

**CENTRAL POLICY UNIT**  
**THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HONG KONG**  
**SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION**

**A STUDY ON THE PHENOMENON OF DIVORCE**  
**IN HONG KONG**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**

**FEBRUARY 2014**



---

THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

# A study on the phenomenon of divorce in Hong Kong

---

Final report

Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention, The University of Hong Kong

February 2014

## Preface

The project on “A study on the phenomenon of divorce in Hong Kong” was undertaken by The University of Hong Kong (HKU), as represented by the Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP).

### **Background of the study**

In light of the increasing cases of divorce in Hong Kong and the concern over impact of divorce on children, the Hong Kong University Family Institute (HKUFI) started a project on Children in Divorce Families in late 2010. With the approval and assistance from the Family Court, a sample of 900 cases from the Family Court Registry was selected. Data coding sheets were designed and tested, and data coding shell were developed, with collection, coding and draft analysis completed in late 2012.

The Family Council commissioned this study, in order to have a thorough picture of this phenomenon. The team would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the HKUFI for giving consent to use the data of these 900 cases collected from the Family Court as part of the quantitative data for this study.

The research team comprises the principal investigator (PI), **Professor Paul YIP**, Director of the CSRP and Professor of the Department of Social Work and Social Administration at The University of Hong Kong, the following **four co-investigators** (Co-Is) and project coordinator:

- Dr. Shu-Sen Chang (Psychiatrist and Research Assistant Professor, CSRP, HKU)
- Dr. Frances Law (RSW and Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, HKU)
- Ms. Lianne Tai (RSW; Accredited Family Mediator; Lecturer, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, HKU)
- Dr. Sandra Tsang (Clinical Psychologist, RSW, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, HKU)
- Ms. Melissa Chan (Project coordinator, CSRP, HKU)

We would also like to thank our research collaborators:

- Mrs. Patricia Chu (Associate Director, HKU Family Institute, HKU)

- Dr. Susan Fan, (Executive Director, The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong)
- Ms. Paulina Kwok (Supervisor, Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre)

And thank you for kind support from Hon. Judge Bebe Chu for facilitating and providing helpful comments on the study.

In addition, we would like to thank Ms. Melissa Chan, for coordination, data collection and analysis, and write-up of the report; Mr. Siu-Lun Chow and Ms. Carmen Lee for assistance in data analysis; research assistants Ms. Esther Li and Ms. Elaine He for editing and write-up; Ms. Cindy Yeung, Ms. Karen Chan, Ms. Polly Lam and Mr. Carson Chan for data coding; Mr. Lincoln Hui for transcriptions; Mr. Feng Sha and Ms. Kathy Xiao for literature review; without which the completion of this study would not have been possible.

We would like to thank the HKUFI, the Family Court and the Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR) Government for providing data. We would like to thank the NGOs and respective social workers for recruitment and arrangement of focus groups and case studies.

Last but not least, we wish to thank all individual interviewees who were willing to share their experiences with us.

## **Disclaimer**

Any information herein or any portion of the information herein may NOT be quoted, re-produced, duplicated, copied, sold, or otherwise exploited for any purpose without the express permission of the Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention at The University of Hong Kong.



## Table of content

Preface.....	2
Table of content.....	4
Executive summary.....	6
Research questions.....	14
Chapter guide.....	16
1 Chapter 1 - Literature review & Methodology .....	20
1.1 The evolution of divorce .....	20
1.2 The risk and protective factors of divorce .....	22
1.3 The impacts of divorce.....	23
1.4 Framework in understanding the process of divorce .....	26
1.5 Couples in a distressed relationship: Attitudes and perception.....	30
1.6 Couples in a distressed relationship: Behaviors and skillsets .....	30
1.7 Country analysis and interventions .....	32
1.8 Research gap in Hong Kong .....	43
1.9 Data sources .....	45
2 Chapter 2 - Demographic and Socioeconomic Patterns and Trend of Divorce cases in Hong Kong .....	47
2.1 Basic demographic information .....	47
2.2 Socioeconomic Patterns and Trend.....	52
2.3 Children related information.....	53
2.4 Legal information of divorce filings .....	59
2.5 Sub-group of Particular Divorce Cases.....	62
2.6 Summary .....	65
2.7 Issues with Family Court data set .....	66
3 Chapter 3 - Socioeconomic and demographic patterns of divorce at levels of households and individuals	67
3.1 Households with children aged under 18.....	67
3.2 Individual data by marital status .....	81
3.3 Hong Kong residents versus New Immigrants from China.....	88
3.4 Summary .....	89
3.5 Issues with Census data set .....	91
Chapter 4 to 6 on Qualitative Study.....	92
Chapter 4-Using an ecological model to explain factors that may affect marital stability.....	95
<b>4.1 Individual level.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>4.2 Couple level.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>4.3 Family and Friends level .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>4.4 Society level.....</b>	<b>105</b>



<b>4.5</b>	<b>Summary</b> .....	109
<b>5</b>	<b>Chapter 5-Using an Ecological model to illustrate the impacts of divorce</b> .....	111
5.1	<b>Impacts on Individual</b> .....	111
5.2	<b>Impacts on Children and Family</b> .....	113
5.3	<b>Societal impacts</b> .....	114
5.4	<b>Summary</b> .....	116
<b>6</b>	<b>Chapter 6–Needs of the families</b> .....	118
6.1	<b>Process of Decision Making</b> .....	118
6.2	<b>Help seeking and service utilization</b> .....	119
6.3	<b>Tangible needs</b> .....	123
6.4	<b>Intangible needs</b> .....	124
6.5	<b>Other needs suggested by frontline professionals and social workers</b> .....	125
6.6	<b>Summary</b> .....	127
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	128
	<b>Limitations of the study</b> .....	129
<b>8</b>	<b>Recommendations</b> .....	132
	Appendix A – Data tables from Family Court.....	142
	Appendix B –Tables from Census Data Set.....	150
	Appendix C – Methodology of household data analysis.....	186
	Appendix D – Case interview and focus group questions.....	190
	Appendix E – Nodes coded in Nvivo.....	195
	Appendix F – Glossary.....	199
	Selected References.....	202

# Executive summary

## *Study background, aim and method*

Divorce is increasingly common in Hong Kong but systematic studies on the phenomenon have been rare. The Hong Kong University Family Institute (HKUFI) started a Project on Children in Divorce Families in late 2010, collecting data from 900 cases, 300 each from 1999, 2004 and 2009 with the approval and assistance of the Family Court. The collection, coding and draft analysis of data was completed in late 2012.

In the light of the increase of divorce cases and their profound impact on children and families, The Family Council sponsored the Department of Social Work and Social Administration and CSRP of the University of Hong Kong to conduct a study titled “A Study on the Phenomenon of Divorce in Hong Kong” in May 2012 and has asked the Central Policy Unit to help commission and oversee the study.

This is a comprehensive study where both quantitative and qualitative data have been adopted to examine this issue. It aims to identify and understand the demographic and socioeconomic patterns and the trend of divorce, the risk and protective factors, the impacts of divorce on the affected individuals and the needs of divorced families in Hong Kong.

This study used several research methods to optimize the understanding of the divorce phenomenon in Hong Kong. Aside from conducting a thorough literature review on divorce issues and interventions in other countries, we have included three other research methods: (i) a study of the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of divorced people and their families based on data collected from the Family Court and Census and Statistic Department, (ii) interviews of forty-one people who were considering divorce, filing for divorce, or already divorced, and those in marital conflicts, and (iii) two focus groups with frontline professionals who were handling divorce cases. The quantitative analysis was based on (i) a total of 1,200 case files obtained from the Family Court (900 case files were collected by the HKUFI, and 300 additional cases in 2011 were captured for a close surveillance of the recent development), and (ii) three Census year micro-set data (2001, 2006 and 2011) for tracking the phenomenon at a macro scale.

## *Demographic and Socioeconomic Profiles*



Analysis of the sample of data collected at the Family Court shows the average length of marriage lies around 11.5 to 12.7 years amongst these divorcing couples. However, this may be dependent upon the number of children that the couples bear within their marriage. The proportion of couples with no children filing divorce has increased over the years, and their average length of marriage is 7 years. For couples with 1-2 children, their marriages last for an average of 14.3 years; for couples with 3 or more children, their marriages last for an average of 22.2 years.

Our results show that, whilst the divorced population and children affected are rapidly and substantially increasing in Hong Kong, they have experienced worse financial condition and less favourable economic perspective than the general Hong Kong population. Data collected from the Family Court and Census show that the total number of divorce decrees granted in 2012 (23,255 cases) was more than 10 times the number in 1981 (2,062 cases) in Hong Kong. The proportion of divorced/ separated individuals increased from 2.7% in 2001 to 4.4% in 2011. It is estimated that the proportion of children affected by divorce has risen from 4% in 2001 to 7% in 2011<sup>1</sup>, acting against the drop in fertility rate<sup>1</sup> and new born babies over the years.

Although divorced women were more likely to work compared with the general female population, divorced households were found to face a high financial pressure and showed an unfavourable trend in their income. The median monthly household income for divorced household (with children aged 18 or below) has dropped in the past decade (\$10,000 in 2001 to \$9,500 in 2011), in contrast to an increase in median household income in all households over the same period. In the years studied, at least 30% of the divorced households with children lived under the poverty line<sup>2</sup> in comparison to less than 20% in the married population. Regarding the housing condition, the proportion of divorced households living in government rentals has increased (from 44% in 2001 to 57% in 2011), whilst the proportion of private housing has decreased over the same period (from 41% to 28%). Around 30% of these households spent over 25% of their income on rent.

### ***Cases and Focus Group Studies***

The case studies and focus group discussions aim to explore factors associated with unhappy married

---

<sup>1</sup> from 57140 (4% of 2001 children population) to 75040 (6% of 2006) and 80780 (7% of 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Please note that the definition of poverty line in this report is different from the poverty line has been set by the Commission of Poverty of the HKSAR government. For our definition, please refer to Section 3.1.1 of the report.

life that may increase the risk of divorce and to identify the impact of divorce on well-being, particularly of the young children. Forty-one case interviews and two focus groups were conducted. Divorce was perceived as common in both the older and younger generations, but older individuals with families and children tended to be more cautious about filing for divorce. There are some factors that may lead to an unbalanced married life and subsequent conflicts, such as communication blocks, age gap between the couple<sup>3</sup>, weak relationship foundation, the adjustment of new parenthood, etc. The participants stated that other factors such as living with extended family members and financial and debt problems also gave rise to conflicts in their marriage. The impacts of divorce on the emotional health of affected adults and children, as well as academic motivation of children, are generally negative.

### ***Recommendations***

Both quantitative and qualitative data show that many divorced households are facing economic challenges. Their **financial and housing needs** should be addressed by strengthening the existing support from the housing and social welfare systems, such as adjusting the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and single-parent allowance for the inflation to fit current economic situation. Moreover, it is recommended to speed up the process of applying for compassionate rehousing and consider providing interim housing for families in need who may not qualify for conditional tenancy in public housing on compassionate ground, so as to avoid further worsening of these families' situations due to unresolved issues such as domestic violence. It is also noted the needs not yet addressed amongst those just above the CSSA threshold, and those who are not eligible to apply for public housing, present a service gap that warrants the government's attention.

Aside from providing tangible support, it is recommended that the policy makers and stakeholders should empower and release the labour force by providing adequate supports and resources for these families. The **provision of childcare services**, in particular the afterschool services, should be enhanced. **Flexible work mode and work hours** should be provided for these parents, enabling them to fulfil duties as both a caregiver and breadwinner.

**Marital counselling** at different life stages (which may include pre-marital education) may be useful to facilitate harmonious relation. Marital counselling empowers couples to make informed decisions to begin, to develop or to end their marriage, as well as to minimize negative impact on well-being of their

---

<sup>3</sup> Refer to definition in Section 4.2.1 of the report.

children, and the occurrence of unhappy married life or divorce.

**When marital breakdown is inevitable, specific interventions, such as divorce education, designed for children and parents experiencing divorce** can be considered. Divorce education increases parents’ awareness of the impact of divorce on children. It generally covers information-based and skills-based education that aims to reduce disputes needed to be settled in the court. In addition, non-court based interventions should help children and parents cope with stress in the divorce process and strengthen their problem solving skills. Moreover, interventions designed for parents should address their emotional needs and help raise their competence in parenting, and should develop effective co-parenting between the divorced spouses. Stakeholders and policy makers may take reference from overseas’ experiences. For example, there are court-based interventions and education for children and parents in the US and Singapore. In the UK, there are also school-based programs for children of divorced families.

Both participants and frontline professionals think that the **procedure of applying for divorce** should be streamlined, simplified, and improved to reduce stress. This could be achieved by providing **additional education or assistance on the application procedure**. Educational materials should cover important topics such as the divorce process, legal rights of both parties, criteria for custodial arrangements, etc.

Lastly, this study has identified important areas where **more research** should be done to understand the situation better and inform policy formulation. For example, remarriages and children in family transition are increasingly common. Evaluation of the effectiveness of pre-and post-divorce interventions is necessary, and the data availability is yet to be improved. Data currently available on divorced couples’ educational qualifications and income, which have been shown to be important risk factors in western literature, are limited. Also, data on the duration of marriages to date and on re-marriages are necessary to for comparison with the married population for further studies on risk and protective factors. In view of the increasing workload of the Family Court, judicial and administrative support should be strengthened for data collection to monitor divorce trend and inform policy making. It is recommended that policy makers and stakeholders should **carry out updated evaluation studies** to identify effective ways to promote mediation services as they are not as widely used as desired.

This commissioned study is an extremely important first step towards future endeavours for a better understanding of families facing divorce situation in Hong Kong. As divorce is perceived to be more acceptable as an option for dissatisfactory marital relationships and has become more common than before;

such understanding is fundamental for evidence-based policy making, which will enhance public awareness on how to minimize the negative impact, as well as restore the general functioning of individuals and children affected by divorce.



# 中文摘要

## 研究背景，目標及方法

離婚在香港已經成為越來越普遍的現象，但有系統的相關研究卻甚少。有見及此，香港大學家庭研究院獲家事法庭的支持，收集了 900 宗離婚個案（1999 年、2004 年及 2009 年各 300 宗個案）的資料，於 2010 年末就離婚對孩子的影響作出研究，並於 2012 年末完成數據整理及分析。

另一方面，鑑於近年離婚急速上升的趨勢及其對家庭成員之深遠的影響，家庭議會於 2012 年 5 月委託香港大學社會工作及社會行政學系和香港大學防止自殺研究中心進行《香港離婚現象之研究》，並由中央政策組負擔統籌及監察是項研究。

本研究同時採用定量和質性數據及多種方法來全面探討香港離婚人口的結構及其社會經濟狀況、離婚趨勢、離婚風險及其保護因素、離婚對個人的影響以及離婚家庭的需要。除了從文獻全面了解其他國家的離婚情況及其處理或介入方法，我們還進行了三項研究，包括：（一）基於家事法庭及政府統計處所提供的數據，研究離婚人口的統計及其社會經濟概況，（二）訪談 41 位還在考慮離婚、正提交離婚、已經離婚、或仍然處身婚姻衝突中的人士，及（三）兩個由處理離婚個案的專業人員組成的聚焦小組。本研究之定量數據來自：（一）家事法庭的 1,200 宗個案；當中包括由香港大學家庭研究院所收集的 900 宗個案，及本研究團隊於 2011 所收集的另外 300 宗個案的數據，以跟進香港離婚狀況的最新趨勢，及（二）分別於 2001 年、2006 年及 2011 年的人口普查數據，以對香港的離婚現象作一個宏觀的研究。

## 人口和社會經濟概況

根據家事法庭的數據，離婚夫婦的平均婚齡是 11.5 至 12.7 年。婚姻的長短可能與夫婦生養孩子的多少有關。無子女的夫婦申請離婚的比例有上升的趨勢，平均婚齡為 7 年。育有一至兩個孩子的夫婦的平均婚齡為 14.3 年，而育有 3 個或更多子女的夫婦的婚姻平均可持續 22.2 年。

我們的研究顯示香港受離婚影響的人口正在迅速增加，而且他們的經濟狀況比一般香港人差。家事法庭和人口普查的數據顯示 2012 年的離婚個案（23,255 宗）是 1981 年（2,062 宗）的 10 倍以上。離婚或分居人士的比例從 2001 年的 2.7% 上升至 2011 年的 4.4%。儘管多年來生育率下降，因離婚的人數增加，受離婚影響的兒童比例也不斷上升，估計從 2001 年的 4% 升至 2011 年的 7%<sup>4</sup>。

<sup>4</sup> 從 2001 年的 57140（佔兒童人口的 4%）到 2006 年的 75040（6%）和 2011 年的 80780（7%）



雖然離婚女性的就業率高於整體香港就業女性，離婚家庭的經濟狀況卻欠佳，收入更呈下降趨勢。離婚家庭（有 18 歲或以下的兒童）的人息中位數在過去十年間，從 2001 年的 10,000 元下降至 2011 年的 9,500 元，而同期的整體香港家庭入息中位數卻有所增加。至少有 30% 有孩子的離婚家庭生活於貧困線<sup>5</sup>以下，而該比例在已婚人群中並不超過 20%。至於住屋情況，離異家庭住在政府出租公屋的比例有所增加（從 2001 年的 44% 到 2011 年的 57%），而私人住屋的比例在同期有所下降（從 41% 到 28%）。約有 30% 的離婚家庭的住屋租金佔其收入的 25% 或以上。

### 個案和焦點小組研究

此研究目的在於探索增加離婚風險的不穩定因素，和離婚對個人（特別是對兒童）的影響。在四十一個個案訪談和兩個焦點小組中發現受訪者（不分年齡）都認為離婚是常見的現象，但有家庭和子女的年長人士傾向對離婚持較為謹慎的態度；另一方面，有可能導致婚姻不平衡及隨後衝突的因素包括：夫妻溝通問題，夫妻之間較大<sup>6</sup>的年齡差距，感情基礎不牢，初為父母的適應等。受訪者亦指出與其他家庭成員（例如，丈夫的父母）一起生活以及金錢和債務等問題也會導致夫妻之間的衝突。離婚對受影響的成人及兒童的情緒健康，以及兒童的學習動力一般都是負面的。

