

Consider what is happening to our families. Everyday newspapers carry stories of family violence, murders of family members, and increasing divorce cases and abortion cases of teenage girls. What has gone wrong?

Individualistic behaviour, nurtured by the onset of information technology and a corrupt media, people think, could be the reason for the increasing family problems.

The economic reform of China since 1978 while attracting foreign investments, has led to a surge in extra-marital affairs because of the need for a spouse to work on the mainland away from home. Divorce cases are now at an all time high.

The financial pressure is high particularly for mothers when fathers abandon their families for other women. The society will end up footing the bill of caring for the family as it applies for CSSA and other assistance.

Some women, who are not qualified for CSSA, may have to work longer or go back to work to make a living. Could young people learn to be good citizens when their parents fail to set a good example? Absolutely Not!

Some youth may be fortunate enough to have teachers, relatives and friends from their churches as the role models. But others may end up becoming triad members. They commit crimes and abuse drugs. Help, if it ever comes, is often too late.

What can the government do?

What can the government do to help our young people to enjoy a happy home?

It is acknowledged that we have already had youth commission to make recommendations on youth development. It has however focused on vocational and occupational training, rather than integrated youth development.

It is vital for families to be involved to equip youth for the challenge in adult lives. It is sad that the suggestion for a complete family policy went unheeded.

Divorce education should be implemented and made compulsory so that a divorced couple and to-be stepparents can better manage physical, property and emotional issues. All children should also be assigned to a social worker to monitor their psychological, mental, emotional and physical development till 18.

Can the government assist families financially?

As a starter, the government can offer an annual tax credit to a couple so as to reward their effort in sustaining the relationship.

For childbearing families, it is attractive to offer a further tax credit on them when the child

reaches a certain age in order to encourage parents to invest more on the next generation. It is unreasonable for the government not to offer proportional tax credit after the third child.

CSSA should be amended to reduce the stipend for applicants whose marriages end up in dissolution. Also a time limit for the payout may give them an incentive to plan for post-divorce living

School vouchers for the next generation

One way to help the new generations to escape from the vicious circle of poverty-low education-poverty is to introduce a system of school vouchers, with the amount based on the income of an individual family. Such vouchers should be distributed to allow parents to “buy” their favourite education for their children. Education is an investment for long term returns. While our middle-class and upper class families can opt for another system when one fails them, shouldn't our poor families also have that choice? To argue that parents may not know how to choose is quite unfair.

I believe through competition and genuine choices, school performance will improve. Parents from all walks of life will be more committed to improving schools. Students will have more talents discovered. Teachers and NGOs that run schools need to think more over course improvement and attract students. All parents should be allowed to “shop” for the best education. Such a measure reduces segregation as well. We can even encourage for-profit making companies to invest in education for expanding choices on parents.

The society has already suffered too much from the collapse of families. Social spending to help single families has skyrocketed. We have mixed values on the next generations. We are not working hard to preserve marriages, but are destroying them. The new generations will only be psychologically and mentally inferior if they are brought up in such dysfunctional families. If they have life-long problems like drug abuse and violence more resources will have to be committed to deal with them.

It is hoped that family law, tax reform, marriage planning, family education and social security can all be upgraded so our new generation will grow up in healthy and happy homes.