### 政策建議

定量和質性數據都說明了很多離婚家庭正面臨經濟挑戰。要解決他們的經濟和住屋需求，政府需要在社會福利和住屋方面加強對離婚人士的協助，如隨著通脹調整綜合社會保障援助（綜援）和單親津貼等。另外，此研究建議加快有條件體恤安置的審批，及為有需要但未合資格的家庭提供其他臨時住屋，以免一些未解決的問題（如家庭暴力）進一步惡化。政府也應該重視不及資格申請「綜援」和公屋人士的需要。

除了提供物質上的援助，政策制定者和持份者應協助釋放離婚家庭的勞動人口，例如加強托兒服務（尤其是課後服務），及鼓勵靈活的工作模式和彈性工作時間，以賦權予離婚人士，使他們能同時履行照顧兒童和養家糊口的職責。

不同階段的婚姻輔導（包括婚前輔導）對促進家庭的和諧關係有一定作用。婚姻輔導協助個人面對結婚，維持婚姻關係或在考慮離婚時能作出成熟的決定，並同時減少婚姻衝突及離婚對個人及孩子造成的不良影響。

<sup>5</sup> 備註：此研究對貧窮線的定義與香港政府扶貧委員會所定的並不相同。此研究的定義可參考本報告書之 3.1.1 章

<sup>6</sup> 參考 4.2.1 章的定義



當離婚無可避免要發生時，政策制定者和持份者可以考慮為經歷離婚的父母和子女設計**具體的介入方法**，如離婚教育，以減低離婚帶來的傷害。此措施可提供適時的資訊，以助離婚人士處理離婚前後的事項，並可讓父母了解離婚對子女的影響，以及減少在法庭上解決紛爭。此外，非法院主導的介入方法可以幫助孩子和父母應付在離婚過程所承受的壓力並加強他們解決問題的能力，而針對父母的介入方法應處理他們的情緒及提高他們的親職效能，並促進離異父母在親職上的合作。政策制定者和持份者可以參考國外的例子，如美國和新加坡的法院設有對父母和孩子的離婚教育，在英國的學校則有針對離異家庭子女的方案。

受訪者和專業人員認為應該簡化**申請離婚的程序**，以減少申請離婚者的壓力。因此我們建議給予有需要人士**更多關於申請程序的教育或援助**，並提供雙方當事人的法律權利和兒童管養權等資料。

最後，我們仍需進行**更多研究和掌握**有關數據作出定期的監察，才能更廣泛和深入了解離婚的情況以協助制定政策。隨著離婚率的上升，再婚的個案及經歷父母離婚的孩子越來越多，實在有迫切的需要掌握有關數據及評估離婚前、離婚後的介入方法的效能。我們亦需要進一步研究離婚的風險及保護因素。雖然西方文獻已證明夫婦的學歷和收入是重要的風險因素之一，然而家事法庭缺乏該方面的數據。再者，由於欠缺已婚及離婚人口的婚齡和有關再婚的數據，故亦難與已婚人口進行比較。鑒於家事法庭的工作量日益增加，司法與行政機關應就數據收集作出相應的支援，以便監察離婚趨勢及協助政策制定。我們並建議政策制定者和持份者定時更新數據及**進行評估研究**，以確定有效的方法來提高調解服務的使用率。

此研究踏出了了解香港離婚家庭情況極其重要的第一步。無疑，離婚已普遍成為解決婚姻關係問題的一種選擇，有鑑於此，我們必須基於有效的數據和實證以制定政策，減少離婚對社會的負面影響，讓受影響的人士及兒童恢復正常生活。



# Research questions

As there have not been previous systematic efforts in studying the phenomenon of divorce in Hong Kong, there has been limited information for policy makers and stakeholders' references to make informed decisions. In sum, these are the objectives of the study:

1. To identify the demographic and socioeconomic patterns and trend of divorce in Hong Kong
2. To understand the risk and protective factors of divorce in Hong Kong
3. To understand the impacts of divorce on the affected individuals (including the couple and their children)
4. To understand the associated needs of divorced families

Therefore, informed by the literature review, and designed to address the objectives of the study, this report is written with the aim to answer the following research questions:

Quantitative data:

*To identify demographic and socioeconomic patterns and trends of divorce:*

- A. What are the associations between socioeconomic/demographic variables and divorce in Hong Kong? (Chapter 2)
- B. Are there any groups who are at a higher risk of divorce than the others? What are the risk (and protective) factors of divorce? (Chapter 2)
- C. What may characterize the profile of a divorced family? How do they differ in terms of employment status, household income, and educational attainment level? (Chapter 3)

Qualitative data:

*To further explore the factors affecting the stability of marriage:*

- D. Are there other risk (and protective) factors that cannot be identified from the quantitative data? (E.g. exploring family dynamics, communication styles etc.) (Chapter 4)
- E. How do individuals currently perceive marriage and divorce? (Chapter 4)
- F. How do the perception and attitudes towards marriage and divorce differ between couples who stay married and those who are divorced? (Chapter 4)



- G. What are the problems and barriers faced by married and divorced couples at different stages of their life (early marriage, childbearing, parenting etc.)? What are the differences in their help seeking and problem solving behavior when conflicts arise in their marriage? (Chapter 4)

*To understand the impacts of divorce on the affected individuals (including the couple and their children) and the community:*

- H. What are the impacts of divorce on the couple and children (if any)? (Chapter 5)  
I. How do they cope with these family transitions? (Chapter 5)

*To understand the associated needs of divorced families:*

- J. What are the factors that may hinder them from help-seeking? (Chapter 6)  
K. How do they perceive mediation services available in Hong Kong? (Chapter 6)  
L. What kind of support services they expect to be available in the community? (Chapter 6)



## Chapter guide

As the whole report contains detailed and comprehensive information, a chapter guide for chapter 2-6 is provided for easy reference.

### **Chapter 2 – Demographic and socioeconomic patterns and trend of divorce cases in Hong Kong**

This chapter illustrates the profile of *couples filing divorce* based on the data extracted from Family Court data files.

Section #	Section title	Page
2.1	<b>Basic demographic</b>	47
2.1.1	Average length of marriage of divorce cases	
2.1.2	Age at divorce and age at time of marriage	
2.1.3	Divorce Cases Filed Relating to Marriage in Mainland China	
2.2	<b>Socioeconomic Patterns and Trend</b>	52
2.3	<b>Children related information</b>	53
2.3.1	Children of Divorced Couples	
2.3.2	Upbringing of Children	
2.3.3	Associations between Length of Marriage and Number of Children	
2.3.4	Associations between Length of Marriage and Couple’s Age Difference	
2.4	<b>Legal information of divorce filings</b>	61
2.4.1	Basic Statistics of Divorce Decree	
2.4.2	Comparison between Cases of Petitions and Joint Applications	
2.5	<b>Sub-group of Particular Divorce Cases</b>	64
2.5.1	Divorce Cases Filed for Unreasonable Behavior	
2.5.2	Remarriages Ending in Divorce	
2.6	<b>Summary</b>	67
2.7	<b>Issues with Family Court data set</b>	68

### **Chapter 3 - Socioeconomic and demographic patterns of divorce at levels of households and individuals**

This chapter illustrates the socioeconomic and demographic patterns of *divorce households* based on the Census data.



Section #	Section title	Page
3.1	<b>Households with children aged under 18</b>	69
3.1.1	Socioeconomic status (SES) differences between households	70
3.1.1.1	The average household size	
3.1.1.2	Working household members	
3.1.1.3	Monthly household income	
3.1.1.4	Poverty situation	
3.1.1.5	Employment status	
3.1.1.6	Number of dependents	
3.1.2	Housing	78
3.1.2.1	Type of housing	
3.1.2.2	Tenure of accommodation	
3.1.2.3	Financial burden	
3.1.3	Immigration status	78
3.2	<b>Individual data by marital status</b>	83
3.2.1	Socioeconomic status (SES) differences	83
3.2.1.1	Total personal income from all employment	
3.2.1.2	Poverty situation	
3.2.1.3	Employment status	
3.2.1.4	Education completed	
3.2.1.5	Occupation & Industry	
3.2.2	Housing	89
3.2.2.1	Housing Type	
3.2.3	Immigration status	90
3.2.3.1	New immigrant status	
3.3	Hong Kong residents versus New Immigrants from China	90
3.4	Summary	91
3.5	Issues with Census data set	92

#### **Chapter 4 - Using an ecological model to explain factors that may affect marital stability**

This chapter illustrates the factors that may affect marital stability.

Section #	Section title	Page
-----------	---------------	------



4.1	<b>Individual level</b>	97
4.2	<b>Couple level</b>	98
4.2.1	Age Gap	
4.2.2	Weak Pre-marriage Relationship	
4.2.3	Child-related Issues	
4.2.4	Retirement	
4.2.5	Lack of Communication	
4.2.6	Extra-marital Affairs	
4.2.7	Financial Stress	
4.2.8	Unreasonable Behaviors	
4.3	<b>Family and Friends level</b>	104
4.3.1	Extended Family	
4.3.1.1	Conflicts with extended family members	
4.3.1.2	Extended family members' involvement in marriage and divorce	
4.4	<b>Society level</b>	106
4.4.1	Case study on cross-border marriages	
4.5	<b>Summary</b>	111

### **Chapter 5 - Using an ecological model to illustrate the impacts of divorce**

This chapter illustrates the impacts of divorce at different levels.

<b>Section #</b>	<b>Section title</b>	<b>Page</b>
5.1	<b>Impacts on Individual</b>	112
5.1.1	Impact on Individuals' Emotions	
5.1.2	Views on remarriage	
5.2	<b>Impacts on Children and Family</b>	112
5.2.1	Impact on Children	
5.2.2	Impact on Relationship between Children and Parents	
5.2.2	<b>Impact on Relationship between Children and Parents</b>  It is noted that most of the children have their own preference in choosing their custodial parents. Some children express hatred or strong	116



dislike of one parent. These feelings may be influenced by negative comments by the other parent. Some interviewees report serious negative comments towards one parent by the other one. One case said that her husband was abnormal because he did not wear underwear at home even when he was in the same room with his two daughters. Another interviewee said that her husband's family has no idea how to teach her children. One interviewee discussed openly with her children and let them choose which parent to follow.

As professionals observe, during the conflicts on custody, the children often become the topic of debate. Both parties want their children to take sides. Sometimes, parental alienation happens. One side may not allow the children to visit the other, or he / she will send their children as “detective” to collect the latest updates on their ex-partner.

***Children and Non-custodial Parents***

For non-custodial parents who still see their children, some meet quite frequently, and they may share some childcare duty. Some meet monthly, or on special occasions like Fathers’ Day. Some non-custodial parents request to meet the children, but whether the children are willing to do so is another matter. Children who still keep in touch with the non-custodial parents hold positive relationship with them.

Concerned with the attitude of custodial parents, some support their children to meet the other parent, or at least give them the choice of doing so. Others are more ambivalent. The parents gave the phone number of the non-custodial parents to their children, and asked them to call if they miss him / her. Some children met their fathers when they were grown-up. Some interviewees initially forbade the children from meeting their non-custodial parent. However, they gradually became lenient as time went by. Still there are some interviewees who are non-custodial parents cannot see their children frequently. Some are forbidden from seeing their non-custodial parents since the custodial parents are uncooperative.

	<p><b><i>Children and Custodial Parents</i></b></p> <p>Amongst the divorced cases, the relationship between the children and the custodial parents is not always positive. In some cases, it is worse than before and some children even blamed the custodial parents for the deteriorative financial situation at home. Some children blamed their mother for depriving them of opportunities to develop their hobbies. In another case, the interviewee thought her daughter encountered some emotional issues as she accused her mother of abusing her. It is unclear whether the daughter’s emotional problems are due to the family conflicts she has experienced before.</p> <p>Nevertheless, in some other cases, the custodial parents and the children feel that they live a much better and happier life together after divorce for there are no more quarrels and abuse in the families. One interviewee expressed the relationship between her and her daughter has become much closer. This may be due to more time spent with her, and her daughter has more attention from her mother after divorce. In another case, the son complained about the situation when he was young. He may blame his mother for all the changes he needed to adapt to. However, as he grew older, he no longer complains as he understands that his mother is not to blame. He understands that his mother bears a lot of stress bringing him up.</p> <p><b>Societal impacts</b></p>	
5.3.1	Stigma about single-parent family	
5.4	<b>Summary</b>	117

**Chapter 6 – Needs of the families**

This chapter illustrates the needs voiced out by cases interviewed, and focus group professionals.

Section #	Section title	Page
-----------	---------------	------



6.1	<b>Process of Decision Making</b>	119
6.2	<b>Help seeking and service utilization</b>	120
6.3	<b>Tangible needs</b>	124
6.3.1	Housing	
6.3.2	CSSA, other income allowance, subsidy	
6.3.3	Childcare services	
6.4	<b>Intangible needs</b>	125
6.4.1	Emotional support	
6.4.2	Equal opportunities for children	
6.4.3	Work culture and policy	
6.5	<b>Other needs suggested by frontline professionals and social workers</b>	126
6.5.1	Filing procedures	
6.5.2	Maintenance order	
6.5.3	Divorce application	
6.5.4	Prenuptial agreement	
6.5.5	Mediation	
6.6	<b>Summary</b>	127



# Chapter 1 - Literature review & Methodology

## 1.1 The evolution of divorce

The phenomenon of a dramatic increase in divorce has been observed in several countries during 1960-1980s. In the United States, the crude divorce rate doubled from 2.2 per 1000 people in 1960 to 5.2 in 1980, and dropped to 3.6 in 2007 (US Census Bureau, 2011). In the UK, a similar trend is observed. The refined divorce rate (measured in 1000 married individuals) climbed from 5.9 per 1000 married individuals in 1971, to 11.9 in 1981, and 11.1 in 2010 (Rogers, 2011).

These increases may be associated with the legislative changes in divorce procedures. With the introduction of “no-fault” divorce in the 1960s in US, the number of divorces surged. In the UK, the 1969 Divorce Law Reform Act introduced “no fault separation” as option for grounds of divorce, a similar surge in was observed thereafter.

Hong Kong is no exception. The number of divorce decrees granted increased from 2,062 in 1981 to 23,255 in 2012 (C&SD). The crude divorce rate<sup>7</sup> increased from 0.53 per 1000 in 1981 to 3.27 in 2011, and the ratio of annual divorces by annual marriages increased from 0.1 in 1986 to 0.34 in 2011, with a peak at 0.43 in 2000. Refer to the chart below, it appears Hong Kong is not the only Asian city that observes a rise in number of divorces over the past few decades. Our neighboring cities in Asia observed an increasing trend as well<sup>8</sup>. The increase is remarkably apparent in 1990-2000s, and slowed down a bit over the past 5 years.

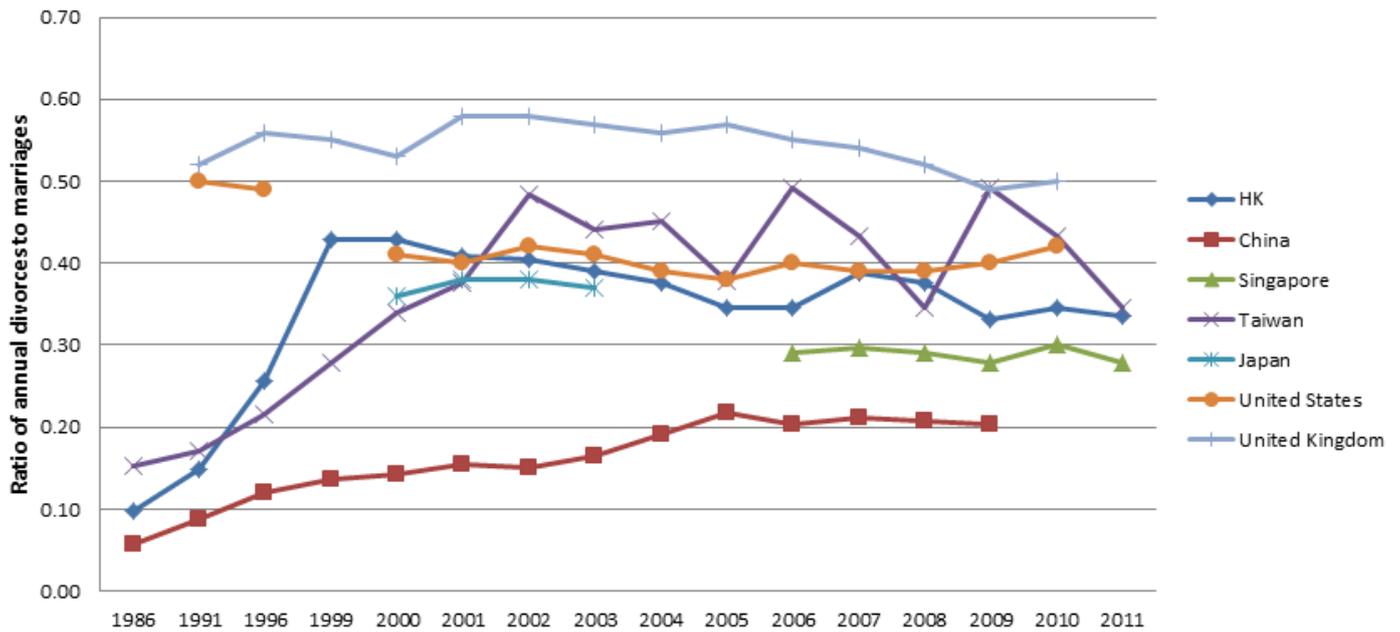
---

<sup>7</sup> Crude divorce rate is defined as number of divorces per 1000 population aged 15 or above

<sup>8</sup> These figures based upon the national statistics of each country

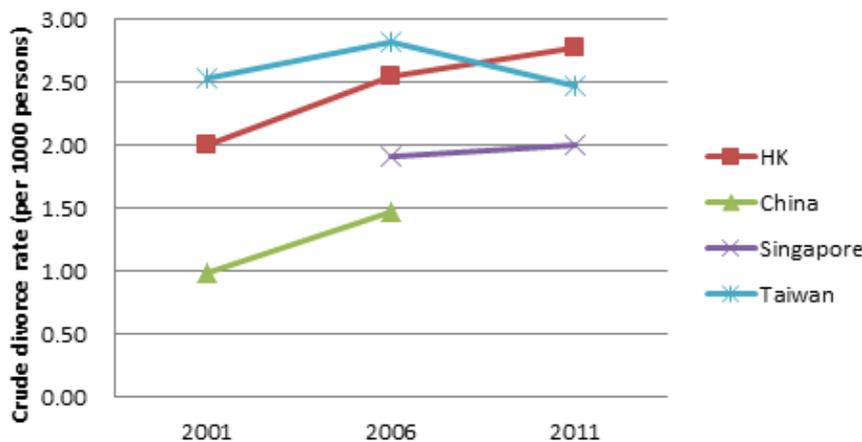


### Cross-country comparison



Compared to Western countries, Asian countries seemed to have a relatively lower ratio of divorce to marriage. However, the evolution of divorce (i.e. a marked increase in number of divorces) follows a similar pattern as the Western society. Asian countries’ evolution of divorce happened perhaps a few decades later compared with Western countries. One of the reasons may be the influence of individualism culture, and the changing perception of marriage and relationships<sup>9</sup>. Another change is the liberalization of the laws, as it removes barriers to divorce. When we compare Hong Kong with other cities where Chinese are the majority population, Hong Kong seems to be having a relatively high crude divorce rate.

### Asian countries crude divorce rate



<sup>9</sup> There is some suggestion that the increase in marriage frauds for residential permits among cross border marriages may contribute to the rapid increase of divorces in Hong Kong (as quoted by one frontline professional).



## Situation in Hong Kong

The number of individuals who are divorced and or separated increased from 152,349 in 2001 to 278,057 in 2011, increased by almost a double of the number in 2001. And it increased from 2.7% to 4.4% of the population aged 15 or above.

HK Census	2001	2006	2011
Divorced	152,349 (2.7%)	189,563 (3.2%)	243,946 (3.9%)
Separated		34,722 (0.6%)	34,111 (0.5%)

According to the census 5% micro dataset, there are 67852, 60698, and 55246 children aged 18 or below in 2001, 2006, and 2011 respectively. And the number of children living in divorced households<sup>10</sup> are 2857 (4%), 3752 (6%), and 4039 (7%) respectively for 2001, 2006, 2011. Despite the drop in fertility rate in Hong Kong, the proportion of children affected by divorce increase from 4% to 7%. Therefore, it is estimated there are 57140, 75040, and 80780 children living in divorced households respectively in 2001, 2006 and 2011.

## 1.2 The risk and protective factors of divorce

According to the model developed by Berrington and Diamond (1997), parents' characteristics, current socioeconomic status, marital factors, interpersonal behavior problems, and attitudes towards divorce interact as factors affecting the risk of divorce. Parents' characteristics referred to parental divorce, growing up in a household without parents who were continually married. Current socioeconomic status referred to unemployment, low income, or receipt of benefit. Some earlier studies found a positive association between the wife's employment/income and divorce rate. However, more recent evidence was mixed. One important factor was lower education level, where evidence was relatively robust. Marital factors included early age of marriage (teenage), premarital birth, second or higher order marriage with children, and the higher number of perceived relationship problems. Interpersonal behavior problems referred to domestic violence in the household, and infidelity. Attitudes towards divorce referred to the low level of trust and love between spouses, and previous partnership breakdown (Amato, 2010; Clarke & Berrington, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Divorced household is defined by the households with a family nucleus that comprise of divorced individuals and children under 18 (from the Census 5% micro dataset)



### Risk and protective factors associated with children experiencing negative impact as a result of divorce–

Aside from factors that put couples at higher risk of divorce, some studies looked the risk factors that put children of divorcees at higher risk of experiencing negative impact. On the individual level, children’s characteristics and coping strategies associate with their risk levels. For example, children with avoidance and distraction coping style did worse. Parents’ mental health status, parent-children relations, and parenting styles including the disciplining techniques associated with their children’s coping to the transition in the family. The family’s poor socioeconomic status had its effects as well, in particular to custodial parents’ financial status. However, identifying few risk factors served no real purpose to children’s prospect as it depended a lot on family dynamics (Anderson & Wolchik, 2001; O’CONNOR, Dunn, Jenkins, Pickering, & Rasbash, 2001). For instance, children might model parents’ ineffective coping strategies (poor conflict resolution skills, higher negativity) and do worse as a result (Anderson & Wolchik, 2001). An important point should be noted that the changes in relationships and environmental circumstances before and after divorce were more critical determinants of children’s adjustment problems rather than the divorce itself. Therefore, research effort should explore on the family dynamics when handling divorce.

## 1.3 The impacts of divorce

The dramatic change in demographic pattern of divorce encouraged many research studies to take place in the Western world. The immediate question for researchers and the government was the impact brought forward by divorce at the individual level and the societal level. The impacts brought forward at two levels: impact on the children of the divorcees, and on the divorced couples themselves. The impacts on children were described to be generally negative. Compared with children whose parents are married, children of divorced parents have worse outcomes on academic achievement, psychological well-being, self-concept, and social relations (Amato & Keith, 1991). This is a solid finding based on a meta-analysis, and findings were reconfirmed a decade later from a meta-analysis of 67 studies. The impact has modest effect on children’s well-being (Amato, 2001). Aside from negative outcomes, these children displayed higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior.

It was generally agreed that the children of the divorcees were at a higher risk of problem behavior, yet many researchers also stated that the response to divorce for each case was highly variable (Anderson & Wolchik, 2001). For instance, researchers found that the family dynamics and structure played a role in



affecting children's outcome. Amato and colleagues found that children from family with poor family dynamics (high conflicts) had worse outcomes than those from divorced family. There was also a positive association between post-divorce handling and children's well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991). Family structure was important because some found that children from divorced families did worse than those of widowed family. But those who were in an intact stepped family did not necessarily do better (Biblarz 2000). Moreover, evidence also suggested inter-generational transmission of divorce risk (Clarke, 1999). Thus, the importance of proper handling of divorce should be highlighted at both individual and societal level.

In terms of the impact on the couple, a review suggested that earlier studies prior to 2000 showed divorced individuals had lower average levels of physical and mental health than married couples. Research in the past decade reinforced these earlier studies (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000), divorced individuals had more symptoms of depression and anxiety, physical health problems, substance use, and greater risk of overall mortality. And the associations were stronger amongst men than women (Amato, 2010). However, this might also be dependent upon the level of distress in the marriage. For the seriously distressed marriages, the divorced were happier after the divorce. The opposite applied in the less distressed marriage (Amato, 2010).

A recent study (Kalmijn, 2010) compared the effects of divorce on the well-being of the individual across 38 developed countries. It was found that the effect of divorce was less significant in countries where family values and support were strong. The effect was also weaker in countries where divorce was more common. This outlined the importance of cultivating family as the support and core value under stressful circumstances.

### *Divorce and suicide*

According to Kposowa (2000), marriage offers security, social support and also a sense of cohesiveness for individuals. Therefore, divorce may create a sense of loss of social support and family integration for individuals. With respect to Durkheim perspective on social integration, the stability of relationships will influence the intention of suicide. A shift of marital status, from married to divorced, can decrease the emotional stability and hence increase the risk of individuals committing suicide.

Kitson and Sussman (1982) suggested that marital complaints from individuals could have an impact on mental health. In their findings, three types of marital complaints, namely extra-marital sexual relations,

sexual problems, and physical and psychological abuse, could cause a higher score on psychological distress. The discontentment of the individual will accumulate as they go through the marital stages. Hence, the divorcee may have higher rates of mental health disturbance than before. Gove and Shin (1989) indicated that the divorced and separated have poorer psychological well-being, and it leads to a higher risk of depression and anxiety.

In addition, Booth and Amato (1991) found that psychological stress was higher in divorced individuals. Divorce also had an impact on persistent life strains such as economic hardship and social isolation. The high stress levels that accompanied divorce may last for at least 2 years approximately, but the level of stress will still be higher than married individuals. Men are more likely to commit suicide than women after divorce with a possibility that women usually have a better social network, such as friendships, to provide emotional support and care. Such supportive network could help them relieve from the emotional distress and resolve the challenges brought by divorce. In fact, Yip and colleagues (Yip et al., 2012) did a study among countries in five pacific rims: Victoria, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Findings suggested that divorced men were more vulnerable to suicide than divorced women particularly in Japan and South Korea.

### *Economic impact*

Aside from the psychosocial impact brought forward by divorce, divorce had negative economic consequences as well. At the family level, divorced couple (particularly the women and their children) do worse compared to intact families. Espenshade (1979) analysed the mechanism and outlined several explanations (Espenshade, 1979). The first related to the loss of “economies of scale”. He quoted the data from US Bureau of Labor Statistics and concluded that a four-person family would have experienced a reduction in average income of almost 11% should the parents divorced and the women had custody of the children (if they were to maintain the same living standard). Secondly, people with poor socioeconomic status were more likely to divorce. These families entered a vicious cycle if they get divorce. Thirdly, divorce placed lots of economic pressure on women. They had a substantially high chance of getting welfare than married women. However, there were few studies examining the exact economic impact of divorce on the family, the community and the government. One study (Schramm, 2006) attempted to calculate and estimate the burden of divorce in the state of Utah in USA, which has just over 2 million people in 2001. Based on the 9,735 divorces filed in 2001 (23,209 marriages) in Utah, the author calculated the aggregate costs. Divorce totaled \$414 million dollars per year for both individuals and government agencies. Of which, \$300 million were direct and indirect costs to both the state and federal

government. The remaining were costs to the divorced families and community organizations. This averaged out to roughly \$30,000 in direct and indirect costs per divorce for the state of Utah. The cost was composed with direct personal costs to the couple (legal fees, relocation, productivity lost etc.), direct costs to the state government (Medicaid, food stamps, court fees, Children’s Health Insurance Plan etc.), direct costs to the federal government (Medicaid, Aid for Women, Infants, and Children, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families etc.), indirect cost estimates relating to divorce (bankruptcy, crime, physical and psychological health problems etc.). The direct personal economic cost of divorce in Utah for 2001 was \$11,408 comprising legal fee, divorce filing fee, mandated divorce education class, and housing move (Schramm, 2006). Although the study was not based in Hong Kong, this study served as an illustrative purpose depicting the economic burden cost to the family, as well as the society and government in general.

## Micro perspective on divorce

### 1.4 Framework in understanding the process of divorce

Several stage models were suggested to understand the stages of marital dissolution. Firstly, Bohannan (1968) had proposed a model on marital dissolution which consisted of six stations of divorce, which included: (1) Emotional divorce, which couples grow apart emotionally as they recognize that they do not have a constructive relationship together, (2) Legal divorce, a social and legal process to end their marriage, (3) The economic divorce, referring to the division of property and assets between spouses, (4) Co-parental divorce, which is the legal custody and right of access of child, (5) Community divorce, giving up the common social network and develop new communities and (6) Psychic divorce that both individuals had to learn to become independent again.

Later, Altman (1973) proposed a relational de-penetration concept from their Social Penetration Theory (opening up oneself by becoming vulnerable to develop intimate interpersonal communications). By decreasing the level of intimacy, the relationship will eventually end. Levinger (1979) proposed that relational attractiveness, barriers to leave the relationship, and the alternative attractions as key factors affecting cohesiveness in a relationship. He used the Social Exchange Theory to explain the worth of relational attractiveness is formed by rewards minus the costs. Later in 1982, Duck suggested a marriage

dissolution model with four dissolution processes: first stage is the ‘intra-psychoic’ phase which is a self-reflection of the state of the relationship. Then, the ‘dyadic phase’ occurs when the couple reveals their concerns about the relationship to their partner. This is followed by the ‘social phase’, meaning making the breakup official, and lastly, the ‘grave-dressing’ phase, where the couple accepts the end of the relationship.

The traditional stage models have shaped the concept regarding breakup and divorce. However, they were formed with the assumption that marital dissolution is a linear sequential progression of steps and stages. Hence, new models with a dynamic approach have been introduced. Honeycutt (1993) suggested that the process of marital breakdown might not be linear but possibly caused by experiences and chaotic events that happened in daily life. In 2005, Duck modified his 1982 marriage dissolution model. He emphasized that the communication and the fluidity creates uncertainties in the dissolution process as individuals might not know that they are in the stage of breaking up. In Duck’s model (2005), the intra-psychoic process referred to a feeling of resentment, which might lead to social withdrawal. The dyadic processes implied the problem aroused the couple to start communication attempting to resolve it, but there is a possibility that results in generation of feelings of guilt and anger that may led to deterioration of relationship. The social processes stage represents the level of distress in the relationship is made public in the social networks of the couples, making it hard to reconcile. The grave-dressing phase is now considered as reporting the breakup in a more acceptable and desired ways to prepare for future relationships. He added a fifth stage called resurrection referring to the psychological adjustments about the views of self and relationships. With the proposal of new model, the complex processes between the couples and their social networks (including life events) could be explained.

Houston and Houts (1998) proposed a disillusionment model and a perpetual problems model to explain how intimate relationships are developed and deteriorated. The disillusionment model suggested that the partners would first carefully monitor their own behavior to make a good impression in the romantic relationship, which would lead to an overlook of shortcomings of each other. As time progresses into a few years of marriage (one year or two), the perpetual problems model suggested that the overlooked problems (that occurred before marriage), would persist after marriage. Thus, these overlooked problems would erode the feelings of each other, and the intimacy of marriage would manifest the hidden problems of partners.

*The psychological adjustment stages after divorce*

Individuals usually have to go through an emotional transition after divorce. Different models are used to explain the emotional stages of divorce.

Elisabeth Kübler Ross<sup>11</sup> used a ‘five stages of grief’ model to explain the emotional changes in individuals facing trauma in 1969. Although this model is primarily developed for explaining the experiences in suffering from life trauma like death and dying, it is possible to use it to explain the process of divorce. The five stages were (1) Denial, which is the refusal to accept the marital crisis; (2) Anger, which is a manifestation of emotional upset to the partner; (3) Bargaining, which is the possibility that individuals might try compromise to avoid divorce; (4) Depression, which is the psychological distress of individuals after understanding that divorce is inevitable; (5) Acceptance, the phase that individuals would settle the problem and move on to a new life.

Kessler (1975) suggested a seven stages model to explain the emotional changes in the gradual process of divorce. The seven stages were: (1) Disillusionment, the stage that individuals started to be aware of problems occurred in marriage which were ignored before; (2) erosion, the stage that the dissatisfaction of individuals started to erode the relationship; (3) detachment, described the decrease in emotional commitment of partners to the marriage; (4) physical separation, which is the stage that either partner would move out from the matrimonial home. This is considered as the most traumatic stage of emotional divorce, because each partner would have to adjust their matrimonial life back to an independent life. During the time, they would face loneliness, anxiety, confusion and a new formation of identity; (5) mourning, the stage that individuals would have a sense of loss and depression; (6) second adolescence, the period of individuals to re-evaluate their needs; (7) hard work, the stage of integrating the experience of divorce and move on to new direction of life.

The dialectic model by Kaslow (1980) suggested a dialectic approach to understand the feelings and behaviors of individual encountering divorce. They divided into three major stages: pre-divorce, during divorce and post-divorce. Among the three stages, the pre-divorce is a deliberated and depression stage that individuals might encounter anguish, shock, dreadfulness or emptiness. They might first deny the fact of divorce and pretend everything was fine. Besides, they might seek therapy or advice from family and friends. At the time during the legal proceedings of divorce, individuals might have a mood swing feeling depressed, angry, hopeless, or helpless. This is also a vulnerable stage where behavior such as bargaining,

---

<sup>11</sup> Five Stages of Grief. , *EKR Foundation*. Retrieved from <http://www.ekrfoundation.org/five-stages-of-grief/>

threatening, or attempting suicide may happen. However, if individuals could manage the emotional fluctuation during the arrangement of the properties and child custody, they would be able to move on to the post-divorce stage and resume a normal life.

These three models have demonstrated the psychological perspective in individuals going through divorce. It is important to understand the emotional adjustment about divorce in order to provide emotional support and avoid traumatic outcomes such as suicide or family tragedies.



## **1.5 Couples in a distressed relationship: Attitudes and perception**

Gottman (1993) summarized four components which were more predictive of marriage dissolution: the defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling from husbands; and the criticism, defensiveness and contempt from wives. A distance and isolation cascade is suggested to explain how criticism leads to contempt, defensiveness and to stonewalling. It began with the idea of ‘flooding’, which referred to the unexpected and overwhelmed negative emotions of one’s partners. Then, partners will perceive the problem as severe and tend to solve it alone rather than together. This may lead to a withdrawal from the matrimonial life. In addition, a self-report of couple’s most positive and negative interactions, they perceive that the negative emotions induced can be described as ‘hurt’, and it is likely to represent distress-maintaining cognitions.

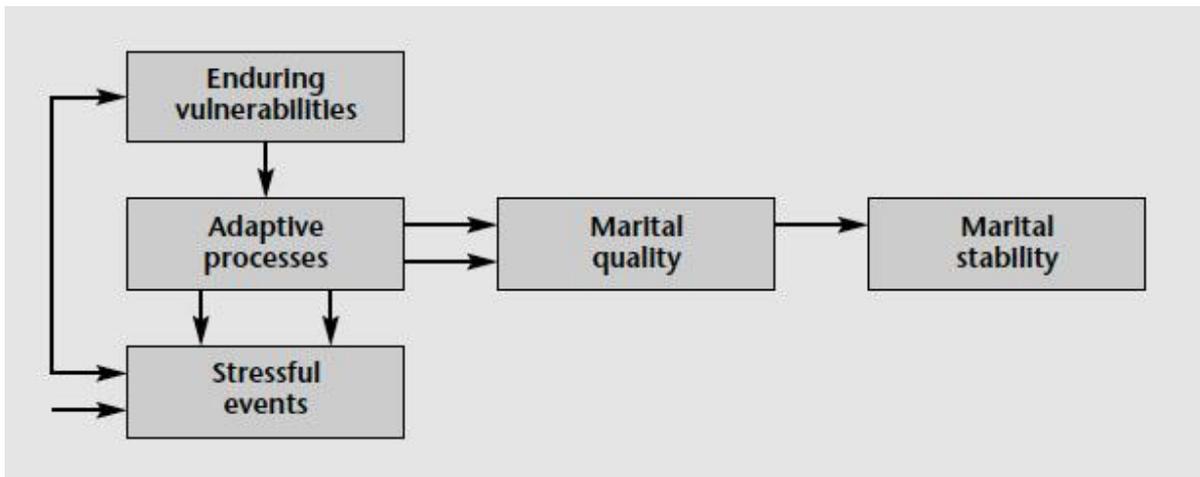
Negative attitudes and perception to marriage might lead to a low level of marital satisfaction, which might finally result in marital dissolution. But low level of marital satisfaction may not necessarily mean divorce is going to happen. A study conducted by Davila and Bradbury (2001) proposed that a number of couples with unhappy marriages stay married but remain a stably unhappy marriage. Davila and Bradbury (2001) suggested that spouses might have attachment insecurity, and they have strong concerns about abandonment and unworthiness. For these couples, a high anxiety about abandonment is developed from the beginning of marriage. Hence, the spouses are at higher risk of experiencing negative outcomes such as depressive symptoms, but still maintained the marriage.

## **1.6 Couples in a distressed relationship: Behaviors and skillsets**

Every couple faces stressful events at some time points. Regarding the reactions to stressful event, the Crisis Theory (Hill, 1949) suggested that there are three factors affecting the nature and outcome of crisis experienced. The handling of different stressful events in life, the different levels of resources available, and the function of familial context were three factors affecting the outcome of crises. Thus, if the stress of the issues increases, it is more likely to have an aversive outcome of the crisis. This is known as ABCX model, as A refers to stressful events, B refers to different levels of resources the family received at the

start of conflict, C refers to the familial context, and X refers to the nature and outcome of crisis. McCubbin and Patterson (1982) later modified the ABCX model to the double ABCX model, with an inclusion of everyday events into the stressors, and the available resources are constantly changing during the coping of the event.

Karney and Bradbury (1995) proposed a Vulnerability-Stress-Adaption model that states marital quality is determined by three factors: 1) enduring vulnerabilities, which is the stable characteristics that brings each spouse to union; 2) stressful-events which are encountered by the spouse in everyday life, and 3) adaptive processes, which refers to the behaviors engaged in conflict and the capacity to adapt.



Vulnerability-Stress-Adaption model by Karney and Bradbury (1995)

Eldridge and Christensen (2002) investigated the communication of intimate relationships and they found a consistent demand-withdraw pattern which is associated with marital satisfaction and stability. The pattern occurs when one spouse demands from the other. He/she criticizes or nags the other spouse, and the other spouse tend to avoid the confrontation, withdraw and become silent. The pattern is reinforced because the partner who desires change will rely on the others' compliance to induce change. He/she will behave in a manner to elicit change by demanding or giving pressure on the other partner. Eldridge and Christensen (2002) found that this pattern is commonly gender specific. Their findings suggested that the pattern often occurs as a wife demand-husband withdraw pattern and this lowers the marital satisfaction.



## 1.7 Country analysis and interventions

In this section, we will provide an overview of grounds and interventions for divorce in certain countries: US, UK, Taiwan, PRC and Singapore. Taiwan, PRC and Singapore are selected as their culture and ethnicity composition is relatively similar to Hong Kong. US and UK are regarded as the Western culture for comparison. Moreover, there have been numerous research conducted in the US and UK for our reference.

### 1.7.1 US

#### Ground of divorce

In the US, grounds of divorce vary by states. In general, there are no faults divorce and fault divorce. No faults divorce is the most common proceedings in US. Neither of the party need to provide evidence of fault, and it only requires one party to state a reason that is recognized by the respective states. Reasons could include incompatibility, irreconcilable difference or that the marriage is irretrievably broken. Some states require the couple to be separated for several months before they can obtain a no-fault divorce. As for fault divorce, one of the parties has to submit proof for abuse, abandonment, desertion, insanity etc.

#### Intervention – Coping Style, Parent-Child Relation, Preventive Intervention Program

Different interventions are developed to address different needs of the couple and children. Sandler (1994) focused on the *coping style* of children and found that style of coping mediates the internalizing and externalizing symptoms. This suggests coping style may be one area of intervention (Sandler, Tein, & West, 1994). Dunn looked at *parent-child relation* and dynamics in a qualitative manner, they suggested that the parents should communicate the reasons for separation and confide with each other when the family structure changes (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001). A rigorous and promising *preventive intervention* – “New Beginnings Program” was developed for children of divorce (Wolchik et al., 2002). The New Beginning trial had 3 arms: mothers’ program, mother plus children’s program, and control group. Teaching covered social learning in a cognitive behavioral therapy approach. It was aimed to improve mother-child relations, and to teach effective disciplining for mother participants. The program would help children (aged 9-12) cope effectively, and reduce negative thoughts about the

divorce. The results were assessed at 6 months, and followed up for 6 years. The results were promising as adolescents were found to have reduced symptoms of mental disorder, rates of diagnosis of mental disorders, level of externalizing problems, alcohol and other drug use, and number of sexual partners. It was also found that mother-children relation was the mediating factor (Wolchik, et al., 2002). Another program, “The Rainbows programme” was founded in the USA by a divorcing mother who wants to support her children. It aims to assist the children to overcome grief from loss of parents or separation of parents. The programme allows children to share their experiences and feelings derived from the separation of their parents in a group format, facilitated by an adult. The program was developed based on the belief that once the distress from divorce has been addressed through thematic discussion and expression of divorce-related beliefs, the affected children’s self-esteem and depressive symptoms will improve. This programme went international and now have different chapters in the US, Canada, UK, Ireland, and Australia.

### Intervention – Court or Community Based Education Programs

At the macro level, about half of all court systems in the US provided either court or community based education programs for parents of divorce by the end of 1990s. In 2008, about 46 states offer some version of court-connected parent education program. The common goals of these programs are to improve post-divorce parenting, understand and improve parents’ and children’s’ adjustments. These education programs are either court-mandated or recommended by the judge. A review (Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 2011) looked at 14 studies, 7 of them focus on quantity of parenting time or nonresidential parent-child contact. 13 studies aim to improve co-parenting relationship, and 7 aims to improve quality of parenting or parent-child relationship. Other topics include parental adjustment to divorce, educating parents about divorce-related events and its impact on children, maintaining child support payments etc. The program duration is usually short, with two to three 2-hour sessions (with a week apart). A few programs provide 6-8 weekly sessions. Some programs are mandated attendance in particular amongst high conflict cases. However, the effectiveness of these education programs remains uncertain, as most of them did not adopt a rigorous research method to evaluate its effectiveness. Nevertheless, there is evidence to show that non-court-connected education programs improving co-parenting and child’s well-being. Thus, the court can consider recommending programs that include components that build skills for high quality parenting, reduce inter-parental conflict, not to undermine the other parent, and to self-assess their own need for more intensive skills-building workshops.

An example – Case study: SMILE: A court mandated intervention to prevent conflict in divorcing families

This is an educational program initiated between Michigan State University and the judges at the Judicial Court of Michigan. It aims to educate the parents the effects of divorce on children, to help them understand the needs of their children during and after the divorce process, to collaborate on parenting issues. It is a bi-monthly program, with community-based psychologists as volunteers. Educational materials are developed by the university, and newsletters series are mailed to the participants as follow-up strategy. Potential participants are identified from the court, and they will receive letters from the court requesting them to attend the 2-hour session prior to having their divorce request granted. Researchers evaluate the program and explore its effect on participants’ stress levels, knowledge of impact on children, personal coping, satisfaction, and knowledge of community resources. In comparison to the control group, the intervention group improved on stress levels, and their knowledge of divorce effects on children (Soderman, Ellard, & Eveland, 1996).

A figure showing a summary of topics covered in court-connected education programs have been captured from an older review for reference (Geasler & Blaisure, 1998). Stakeholders can take reference of the possible coverage of education programs from the figure below.



Table 2  
Summary of Topics Covered in Programs

Parent-Focused Content	Programs
<b>Personal Adjustment Category</b>	
Grief/Loss Cycle	18 (49%)
Divorce Process	16 (43%)
Emotional Aspects	15 (41%)
Anger	5 (14%)
Former Spouse Issues	3 (8%)
Guilt	2 (5%)
Stress	1 (3%)
<b>Coping with Change Category</b>	
Divorce Adjustment	10 (27%)
Handling Change/Coping	8 (22%)
New Relationships/Family Structure	4 (11%)
Grandparents	3 (8%)
Financial Impact	2 (5%)
Social Impact	2 (5%)
Work Impact	1 (3%)
AIDS Facts	1 (3%)
<b>Parenting Category</b>	
Co-Parenting	22 (59%)
Business Relationship	14 (38%)
Long Distance	1 (3%)
<b>Skills and Resources Category</b>	
Referrals/Books	24 (65%)
Communication	16 (43%)
Support Resources	12 (32%)
Parenting Skills	7 (19%)
Conflict Resolution	6 (17%)
Decision Making	2 (5%)
Growth Games	2 (5%)
Child-Focused Content	Programs
<b>Children's Responses to Divorce Category</b>	
Developmental Stages of Children	27 (73%)
Typical Reactions of Children (including grief & long term reactions)	25 (68%)
Impact of Divorce on Children	22 (59)
Symptoms of Problems	11 (30%)
Psychological Tasks for Children	3 (8%)
Contribution to Custody Disputes	1 (3%)
<b>Helping Children with Divorce Category</b>	
Responding to Children's Distress	28 (76%)
Harmful Interactions	15 (41)
Helping Children Adjust	11 (30%)
Reading List	9 (24%)
Children's Bill of Rights	8 (22%)
Handling Conflict	4 (11%)
Health and Safety Issues	2 (5 %)
Court-Focused Content	Programs
<b>Court Processes Category</b>	
Mediation	9 (24%)
Legal Representation	6 (16%)
Court Procedures	6 (16%)
Divorce Procedures	4 (11%)
Review of Law	4 (11%)
Guardian Ad Litem	1 (3%)
Best Interest of Child	1 (3%)
<b>Parent Responsibility Category</b>	
Custody	15 (41%)
Visitation	13 (35%)
Parenting Plan	8 (8%)
Child Support	5 (14%)

## 1.7.2 UK

### Ground of divorce

In the UK, couples can file divorce if they have been married for at least 1 year, and there are 5 grounds of divorce similar to Hong Kong. Of which, adultery, unreasonable behavior, and desertion are comparable with Hong Kong. But the length of separation is different from Hong Kong. In the UK, separation has to last for 2 or more years and both parties agree to divorce. Otherwise, living apart for over 5 years is enough to file a divorce even without both parties' consent.

### Intervention – School Based Programme

School based programmes in the UK are designed not specifically for children undergoing divorce, but commonly for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. One of the factors they considered is that they do not want to stigmatize these children who enroll into the programmes. Although they are not designed specifically for children with divorced parents, these school based programmes aim to provide a supportive and safe place for children in school to build up their self-esteem, manage their stress, and share difficult feelings.

Some examples of specific programmes for children undergoing divorce include “The Changing Families Project and Dawn Projects” and “Counselling service by The Catholic Children’s Society”. These two projects are both faith based organizations. The Dawn projects are a 10-week intervention for young people. Components include problem-solving tasks, social and outdoor activities to increase self-confidence and social and intellectual skills. They also put together a magazine to share their thoughts about changing families and divorce. This project also supports the work of “Rainbows programme”, and provides workshops for teachers and parents. They utilize school lunch hours for young people to discuss and share their stories, lasting 6 sessions of an hour each. As for the Catholic Children’s Society, it provides counseling for 6-8 sessions per year serving 200 students going through divorce.

### Intervention – Government, national NGOs

The government’s department distributes and produces many leaflets that are research-based, and targeting age specific groups. For instance, The Lord Chancellors Department produces age, gender, cultural

and stage appropriate leaflets for different groups of young people. Other types of leaflets are produced by national NGOs. The national NGOs provide different types of services and programs for children and parents as well. These include helplines for both children and parents, internet websites providing information, books, audio and video tapes, CD roms, and games created to address divorce and family. Some booklets are linked to the BBC Educational Unit, being broadcasted over TV media.

It appears interventions in the UK are commonly operating at the national NGOs level, with considerable distribution outlets through schools and media. The government also stressed that materials are developed from research evidence support. A lot of resources are children-focused, which implied that the government places an important emphasis on children. Consulting children is also an aspect in terms of policy formulation.

### 1.7.3 Taiwan

#### Divorce procedure

In Taiwan, divorce does not normally require court action. Divorces can be registered by mutual consent in writing, witnessed by two witnesses, and registered with the Household Registration Bureau. It is most likely that father gets custody of children. This may be due to the primary judging criteria in Taiwan lies in the financial support for children and men remains the usual breadwinner in the family. If the couples do not have consent, the petitioner can submit evidence for bigamy, infidelity, ill treatment, desertion etc. for the court to consider these legally valid reasons<sup>12</sup>.

#### Intervention – Family Life Education

Taiwan emphasizes the importance of family life education at the national level. The Family Education Law was announced by the President in February 2013. According to the laws and regulations database of Taiwan, this law aims to enhance knowledge and capabilities regarding family life at a national level. It also aims to advance the national physical and mental well-being in order to foster harmonious family relations. This law incorporates any educational activities to improve family functions via parents, gender, and marriage education etc. The Ministry of Education is responsible at the central government level for formulating laws, research development and implementation of education, promoting nationwide family

<sup>12</sup> <http://acs.ait.org.tw/marriage-info.html> (American Institute in Taiwan)



education etc. The law is implemented at the Municipal or Hsien (County) level to gather resources, train professionals, provide advisory and counseling services. Family education professionals need to obtain specific qualifications requirement set by the central government. In particular, in Article 14, the County level government needs to provide men and women eligible for marriage with at least four hours of premarital family education courses<sup>13</sup>.

## 1.7.4 Mainland China

### Ground of divorce

As China move away from the socialist era, the liberalization of the marriage laws, loosening of state control over marriage, and the rapid economic growth gradually changes the marriage and divorce trends in China. Arranged marriages were abandoned in 1950, the law states that marriages are voluntary between two persons, and it introduces divorce. During the socialist era, the work unit creates social pressure for the couples to resolve their conflicts and moral teaching is given to them. As the work units disintegrate after 1970s, so does the traditional value on marriage. The new marriage law in 1981 reduces the barrier to divorce even further<sup>14</sup>. In contemporary China, like Taiwan, mutual agreed divorce does not go through the Court. The couples file their divorce in the marriage registry, the procedure is so simple that cases can be married in the morning, and divorced in the afternoon. There is no minimum separation time required between the couples. A recent legal change in 2011<sup>15</sup> stated that property bought before a marriage (by the groom or bride or one of the parents) will no longer be negotiated after the divorce. The property will only belong to the person whose name is on the deed. This change was said to be influential on marriage and divorce rates.

### Intervention in China

As the state has loosened its control on formation of marriages and families, and starting to emphasize on personal rights and freedom, the state's provision of services for divorced couples and families are less structured. Marriage education workshops and other activities to promote healthy family life rely a lot on academic and social institutions. There are no known mediation services in China yet, although the number

<sup>13</sup> <http://law.moj.gov.tw/eng/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?PCode=H0080050> (Laws & Regulations Database of Taiwan)

<sup>14</sup> Women and Men in China – downloaded from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/qtsj/>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.court.gov.cn/qwfb/sfjs/201108/t20110815\\_159794.htm](http://www.court.gov.cn/qwfb/sfjs/201108/t20110815_159794.htm) (The Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China)

of divorce lawyers is on the rise. Over the recent years, a government organization has been set up under the Ministry of Civil Affairs, translated as Cross-Strait Marriage and Family service network (CSMF<sup>16</sup>). It aims to collaborate with professionals from Mainland China and Taiwan to conduct research and formulate policies on the topic of cross-strait marriages. The network also provides consultancy services, receive and deal with complaints. They organize family counseling to improve the quality of such marriages.

## 1.7.5 Singapore

### Ground of divorce

Like Hong Kong, divorce proceedings go through the Family Court by filing a “Writ for Divorce”, and the procedures appear rather complex compared with other Asian countries<sup>17</sup>. Similar to Hong Kong, their grounds of divorce include adultery and unreasonable behavior. But the difference lies in the years of separation, couples need to be separated for 3 years (with consent), or 4 years’ separation before they can file for divorce. As for procedures, there are two main stages. If couples did not request to attend a hearing, they will attend a Status Conference, where the Deputy Registrar will meet them and make orders to help the couples reach agreement on the divorce. Then, they are likely to meet a Court professional counselor to resolve their emotional aspects of divorce, or meet the Judge to resolve their differences over the legal aspects of the divorce. Sometimes, a joint conference will be held for the couple to meet both counselor and the judge. If there is no settlement between the disputes, they will further proceed to the second stage – the trial stage. There are more conferences to attend before the trial, so as to settle disputes before further hearing. They may be referred to counseling again, or referred to Family Resolutions Chambers.

### Family Court - Child Focused Resolution Centre (CFRC)

Since September 2011, the Child Focused Resolution Centre (CFRC) has been set up as a part of the Family Court. It provides mandatory counseling and mediation for couples who have filed divorce, and have minor children. They provide service to couples with children aged 8 or below at this stage. But this service will later include older children. It aims to shift the decision making for divorcing parents from self-focused to child-focused, and from marital discord to parental accord. It is hoped that these sessions conducted early

<sup>16</sup> <http://c-smf.mca.gov.cn/index.htm>

<sup>17</sup> <http://app.subcourts.gov.sg/family/page.aspx?pageid=3745>

in the divorce proceedings, will lessen the stress faced by the children and parents. They will meet an assigned family counselor, for the intake assessment of needs and rapport building. It helps the couple reach consensus on the care arrangements for the children. The couple will also meet the judge-mediator, where he/she will bring the legal perspective into the case, and build agreements based upon the framework structured at counseling. These services are all free of charge.

### Intervention – Family Court

The Family Court in Singapore contributes an active role to prevent divorce and assist couples during and after divorce. They develop different programmes with community agencies for different purposes. For instance, Project HEART is a divorce intervention to help couples considering divorce (or retrievable cases) reconcile via communication skills workshops, befriending, counseling and networking etc. KIDSLine is an interactive programme to explore issues of divorce with children, and the Ministry of Education trains teacher-counselors to conduct individual and group work with children affected by divorce in schools. Project IMPACT is a post-court-order parenting workshop that aims to equip parents with essential parenting skills and to assist them on co-parenting with reduced conflicts. In high conflict custody cases, Project CONTACT can help the parent with access rights to strengthen the bond between them and their children. The court also pays attention to the immediate financial need for some families, in particular to those waiting for maintenance hearings. Project HOPE offers interim financial assistance in the form of food vouchers. There will also be follow up assistance such as tuition and school funds for children, support counseling, skills and job search training etc. In some cases where the ex-spouse defaults to provide maintenance, Project SHINE offers short-term financial assistance and other workshops similar to Project HOPE. In addition, gambling and/or alcohol addiction is one of the reasons to familial breakdown. The Family Court can make orders to offenders to undergo Project SAVE. This project provides counseling for offenders of family violence together with gambling/ alcohol addiction. The offenders need to attend mandatory counseling sessions provided by the Institute of Mental Health.

## **1.7.6 Compare & Contrast**

In general, Singapore shares the same grounds with Hong Kong that adultery and unreasonable behavior hold the most reasons to divorce. For UK, adultery, unreasonable behavior, and desertion are comparable with Hong Kong and Singapore. But the length of separation is different from Hong Kong. In US, grounds of divorce vary by states, but normally there are no faults divorce and fault divorce; while in the

PRC, although no fault divorce is widely adopted and implemented in the courts, fault divorce is still feasible. (Table A)

Country	Ground of divorce			
	No faults divorce	Adultery	Unreasonable behavior	Desertion
US	✓			
UK		✓	✓	✓
Taiwan				
Singapore		✓	✓	
PRC	✓			

Table A. Overview of the ground of divorce in US, UK, Taiwan, Singapore and PRC.

Courts in the US, UK, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore are regarded as essential authority to deal with divorce. But there is still slightly difference in terms of the focus of the courts’ function. For US, UK, and Hong Kong, the courts perform as mostly the legal mechanism to justify and implement the divorce settlement or disputes, and the procedures appear to be rather complex compared with other Asian countries; while in Taiwan and Singapore, courts are endowed with the responsibility for education purpose. For example, the importance of family life education at the national level is emphasized in Taiwan, and not normally there requires Court Action, but consent, witness, Household Registration Bureau to settle down the divorce issue; and in Singapore, the Child Focused Resolution Centre (CFRC) under the Family Court is relatively crucial for mandatory counseling and mediation for couples who have filed divorce.

Country	Intervention			
	Focus of intervention	Target recipients	Key of program content	Similar programmes in other countries
US	1. Coping Style 2. Parent-Child relation 3. Preventive intervention programmes: "New Beginnings Program", "The Rainbows Program"	Children	Focus on improving children’s skillsets and relations that mediates	"The Rainbows Program": UK, Canada, Ireland, Australia

	4. Macro level (Court System) - Court-based education program for parents, Court-connected parent education program/non-court-connected education program		internalizing and externalizing symptoms	
UK	1. School based program: "The Changing Families Project and Dawn Projects" 2. Counselling service by the Catholic Children's Society 3. Government department: leaflets	Children	Provide self-esteem, stress, communication training for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties	US
Taiwan	1. Family life education: Family Education Law 2. The Ministry of Education	Parents	Emphasize family life education	N/A
Singapore	1. Taken by the Family Court - Child Focused Resolution Centre (CFRC)	Parents and children	Emphasize to shift the decision making for divorcing parents from self-focused to child-focused	N/A
Mainland China	Few marriage education workshops and other activities, Cross-Strait Marriage and Family service network	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table B: Overview of intervention program in certain countries: US, UK, Taiwan, Singapore, and Mainland China.

Besides, the civil society in US, UK, Hong Kong, Taiwan that facilitates the education and promotion of family relations and divorce intervention is quite vibrant, frequently supported and cooperated by the governments to some extent (Table 2). As stated above, in the US, community based education programmes are normal; in the UK, NGOs play an active role to prevent divorce and assist couples during and after divorce, sometimes with the support from the media like the BBC Educational Unit; in Hong Kong, NGOs like Caritas Hong Kong and Hong Kong Family Welfare Society offer psychological and material assistance to the couples and their children through volunteer work, donation, and collaboration with the government. While on the other hand, this certain phenomenon in the PRC is merely visible. In Singapore, family court provides key support to families that are breaking up. They offer mandatory counselling for couples with children when they decided to divorce (Mui, 2013). Mediation service can be provided if couples have disputes about maintenance. In contrast, Hong Kong's family court does not have such involvement. Social services in Hong Kong take a more active role to help families going through divorce and the special need of children (Mui, 2013). In the PRC and Taiwan, couples can easily divorce even without the Courts' decision. While in US, UK, Singapore and Hong Kong, the pre-requirements to proceed the divorce case to the Courts are quite demanding, so that takes an important role in terms of divorce prevention.

## 1.8 Research gap in Hong Kong

Under the context of increasing divorce rate observed in Hong Kong, compared with the above western literature, there appears to be a paucity of studies in Hong Kong regarding divorce. A review published in 2005 noted a few factors attributing to the increase in divorce rate: women in Hong Kong has more financial independence, higher sense of individualism, attitudes about marriage and divorce are changing, and higher proportion of cross-border employment and marriage etc. (Sullivan, 2005). Under the Chinese cultural influence, divorce brings upon feelings of personal failure, shame, and loss of face for the divorcees as well as the extended family members. Divorced mothers in Hong Kong experience a high degree of stress from parent-child relationships, financial stress, as well as lack of social support. In particular, the stress results from maintaining a shelter and property rights. The children experience strong sense of negative self-identity and stigmatization from divorce. The children's adjustment to divorce depends highly on their mother's management of divorce. The Pilot Scheme in mediation has been rolled out in mid-2000. The evaluation study concludes that mediation process is generally acceptable and effective in resolving disputes (Sullivan, 2005). Nevertheless, these studies are over a decade old, and subject to flaws in methodology. The author calls for research to identify the characteristics of divorced families and their needs.

At the societal level, it is important for policy makers to understand the divorce phenomenon to make

informed decisions. Taking the UK as an example, a research study on the socio-demographic predictors of divorce, has been undertaken for the Lord Chancellor's Department by two universities (Clarke & Berrington, 1999). The project looked at risk factors for divorce, examined socio-demographic and divorce trends in local and foreign countries, and discussed policy implications and noted research gaps.

No such research study has been conducted in Hong Kong, despite the observed changes in family composition in Hong Kong over the past decades. These changes are one of the important emerging demographic events in policy debates as they are reflections of the social and economic makeup of society. In the 2005-2006 Policy Address, the Chief Executive (CE) already highlighted that “A family that lives in harmony will prosper” – harmony as a core value in our tradition (HKSAR, 2005). The social policies of Hong Kong should continue to be geared towards supporting and consolidating the family, and fostering the well-being of family members (HKSAR, 2006). The recent increase in the number of divorces and single parent households may raise alert for stakeholders more effort should be targeted to the families in need, as the family support may not be as strong as before.

Thus, before any social strategies or policies are deliberated, it is of prime importance to identify barriers on family formation and marriage from a family perspective (HKSAR, 2011). The phenomenon of divorce, its associated risk factors, associated impacts, and needs of divorced families have not been vigorously researched in Hong Kong. It is expected the study will provide a better understanding of problems associated with divorce in order to inform future directions. Policy recommendations in empowering family as a core value can be duly put forward.

## 1.9 Data sources

In order to have a comprehensive view of the phenomenon, several data sources are necessary to meet our research objectives. The first two research objectives can be achieved via data set from Family Court and Census. Family Court data set provides us insight to information on divorce case files, as well as basic profile of these couples. The Census data set provides us data to compare between divorce headed households and married headed households. However, quantitative data cannot answer our research objectives 3 and 4. Thus, case studies of divorcees and focus groups of frontline professionals are necessary to understand the impacts and needs of families.

### Family Court

In light of the increasing cases of divorce in Hong Kong and the concern over impact of divorce on children, the Hong Kong University Family Institute (HKUFI) started a project on Children in Divorce Families in late 2010. With the approval and assistance from the Family Court, a sample of 900 cases from the Family Court Registry was selected and coded by HKUFI. Another 300 case files were collected for 2011 to monitor the most update situation for this study. Three hundred cases were selected at random from the complete list of case files for 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2011<sup>18</sup>, to ensure the selection is objective. HKUFI and the research team have read through each case file, and extract the data into a data coding sheet. Then, these data are entered into a statistical software (SPSS) for analysis purpose.

### Census from C&SD

Data was generated based on 5% micro dataset of Census year 2001, 2006, and 2011. The data set first was separated into individuals' dataset, and household dataset. This aim was to compare profiles of individuals (married vs divorced), and the profiles of households (married vs divorced) including children.

### Case studies

With the assistance and support from three NGOs, a total of 41 case interviews have been conducted across the period from 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012 to 26<sup>th</sup> March 2013. These NGOs are located in the districts of Tuen Mun, Aberdeen, Shau Kee Wan, Quarry Bay, and Kowloon Bay. The following inclusion criteria are used for recruiting interviewees:

---

<sup>18</sup> The year 1999 and 2004 has been selected because the Pilot Mediation Scheme was rolled out in May 2000 to May 2003. The data could reflect the changes before and after the pilot scheme. Moreover, the year 2003 has been a rough time period for Hong Kong, the divorce cases in 2004 may reflect the changes associated with socioeconomic changes in Hong Kong (e.g. unemployment rate) and how families adapt. The year 2009 was chosen for the purpose of data collection in equal intervals. And data from **2011 are also chosen** to be able to capture the most recent development of the divorce cases of Hong Kong.

- Individuals who have marital conflicts, but remain married and not likely to file divorce
- Individuals who are considering divorce, looking for information and likely to file divorce
- Individuals who have filed or filing divorce, or already separated
- Individuals who are already divorced

### Focus groups

Two focus groups have been conducted on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013, with a total of 7 social workers and 1 family mediator, also located in different districts. Moreover, a legal professional (Family Court Judge) has given suggestions and comments regarding the numerous cases she has handled.



# Chapter 2 - Demographic and Socioeconomic Patterns and Trend of Divorce cases in Hong Kong

*NOTE: A snapshot of all the findings and tables can be found in Appendix A for reader's easy reference.*

## Methodology

A total of 1,200 divorce cases obtained from the Family Court, involving around 2,400 individuals' data are presented. However, the particular data discussed below may not apply for all the case files. Thus, readers need to interpret the data with care that the results are based on the data available.

To establish profiles of divorce couples/ families, we rely mainly on the Family Court data source. First, the data (1200 divorce cases) are analyzed in a descriptive manner. Then, ANOVA tests, a type of statistical tests to test differences between groups, are conducted to explore further associations where data are available<sup>19</sup>.

Analysis of risk and protective factors is not conducted in this chapter, as a lot of necessary information is missing due to current available data. Data limitation will be further discussed in Page66.

## 2.1 Basic demographic information

### 2.1.1 Average length of marriage of divorce cases

The average length of marriage lasted from 11.5 to 12.7 years amongst the divorce cases filed in 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2011. Among these four selected years, the differences of the length of marriage are quite marginal, and the distribution widely spreads. For example, the length of marriage varied from 0.6 to 40.8 years in 1999 and 0.8 to 51.8 years in 2011 (see table below—also equivalent to Table 35 in Appendix A). The statistical mode of marriage (highest occurring frequency) lies around 5-7 years. The saying of “seven years itch” (“七年之癢”) appears “valid”.

<sup>19</sup> ANOVA test has been used to test for a) associations between length of marriage and couples with no/1-2/3 or more children; b) associations between length of marriage and couples with different sizes of age gap



Table 1- Length of Marriage of Divorce Cases

Year of divorce*	n	Length of marriage (years)			Distribution
		Mean	Minimum	Maximum	
1999	299	11.5	0.6	40.8	
2004	296	12.5	0.2	42.8	
2009	300	12.3	0.8	51.8	



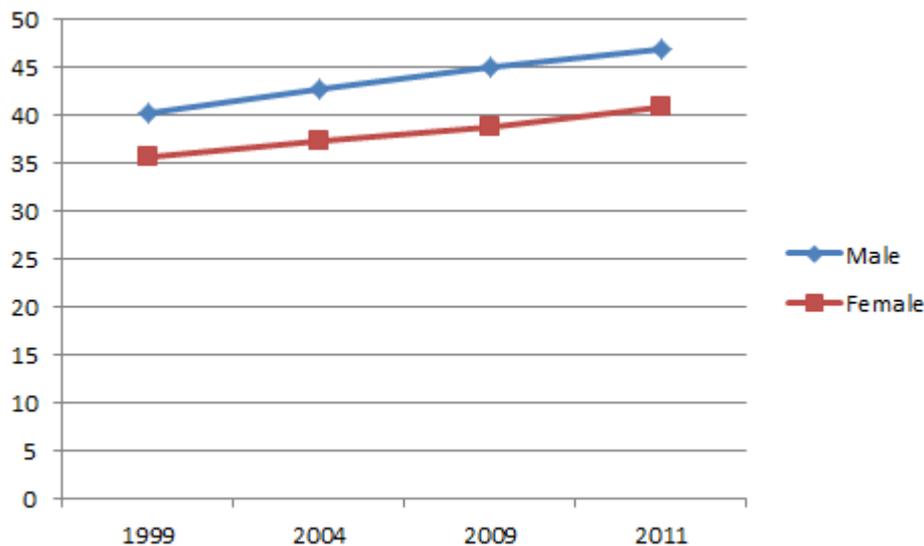
<p><b>2011</b></p>	<p>305</p>	<p>12.7</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>49.8</p>	
--------------------	------------	-------------	----------	-------------	--

## 2.1.2 Age at divorce and age at time of marriage

### Age at divorce

At the time of divorce petition, the average age of men increased from 40.3 in 1999 to 47 in 2011, and women from 35.6 to 40.8 (see figure below--also equivalent to Table 36 in Appendix A).

Figure 1 Age at the time of divorce petition by gender

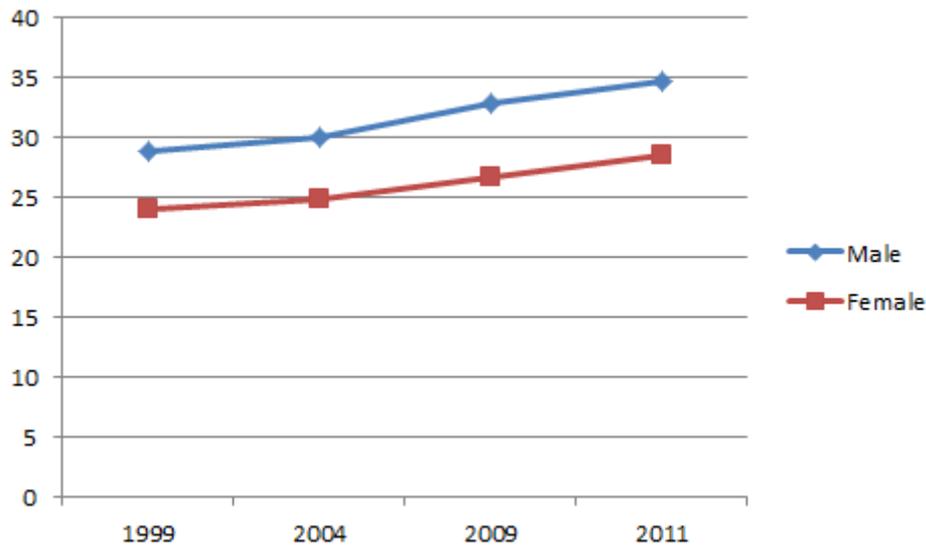


### Age at marriage of divorce cases

Amongst couples who filed divorce, the average age at the time of marriage increases for both males (age 28.8 to 34.7) and females (age 24.1 to 28.5) from 1999 to 2011 (see figure below—also equivalent to Table 37 in Appendix A).



Figure 2 Age at Marriage of Divorce Cases (Information from certificate of marriage)



### 2.1.3 Divorce Cases Filed Relating to Marriage in Mainland China

There is some basic information at the time of marriage based on the marriage certificates filed together with the divorce case files in Table 37 (See Appendix A). However, the following results have to be interpreted with care, because the data availability is dependent upon the marriage certificates, which vary across cities and countries. These figures are reported in the best available manner.

#### *Cross border marriages*

From the Demographic Trends in Hong Kong (1981-2011)<sup>20</sup>, an increasing trend is found in cross-border marriages. For marriages registered in Hong Kong, where bridegrooms are Hong Kong permanent residents and brides are Mainland China citizens, the number went up from 703 (2% of all marriages registered in Hong Kong) in 1986 to 18,182 (36%) in 2006, and dropped to 16,361 (28%) in 2011. Although the proportion is small, the number of Hong Kong brides marrying grooms from Mainland China also increased from 79 (0.18%) in 1986 to 4,127 (7%) in 2011.

In the data collected from Family Court, there is insufficient information to determine whether the

<sup>20</sup> Published by Census and Statistics Department of HKSAR Government



divorce couple is a ‘cross-border’ marriage<sup>21</sup>. The best estimate is therefore drawn from the number of marriages registered in Hong Kong and the number of marriages registered in Mainland China. The proportion of marriages registered in Mainland China amongst the divorce cases has increased in the period of 1999-2009.

Table 37- Information from certificate of marriage

Year of divorce*	n <sup>@</sup>	Place of marriage certificate issued <sup>22</sup>		
		# (%)		
		Hong Kong	Mainland China	Others
1999	290	234 (78.3%)	57 (19.1%)	8 (2.7%)
2004	296	188 (63.5%)	88 (29.7%)	20 (6.8%)
2009	300	189 (63.0%)	101 (33.7%)	10 (3.3%)
2011	309	211 (68.3%)	89 (28.8%)	8 (2.6%)

<sup>@</sup> Some data are missing as data availability is dependent upon information available on marriage certificates

<sup>21</sup> Not every case file contains the residence identification (HKID/ Passport No.)

<sup>22</sup> also in Appendix A

## 2.2 Socioeconomic Patterns and Trend

### *Economic activity of divorced couples*

The table below (and also Table 38 in Appendix A) shows the economic activity status of people filing divorce. A large majority is employed. Only about 10%-15% of them are unemployed. The percentage breakdown remains similar over the years. The nature of their matrimonial home is uncertain as a lot of data are missing from the case files. Based on the available data, the percentage breakdown keeps at a same level between public housing estate and private residency.

Table 38 - Basic information of the couple at time of divorce petition – employment status and matrimonial home

Year of divorce*	Employment status <sup>®</sup>							Matrimonial home <sup>^</sup>	
	# (%)							# (%)	
	Male			Female				Public housing estate	Self-owned (HOS & Private)
Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Housewife			
1999	232 (77.6%)	35 (11.7%)	7 (2.3%)	189 (63.2%)	33 (11.0%)	0 (0.0%)	65 (21.7%)	81 (50.3%)	80 (49.7%)
2004	221 (74.7%)	42 (14.2%)	11 (3.7%)	199 (67.2%)	31 (10.5%)	3 (1.0%)	45 (15.2%)	63 (45%)	77 (55%)
2009	227 (75.7%)	44 (14.7%)	16 (5.3%)	193 (64.3%)	38 (12.7%)	2 (0.7%)	52 (17.3%)	74 (52%)	68 (48%)
2011	224 (72.5%)	43 (13.9%)	16 (5.2%)	207 (67%)	35 (11.3%)	2 (0.6%)	54 (17.5%)	120 (51%)	114 (49%)

<sup>®</sup> Some data are missing from the case files

<sup>^</sup> 24% - 53% data are missing

In the larger context, the general labour force participation<sup>23</sup> by gender is presented below in comparison with the divorced cases above.

Table 2 – Labour force participation by gender (population vs divorce cases)

Year	MALE labour force participation rates in general population	FEMALE labour force participation rates in general population	Divorced MALE employment status	Divorced FEMALE employment status
1999	73-74%	48-49%	77.6%	63.2%
2004	71-72%	51-52%	74.7%	67.2%

<sup>23</sup> Data compiled from General Household Survey

2009	68-69%	52-53%	75.7%	64.3%
2011	68-69%	52-53%	72.5%	67%

The proportion of employed and divorced female consistently keeps higher than the overall female labour force participation rate. It indicates that divorced females are more likely to be economically active<sup>24</sup> than women in the population. A probable reason is the financial needs of divorced families.

## 2.3 Children related information

### 2.3.1 Children of Divorced Couples

In Table below (also Table 39 in Appendix A), the number of children per couples filing divorce has been decreasing. Of the approximate 1,200 divorce cases, 1,273 children were involved in 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2011. Around 28% of the divorced couples had no children in 1999 with the proportion increasing to 46% in 2011. Of these approximate 1,200 divorce cases, the total number of children involved was 381 in 1999, and it went down to 280 in 2011. Except the year 2011, about 30% of children involved in divorce are aged 6-12. About 20%-25% aged 13-18, and 21%-33% aged 19-30. The distribution is quite even. The number of reports of child abuse has dropped in recent years (i.e. 2009 and 2011).

Table 39- Basic information of children at time of divorce petition

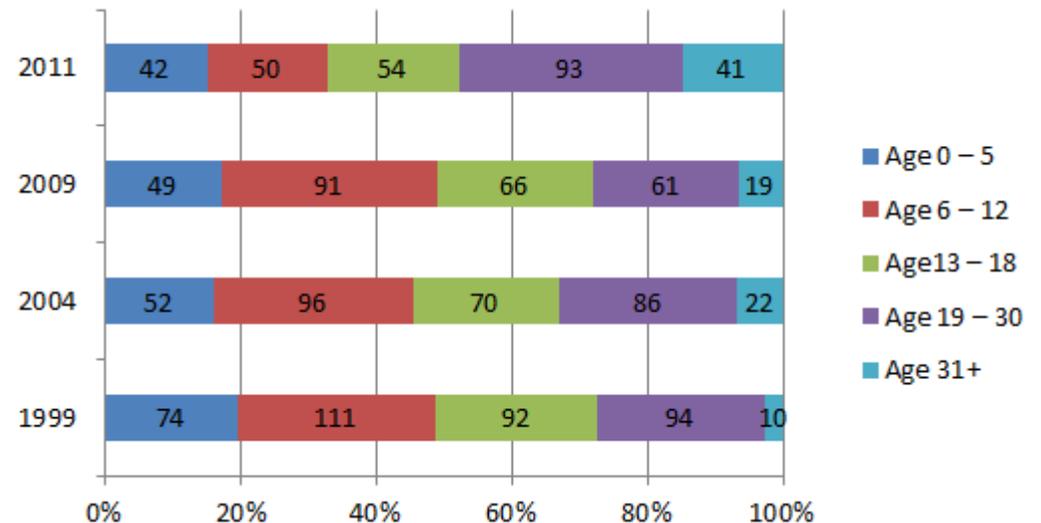
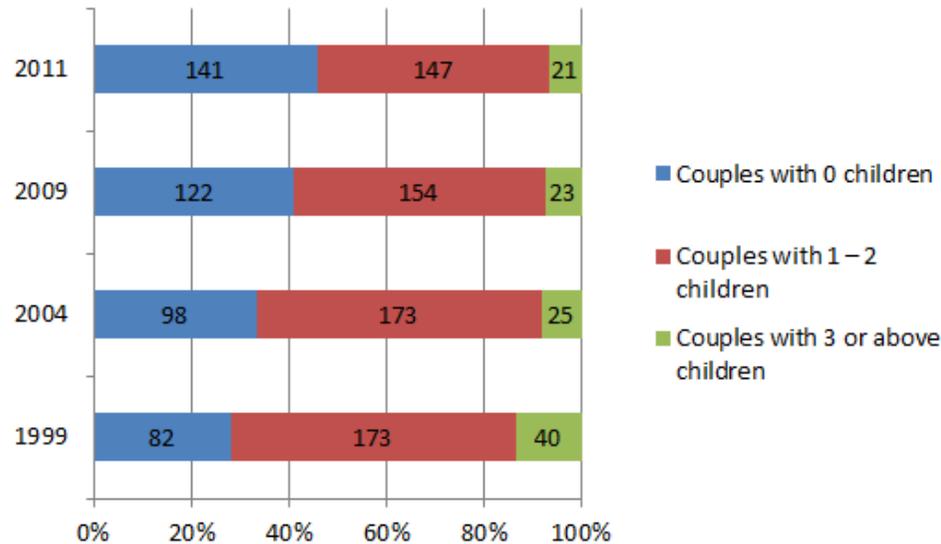
Year of divorce*	Number of children per couple <sup>®</sup>			Age distribution of the children					Total # of children	Reports or threats of child abuse
	# of couple (%)			# of children (%)						
	Couples with 0 children	Couples with 1 – 2 children	Couples with 3 or above children	Age 0 – 5	Age 6 – 12	Age13 – 18	Age 19 – 30	Age 31+		
1999	82 (27.8%)	173 (58.6%)	40 (13.6%)	74 (19.4%)	111 (29.1%)	92 (24.1%)	94 (24.7%)	10 (2.6%)	381	18
2004	98 (33.1%)	173 (58.4%)	25 (8.4%)	52 (16.0%)	96 (29.4%)	70 (21.5%)	86 (26.4%)	22 (6.7%)	326	19

<sup>24</sup> According to the Census data set user guide, economically active population is comprised of both working population and the unemployed population. It does not count people who are not seeking for employment (e.g. home-makers, students, retired persons etc.).



<b>2009</b>	122 (40.8%)	154 (51.5%)	23 (7.7%)	49 (17.1%)	91 (31.8%)	66 (23.1%)	61 (21.3%)	19 (6.6%)	286	11
<b>2011</b>	141 (45.6%)	147 (47.5%)	21 (6.8%)	42 (15%)	50 (17.9%)	54 (19.3%)	93 (33.2%)	41 (14.6%)	280	3

<sup>a</sup> Some data are missing as data availability is dependent upon information available on marriage certificates



In the larger context, if we take a proxy number from the population Census in 2001, 2006 and 2011 which calculates the number of households with children aged under 15<sup>25</sup> (excluding lone parents), the proportion of couples with no children in all households composed of married couples in 2011 is 27%, which is much lower than the proportion of divorced couples with no children amongst divorced couples in 2011. It implies having no children may experience excessive risks of divorce in comparison with married couples with children.

<sup>25</sup> Calculated by summing up “Households consisting of one-unextended family nucleus with or without unrelated persons” by “Number of children aged under 15 in households”. Vertically extended family nucleus (i.e. couples living with their parents) or other household compositions are not included in this proxy calculations.

Table 3 – Number of children in household comparison from population data

Year of Census	Approximate # of households (%)			Total
	Couples with 0 children	Couples with 1 – 2 children	Couples with 3 or above children	
2001	346 274 (26%)	763 037 (58%)	216 593 (16%)	1 325 904
2006	410 517 (28%)	858 578 (59%)	180 355 (12%)	1 449 450
2011	381 396 (27%)	842 462 (60%)	180 231 (13%)	1 404 222

## 2.3.2 Upbringing of Children

In table below (also Table 40 in Appendix A), the situation of children’s upbringing is illustrated. Over 70% of the children lived with their mothers, while roughly over 30% or more lived with their fathers. Similarly, over 70% of mothers were involved in care and upbringing of their children, and a considerable proportion of grandparents also took care of the children’s upbringing. In terms of financial support, a similar proportion of mothers and fathers contributed to support the children financially.

Table 40- Children’s living, childcare and financial arrangements prior to divorce proceedings

Year of divorce*	% of whom the child living with <sup>@</sup>				% of who involved in the child’s care and upbringing <sup>@</sup>				% of who giving financial support to the child <sup>@</sup>		
	Father	Mother	Grandparents	Domestic helper	Father	Mother	Grandparents	Domestic helper	Father	Mother	CSSA
1999	36.9%	78.7%	15.6%	6.3%	32.8%	78.4%	22.4%	14.0%	61.7%	64.2%	23.6%
2004	46.9%	71.6%	12.6%	2.9%	38.4%	70.2%	28.0%	10.0%	58.7%	63.6%	21.8%
2009	51.4%	74.5%	26.0%	3.3%	41.3%	75.1%	37.2%	7.3%	65.6%	71.5%	23.6%
2011	35.3%	74.7%	6.7%	0%	27.3%	77.3%	16.7%	0.6%	65.3%	62.7%	9.5%

<sup>@</sup> Some data are missing as data availability is dependent upon information available on marriage certificates & note these are not mutually exclusive



### 2.3.3 Associations between Length of Marriage and Number of Children

The length of marriage is explored as a dependent variable in the following section. According to the demographic data of children of divorced couples (see Section 2.3.1), the associations between length of marriage and number of children will be analyzed in terms of 3 groups below:

- Couples with no children,
- Couples with 1-2 children,
- Couples with 3 or more children

The results show statistical significance between groups, meaning the average length of marriage differs between the above 3 groups. Combining all four years (1999, 2004, 2009, 2011), for couples without any children, the average length of marriage is 7 years; for couples with 1-2 children, the average is 14.3 years; for couples with 3 or more children, the average is 22.2 years. This is an interesting finding to note, however, please interpret with care as association is not equivalent to causation.

For the couples with 1-2 children, the average age of these children is 13 years old. For the couples with 3 or more children, the average age of these children is 20.4 years old.

Table 4 - Associations between the number of children and length of marriage

	N	Mean Length of marriage (years)	Std. Deviation
<b>0 children</b>	448	6.95	4.51
<b>1-2 children</b>	650	14.25	8.13
<b>3+ children</b>	110	22.18	10.52
Total	1208	12.27	8.64

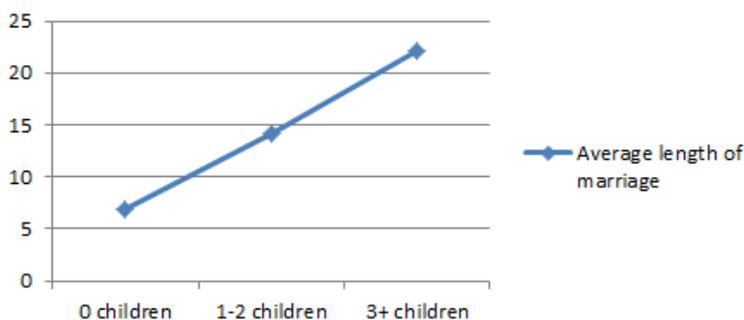




Table 5 - Average age of children per couple

Divorced couples with N children	Average age of children		Average age of YOUNGEST children
Couples with no children	n/a		n/a
Couples with 1 children	9.7	12.9	9.7
Couples with 2 children	15.3		13.4
Couples with 3 or more children	20.4		15.6

### 2.3.4 Associations between Length of Marriage and Couple's Age Difference

The length of marriage is explored as a dependent variable in this section. The age difference between the couple is calculated and recoded, to see if there are any differences in length of marriage amongst groups.

Divorced couples are then separated into 6 groups, looking at age differences between wife and husband

- Wife older than husband for over 5 years,
- Wife older than husband for 0-5 years,
- Husband older than wife for 0-3 years,
- Husband older than wife for 3-6 years,
- Husband older than wife for 6-9 years,
- Husband older than wife for over 9 years

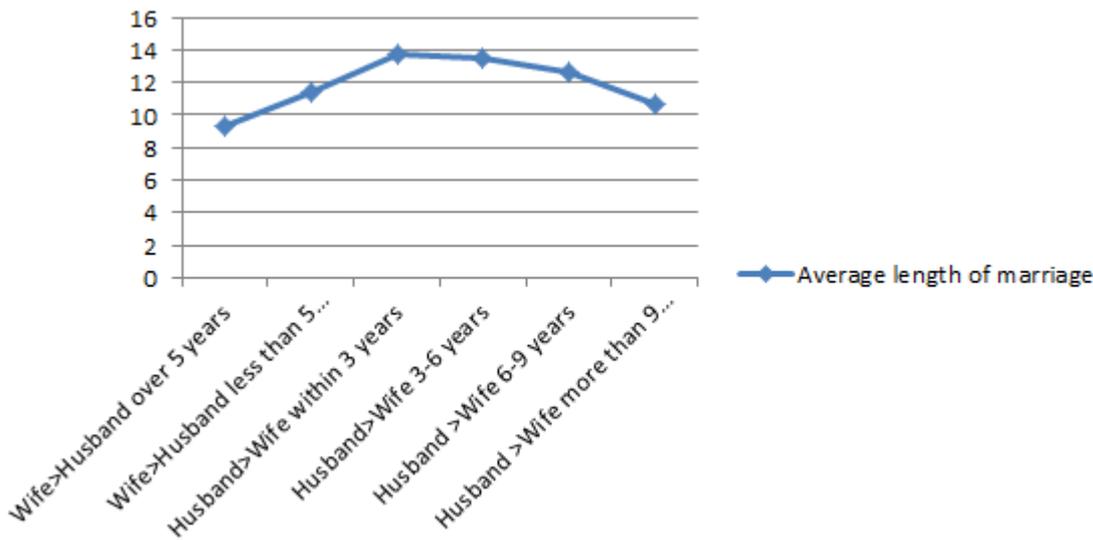
The results also show statistical significance among groups above. It appears that couples of wife older than husband have a shorter average length of marriage. In addition, couples of husband older than wife for over 9 years also have a shorter average length of marriage.

Table 6 - Associations between the age difference (by gender) and length of marriage

	N	Average length of marriage	Std. Deviation
Wife>Husband over 5 years	30	9.34	6.59
Wife>Husband less than 5 years	226	11.43	8.73
Husband>Wife within 3 years	274	13.68	9.38
Husband>Wife 3-6 years	244	13.48	8.82
Husband >Wife 6-9 years	149	12.59	8.98

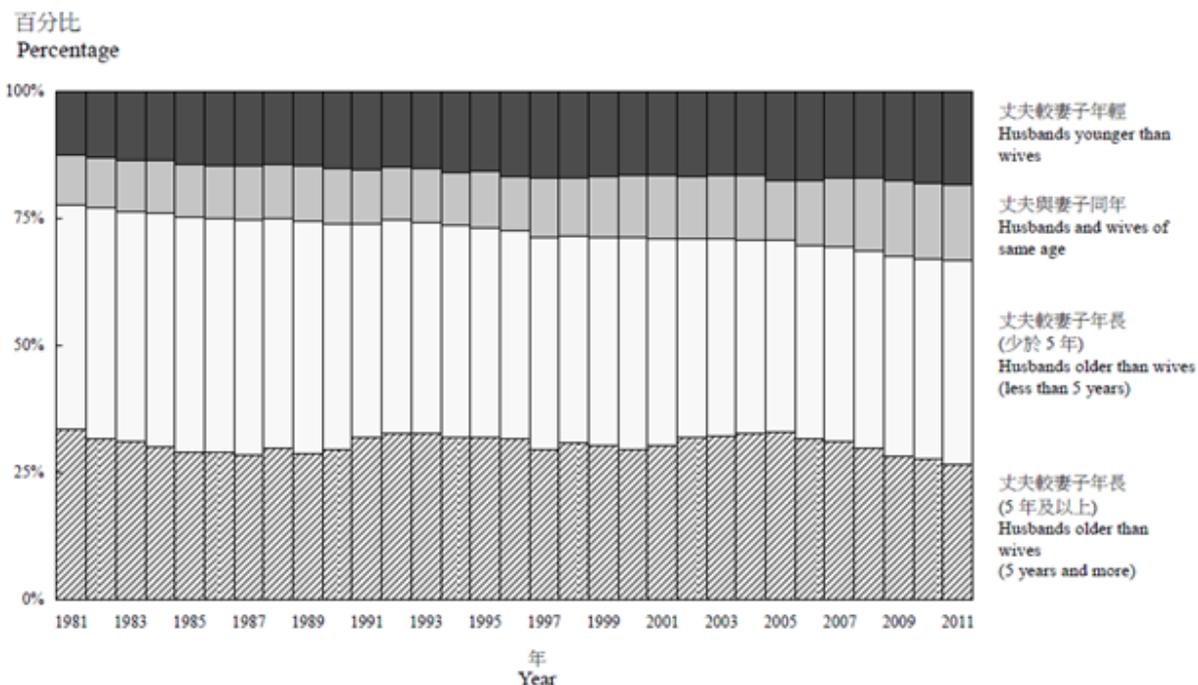


Husband >Wife more than 9 years	262	10.63	7.10
Total	1185	12.29	8.64



In the larger context, according to the Demographic Trends in Hong Kong 1981-2011<sup>26</sup>, there are more couples with younger husbands over the past decade as well. However, without the data from the couples remain in marriage as the base, it is difficult to draw any concluding statements regarding age difference as a determinant factor.

### 1981 年至 2011 年從未結婚男性與從未結婚女性結婚時的年齡差異 Age difference between bachelors and spinsters when married, 1981–2011



<sup>26</sup> Demographic Trends in Hong Kong 1981-2011 (2012 edition), Census and Statistics Department



## 2.4 Legal information of divorce filings

### 2.4.1 Basic Statistics of Divorce Decree

From the basic information of divorce proceedings amongst the filed cases, petition applications double the number of joint applications in all years studied. Of those who filed petitions, a majority of them are females. About 8%-17% of the females use legal aids whilst only 2% to 7% of the males use legal aids (also Table 41a in Appendix A).

A majority (around 57% to 61%) of the cases stated “living apart for at least 1 year with consent” as their ground of divorce (Table 42 below and in Appendix A). This is followed by “living apart for at least 2 years” (around 24% to 32%), and “unreasonable behavior” contributes to around 10%-12% of the cases. From table below and Table 43 in Appendix A, the average number of years of separation is 2.5-3.1 years before filing divorce proceedings. Since the most common ground of divorce is “separation with consent”, it may imply mutual agreement to divorce is more and more widespread in Hong Kong nowadays.

Table 41a - Basic information of divorce proceedings –application details (Petition vs Joint)

Year of divorce*	Petition vs Joint	Who initiated the divorce proceedings?				% of the parties who were represented		% of use of legal aids	
		Petition		Joint		Male	Female	Male	Female
		Male	Female	Male	Female				
1999	200 vs 99	55	145	42	57	30.4%	60.5%	5.0%	17.1%
2004	199 vs 97	82	117	42	55	32.8%	48.6%	7.4%	12.8%
2009	200 vs 100	66	134	57	43	21.7%	40.7%	6.3%	10.3%
2011	243 vs 66	85	158	32	34	26.6%	49%	2.3%	8.4%

Table 42- Basic information of divorce proceedings – grounds of divorce

Year of divorce*	Ground of divorce (as stated in the petition)				
	# (%)				
	Adultery	Unreasonable behavior	Living apart for at least 1 year (with consent)	Living apart for at least 2 years	Having been deserted for at least 1 year
1999	1 (0.3%)	36 (12.0%)	181 (60.5%)	72 (24.1%)	9 (3.0%)
2004	1 (0.3%)	34 (11.5%)	169 (57.1%)	88 (29.7%)	5 (1.7%)
2009	0 (0.0%)	33 (11.0%)	178 (59.3%)	85 (28.3%)	3 (1.0%)
2011	0 (0.0%)	32 (10.4%)	176 (57%)	100 (32.4%)	1 (0.3%)

Table 43 - Basic information of divorce proceedings – length of separation

Year of divorce*	Length of separation before filing the divorce proceedings (years)		
	Mean	Minimum	Maximum



<b>1999</b>	2.5	0.0	23.3
<b>2004</b>	2.5	0.0	19.0
<b>2009</b>	2.6	0.0	17.0
<b>2011</b>	3.1	0.25	29.3

From Table 44 (below and in Appendix A), it is noticed that the percentage of cases that requires dealing with custody and maintenance issues are decreasing over the years. It may be an indication of more couples with no children filing divorce and individuals are more financially independent.

Table 44- Basic information of divorce proceedings – issues to be dealt with by court

Year of divorce*	Issues required to be dealt with by court (as stated in the petition) @					
	# (%)					
	Child custody / access	Maintenance (for spouse)	Maintenance (for children)	Property arrangement	Other ancillary relief	Other court related cost
<b>1999</b>	173 (57.9%)	139 (46.5%)	84 (28.2%)	33 (11.0%)	17 (5.7%)	206 (68.9%)
<b>2004</b>	151 (51.0%)	105 (35.5%)	60 (20.3%)	33 (11.1%)	9 (3.0%)	140 (47.3%)
<b>2009</b>	135 (45.0%)	104 (34.7%)	59 (19.7%)	28 (9.5%)	1 (0.3%)	225 (75.0%)
<b>2011</b>	109 (35.3%)	84 (27.2%)	47 (15.4%)	24 (7.9%)	9 (2.9%)	288 (94.1%)

@These are not mutually exclusive

Particularly for the issue of child custody, Table 45 (below and in Appendix A) shows that mothers are much more likely to be granted the child’s custody. Over 70% of mothers gained custody. For financial support, over 70% of the fathers need to financially support the children. Although a smaller percentage of mothers are financially responsible for the support of children, the percentage is still over 50%. The assistance of CSSA contributes to a small proportion only.

Table 45 - Information about divorce decree – Court’s decision on child custody and financial support

Year of divorce*	Decree nisi	Decree absolute	To whom was the child’s custody granted		Court’s decision on who will be financially supporting the child		
			Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA)
<b>1999</b>	93.6%	93.3%	36.6%	82.0%	75.7%	57.1%	17.6%
<b>2004</b>	91.9%	90.2%	42.3%	74.4%	77.2%	51.2%	11.4%
<b>2009</b>	93.7%	90.2%	46.6%	81.4%	76.6%	64.0%	20.2%
<b>2011</b>	89.9%	87.3%	27.1%	77.4%	73.9%	54.5%	6.7%

## 2.4.2 Comparison between Cases of Petitions and Joint Applications

The number of petitions doubles the number of joint applications in 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2011 (See Table 41a in Appendix A). Additionally, compared with petitions applications, an increasing number of couples with no children jointly apply for divorce as time progresses.

Figure 3 – No. of children in petition cases

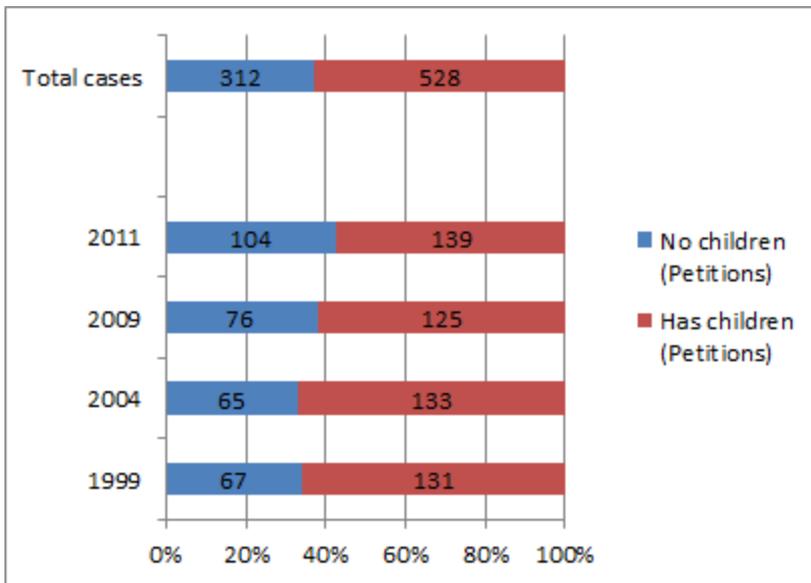
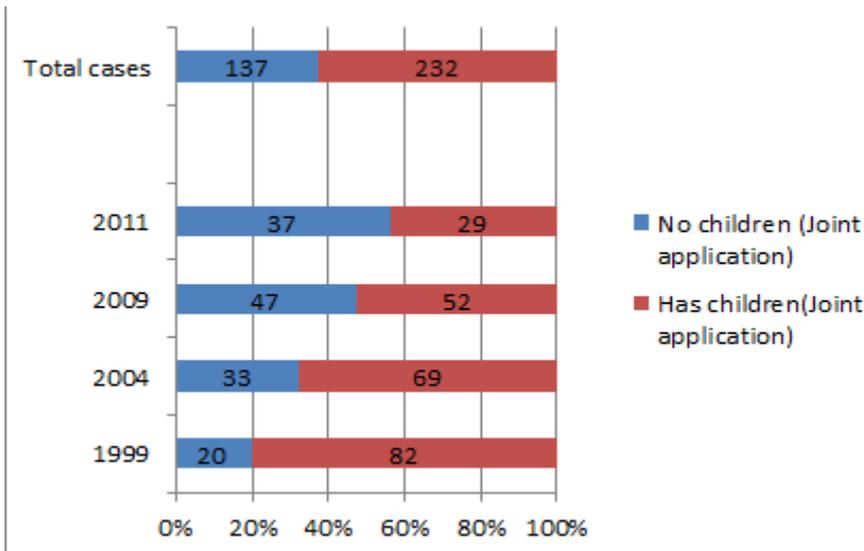


Figure 4 – No. of children in Joint application cases





## 2.5 Sub-group of Particular Divorce Cases

### 2.5.1 Divorce Cases Filed for Unreasonable Behavior

In all years combined (1999, 2004, 2009 and 2011), there are a total of 136 couples who filed divorce based on the grounds of “Unreasonable behavior”. Of which, 107 males (81.1%) are unreasonably behaved, versus only 25 females (18.9%) are unreasonably behaved. Majority (85%) of these couples have children. A total of 213 children are involved in these cases.

As you see from the table below, a large majority (65%) of these applicants believed that their partners showed little love, care and affection towards the petitioner. Over half (54%) think their partners failed to provide enough maintenance for the family. Close to half (46%) of them had a violent disposition.

Table 7 – Different types of “unreasonable behavior”

<b>Unreasonable behaviors (these reasons are not mutually exclusive)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% of all 136 couples</b>
showed no/ little love, care, concern or affection toward the Petitioner	82	65.1
failed to provide enough maintenance	68	54.4
had a violent disposition	58	46.4
often scolded/ insulted the Petitioner	43	34.4
seldom returned home	39	31.2
had an extra-marital affair	37	29.6
was addicted to gambling	32	25.6
was heavily indebted	25	20
was a sexual abuser	9	7.2

From the general descriptions of case files, a brief qualitative summary can be outlined as follow:

Female petitioners commonly accuse their male partner for failing to provide enough maintenance, whilst male petitioners accuse their female partner for not staying at home and not doing household chores. Both genders believe it is unreasonable for their partners to disappear without any reasons. The risky behaviors can cover a wide range of problems including debt and loan-sharks, alcohol and drugs abuse, domestic violence (including sexual abuse), mental torture and being ill-tempered.



## 2.5.2 Remarriages Ending in Divorce

Amongst available data of these divorce cases, it seems the number of people who divorced for the second time increased over the years if we look at the absolute numbers in the table below.

Table 8-Number of Cases of First Divorce and Second Divorce

Year of divorce*	n <sup>@</sup>	First divorce by gender <sup>@</sup>			
		Male		Female	
		#	%	#	%
1999	290	228	76.3	224	74.9
2004	296	180	60.8	179	60.5
2009	300	168	56.0	164	54.7
2011	309	255	82.5	244	79.0

Table 8-Number of Cases of First Divorce and Second Divorce

Year of divorce*	n <sup>@</sup>	First divorce for both parties	Second divorce for either party	Second divorce for both parties	Unknown as limited by data availability
1999	290	218	19	5	48
2004	296	174	17	11	94
2009	300	146	43	7	104
2011	309	224	50	32	3

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

<sup>@</sup> Some data are missing as data availability is dependent upon information available on marriage certificates

According to Table 37 (see Appendix A), there are a total of 184 pairs of re-marriage couples filing divorce, of which at least 1 party was a re-marriage in 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2011. 55 of these were a re-marriage to both males and females. The data of these couples have been extracted to examine whether their profiles and nature of cases are different from all divorce cases.

The average age of males re-marrying is 43.6 and 35.9 for females, who ended up in their second (or more) divorce. The average length of these marriages lasted 7.95 years (SD = 5.92 and median is 6.17),

which is considerably shorter than the average length of all divorces (See Table 46 in Appendix A). The number of petitions (N=149, 81%) also outnumbered the joint applications by more than four times (N=35, 19%) (See Table 47 in Appendix A). Most of these remarriages which ended in divorce were registered in Hong Kong (93.5%), which is higher than the percentage in the overall divorce cases (ranging from 63-78% married in HK, See Table 48 in Appendix A). The employment status remains comparable as well, except there is a slightly higher percentage of retired males (7.1% versus 5.2%) involved in second divorce (See Table 49 in Appendix A). Of the 184 pair of couples, 107 of them have no children (58.2%) (See Table 50 in Appendix A). This percentage is higher than all divorce cases (ranging from 28% to 46%) (See Table 39 in Appendix A).



## 2.6 Summary

In order to achieve the first research objective of this study, this chapter identified the demographic and socioeconomic patterns and trend of divorce in Hong Kong based on the data from Family Court. Statistics with significant implications were selected, presented and analyzed, and the following findings have been identified:

- The average length of marriage ending in divorce was around 11 to 12 years in 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2011. Divorce happened most frequently when a couple’s marriages lasted around 5 to 7 years.
- There is trend that for those whose marriage ending in divorce, their age at marriages increased over time which indicates the extensiveness of the problem.
- For cross border marriages, the number of Hong Kong bridegrooms marrying Mainland China brides increased from 1986 to 2006, and dropped in 2011, while the number of Hong Kong brides marrying Mainland China bridegroom kept increasing. However, no sufficient evidence at present can be concluded that the increase of divorce cases over time is contributed by the increase of cross-border marriages.
- Socioeconomically, figures about the employment status of female and male illustrate that divorced females are more likely to be economically active than the overall female population.
- Demographically, the proportion of divorced couples with no children among divorced couples is higher than the proportion of married couples without children among married couples. It implies couples having no children may have a higher risk of divorce in comparison with married couples with children.
- Over 70% of children lived with their mothers and over 70% of mothers were involved in care and upbringing of their children, although a similar proportion of mothers and fathers financially support their children.
- Among marriages ending in divorce, the marriage length shows positive association with the number of children that couples have. For couples without children, the average length of marriage is 7 years; for couples with 1-2 children, the average is 14.3 years; for couples with 3 or more children, the average is 22.2 years.
- Among marriages ending in divorce, couples composed of a wife who is older than a husband for over 5 years or a husband who is older than a wife for over 9 years have a shorter length of marriage, compared with couples with other kinds of age gaps.
- The most common ground of divorce is “separation with consent”. There is a possible implication that mutual agreement to divorce is becoming increasingly widespread and observed in Hong Kong.



- The number of petitions doubles the number of joint applications in 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2011. Compared with petitions applications, more and more couples without children jointly applied for divorce.
- For remarriages (i.e. Either one or both parties had a remarriage) ending in divorce, the average length of the remarriages is around 8 years which is much shorter than the length of other types of marriages ending in divorce; the number of petitions is four times the number of joint applications; 93.5% of these remarriages were registered in Hong Kong; 58.2% of these remarriage-couples filed their divorce when they had no children, which is higher than all divorce cases.

## 2.7 Issues with Family Court data set

The divorce case files obtained from Family Court only provide us with limited information regarding the couples' demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, from the western literature, one important risk factor associated with higher risk of divorce is the lower education level compared to that of the married. However, the case files from Family Court do not contain this information. Moreover, other possible risk factors, including income earnings and marital infidelity, cannot be found in the Family Court case files. For income earnings, only cases that receive CSSA will have such information. With regards to marital infidelity, very few cases indicated that as a reason of divorce. Moreover, the actual number is probably underestimated as they cannot be captured by Family Court case files alone.

It is worth noting that frontline professionals commonly hold the impression that cross-border marriages are at a higher risk of divorce. However, it cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed in this study. Despite a higher proportion of the cross-border marriage was found among the divorced cases, there is insufficient information to draw the conclusion that the increase is indeed attributed by the increasing number of cross-border marriage, as we don't have accurate information on the number of cross-border marriages who remained in Hong Kong. Also, sometimes, it is difficult to ascertain from the Family Court case files whether the couple is a 'cross-border' marriage, inter-racial marriage, or local marriage. An agreed definition should be set prior to the research. Additionally, data from sources such as the marriage registry and the Immigration Department can be explored.



# Chapter 3 - Socioeconomic and demographic patterns of divorce at levels of households and individuals

This chapter investigates research question one, particularly looking at divorced *households* based on Census dataset.

## Methods

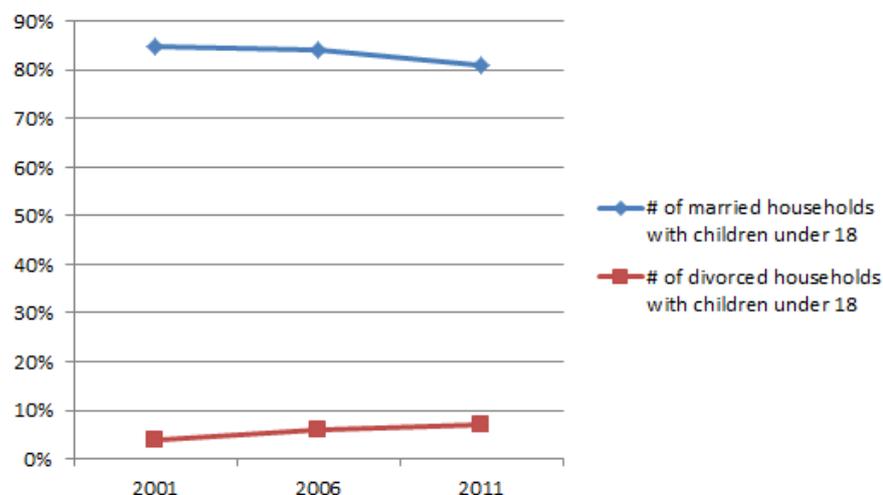
To identify the demographic and socioeconomic patterns associated with divorce, we rely mainly on the Census data source. The household datasets are split into married households and divorced households, to examine the mean differences and percentage differences among groups. The analysis is based on the households that contain at least a family nucleus. Please refer to Appendix C for the detailed methodology. The expected branch of variables to be covered includes: (a) socioeconomic status (SES), (b) housing, and (c) immigration status.

## 3.1 Households with children aged under 18

This section will compare socioeconomic status, housing, and immigration status of married and divorced household types. As impacts on children from divorce families are often negative, thus, households with children under 18 are selected. These are mutually exclusive households; therefore, married households can be compared with households with divorced parents and children. The profile, characteristics and needs of divorced households can then be understood in response to our research aims and questions. As the number of divorce decrees granted increased over the past decade, the number of households containing divorced individuals increased as well.



Table 9– No. of married households and divorced households by Census years (based on 5% Census data)



Based on 5% Census data	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
# Of married households with children under 18	34652	33102	31155
(% of total)	85%	84%	81%
# Of divorced households with children under 18	<b>1816</b>	<b>2514</b>	<b>2864</b>
(% of total)	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Total # of relevant households	40917	39606	38313

This section below looks at households with children under 18. For presentation purposes, married households refer to married households with children under 18; divorced households refer to divorced households with children under 18 unless otherwise specified.

### 3.1.1 Socioeconomic status (SES) differences between households

#### 3.1.1.1 The average household size

As time goes by, the average household size decreases. In comparison, the divorced households have the smallest household sizes in comparison (even smaller than widowed households). (See Table 51 in Appendix B for other household types).

Table 10- Average household size comparing married household and divorce household with children under 18

<u>Average Household size</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>



Married	4.18	4.07	4.04
Divorced	2.79	2.72	2.63
Widowed	3.21	3.08	2.91

### 3.1.1.2 Working household members

(Excluding Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDH))

The working household members in different households remain relatively stable over the years. As expected, the number of working household members for divorced (and widowed) households is smaller in comparison to that of married households.

Table 11 – Average working household members with children under 18

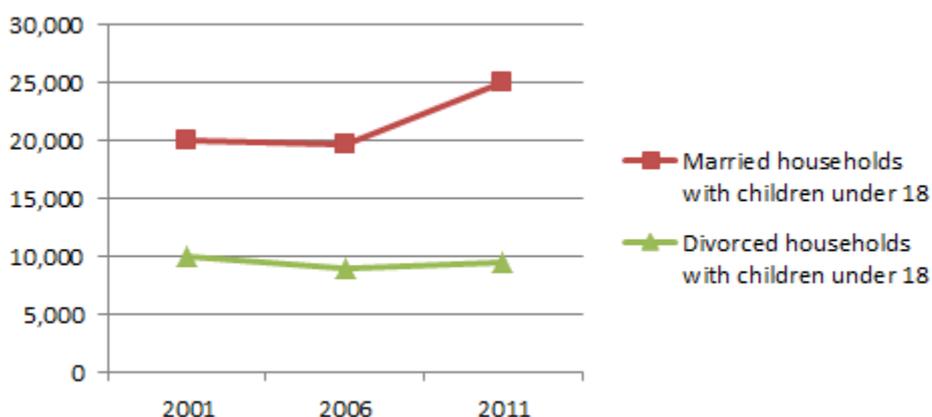
<u>Average working Household members</u> <u>excluding FDH(mean)</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
Married	1.59	1.58	1.61
Divorced	0.81	0.81	0.77
Widowed	0.93	0.94	0.90

### 3.1.1.3 Monthly household income

Divorced household average income is less than half of the average income of married households. It is noted that the number of working members is also smaller among divorced households (See Table 52 in Appendix B for other household types).

Table 12- Mean and Median Monthly household income (in HK\$ and excluding FDH) comparing married household and divorce household with children under 18

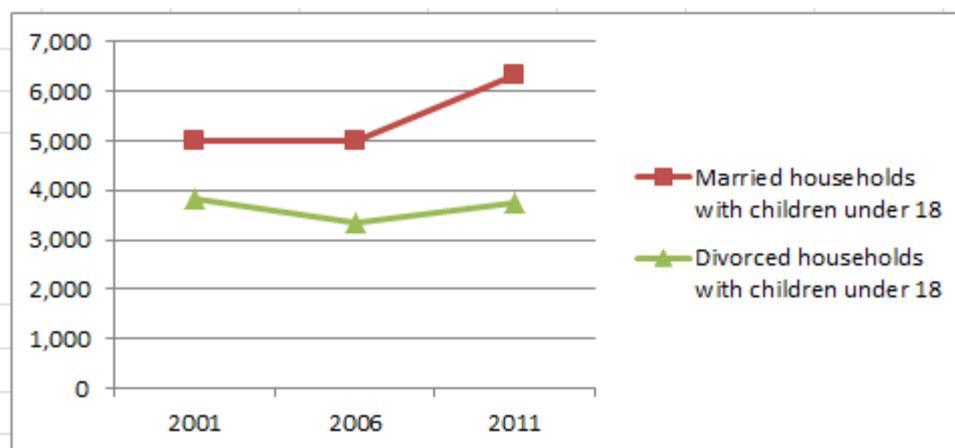
Household type	Year	<u>Mean HK\$</u>			<u>Median HK\$</u>		
		<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
Married		28,339	29,186	36,604	<u>20,000</u>	<u>19,750</u>	<u>25,000</u>
Divorced		13,784	12,722	15,157	<u>10,000</u>	<u>9,000</u>	<u>9,500</u>



To take into account of the number of persons living in the household, the mean and median household income per person is calculated. The data shows a similar picture where income per person in households with divorced / separated individuals has been much less than households with married and never married individuals over the past decade. (See Table 53 in Appendix B for other household types)

Table 13 – Mean and Median of Monthly household income per capita comparing married household and divorce household with children under 18

Household type \ Year	<u>Mean HK\$</u>			<u>Median HK\$</u>		
	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
Married	6,938	7,291	9,156	<u>5,000</u>	<u>5,000</u>	<u>6,333</u>
Divorced	5,162	4,827	5,913	<u>3,850</u>	<u>3,333</u>	<u>3,759</u>





### 3.1.1.4 Poverty situation

The poverty situation is explored through examining the proportion of households living under poverty line. ‘Poverty line’ here is defined as half of the median income for the respective size of household, which is a common measure applied across countries<sup>27</sup> However, the median incomes calculated in the study differ from the data from the Commission on Poverty which released in September 2013 (HKSAR government, 2013).

Table 14 - Poverty line of different sizes of households

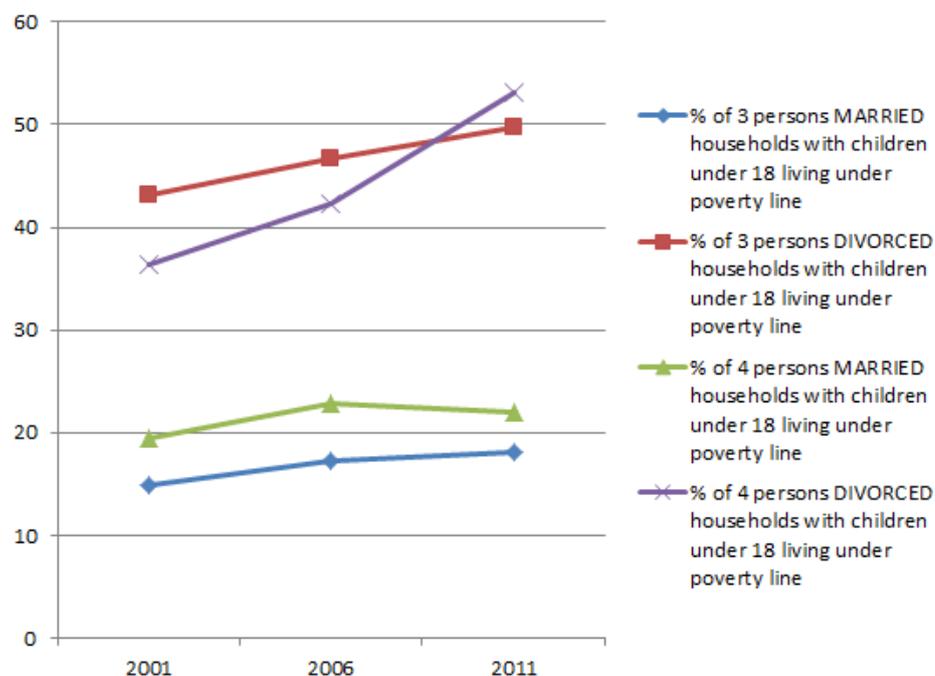
<u>Median income</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>Poverty line</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
2 persons	\$15360	\$14000	\$15500	2 persons	\$7680	\$7000	\$7750
3 persons	\$18705	\$17500	\$21000	3 persons	\$9352.5	\$8750	\$10500
4 persons	\$21000	\$21500	\$26950	4 persons	\$10500	\$10750	\$13475
5 persons	\$25500	\$27000	\$35440	5 persons household	\$12750	\$13500	\$17720
6 or more persons	\$31000	\$30250	\$38785	6 or more persons	\$15500	\$15125	\$19392.5

Through studying the percentage of different sizes of households living under poverty line (See Appendix B for Table 55 to Table 59), the statistics illustrate that at least 30% of divorced households lived under the poverty line regardless of time points. Married households had a relatively lower percentage of poverty which is no more than 20%. The percentage seems to be increasing over the past decade as well.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the OECD, Canada, and HK Council of Social Service adopts the relative measure of poverty as well



Table 15 – Poverty situation comparing married household and divorce household with children under 18



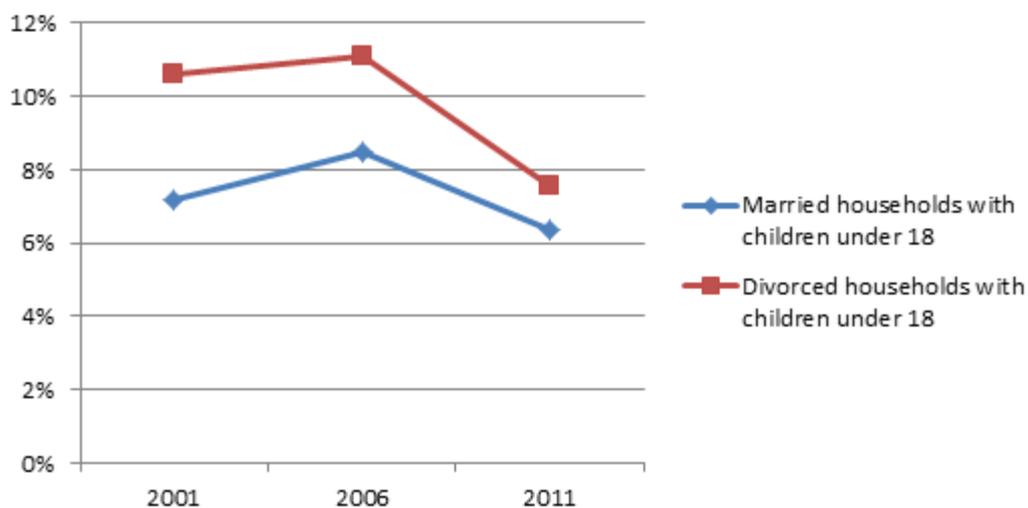
Based on 5% Census data	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	MARRIED			DIVORCED		
# of 3 persons household living under poverty line	1296	1643	1795	312	505	538
%	14.9%	17.2%	18.1%	43.2%	46.7%	49.7%
# of 4 persons household living under poverty line	2877	3268	2821	91	110	149
%	19.4%	22.8%	22.0%	36.4%	42.3%	53.2%

### 3.1.1.5 Employment status

Among households which involve never married children aged under 18, over 88% are households without any unemployed person. The situation remains relatively stable over time. However, among households with divorced / separated and never married children, the proportion of the households with at least one person unemployed (7%-10%) is consistently higher than the proportions amongst households with married individuals and never married children (6%-8%). (See Table 60 in Appendix B for other different household types)



Table 16 – Unemployed persons in married versus divorced households with children under 18



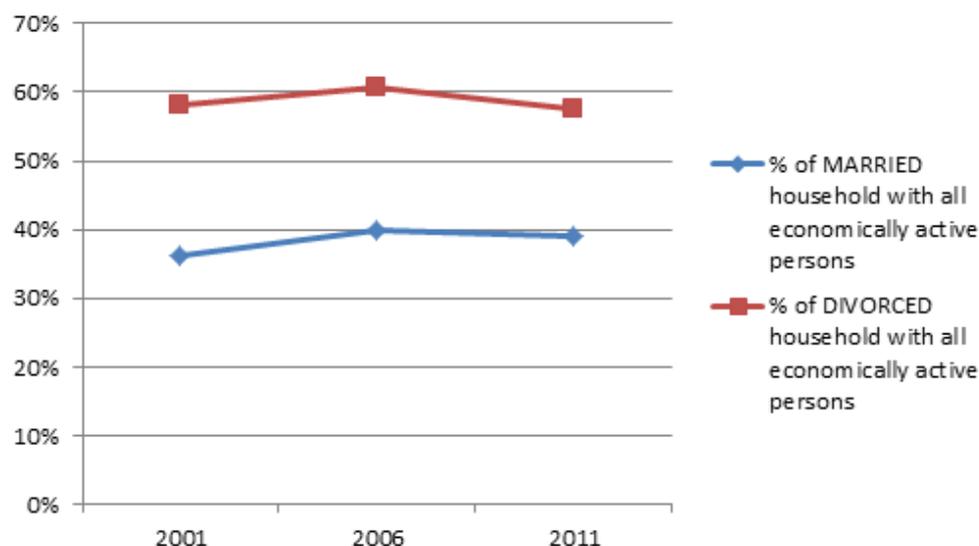
Based on 5% Census data	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	<u>MARRIED</u>			<u>DIVORCED</u>		
No unemployed person	32171 (92.8%)	30295 (91.5%)	29173 (93.6%)	1623 (89.4%)	2235 (88.9%)	2648 (92.5%)
One or more unemployed persons	2481 (7.2%)	2807 (8.5%)	1982 (6.4%)	193 (10.6%)	279 (11.1%)	216 (7.5%)
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864

The table below shows households with divorced and never married individuals are the most ‘economically active’ because almost 60% have nobody economically inactive in the household<sup>28</sup>. This compares to 35-39% among households with married and never married individuals. This is not surprising as the lone parents often need to work to support the whole family. (See Table 61 in Appendix B for different other household types)

<sup>28</sup> This follows the definition used in Census. “Economically inactive population” comprise of persons who do not have a job and have not been at work for the past 7 days before the census moment (excluding those who are unemployed or on holiday). This often include home-makers, retired persons, and all those aged under 15



Table 17 – Economically inactive persons in household with children under 18



Based on 5% Census data	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
	<u>MARRIED</u>			<u>DIVORCED</u>		
No economically inactive persons (all economically active)	12560 (36.2%)	13209 (39.9%)	12145 (39.0%)	1057 (58.2%)	1524 (60.6%)	1647 (57.5%)
More than 1 economically inactive persons	22092 (63.8%)	19893 (60.1%)	19010 (61%)	759 (41.8%)	990 (39.4%)	1217 (42.5%)
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864

### 3.1.1.6 Number of dependents

Dependents in the study are defined as children aged under 18 and elderly aged 65 or above<sup>29</sup>. It can be seen that there is a drop in the average number of dependents in every household structure. This is probably due to the drop in fertility rates over the past decade. In the further breakdown, it can be seen that married households have more dependents and children. Among households with divorced and never married children, over 60% households have only one child in 2001, 2006 and 2011. (See Table 62 to Table 64 in Appendix B for other different household types)

Table 18 – Average no. of dependents and children under 18 comparing married households with divorced households

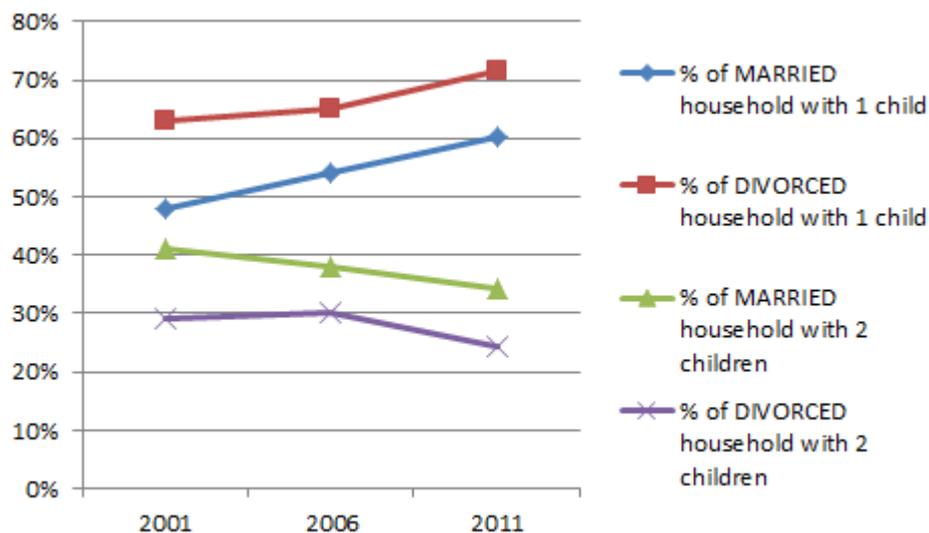
	<u>Average # of dependents</u> (children under 18 plus elderly 65 or above)			<u>Average # of children under 18</u>		
	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
<u>Household type</u>						

<sup>29</sup> The definition of dependents is different from Census report.



<b>MARRIED</b>	1.77	1.66	1.57	1.66	1.55	1.46
<b>DIVORCED</b>	1.47	1.43	1.35	1.47	1.41	1.33

Table 19 - No. of children in households comparing married households with divorced households with children under 18



<u>No of children aged under 18</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	<u>MARRIED</u>			<u>DIVORCED</u>		
1	16578	17934	18815	1140	1637	2044
	48%	54%	60.4%	63%	65%	71.4%
2	14105	12616	10725	532	745	695
	41%	38%	34.4%	29%	30%	24.3%
3 or above	3969	2552	1615	144	132	125
	11%	8%	5%	8%	5%	4%
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864

Table 20 – No. of dependents in households comparing married households with divorced households **with children AND elderly under 18 or over 65.**

<u>No of Dependents</u> Based on 5% Census data	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	<u>MARRIED</u>			<u>DIVORCED</u>		
1	15053	16279	17221	1129	1611	2017
	43.0%	49.0%	55.3%	62.2%	64.1%	70.4%
2	14088	12778	10976	539	766	713



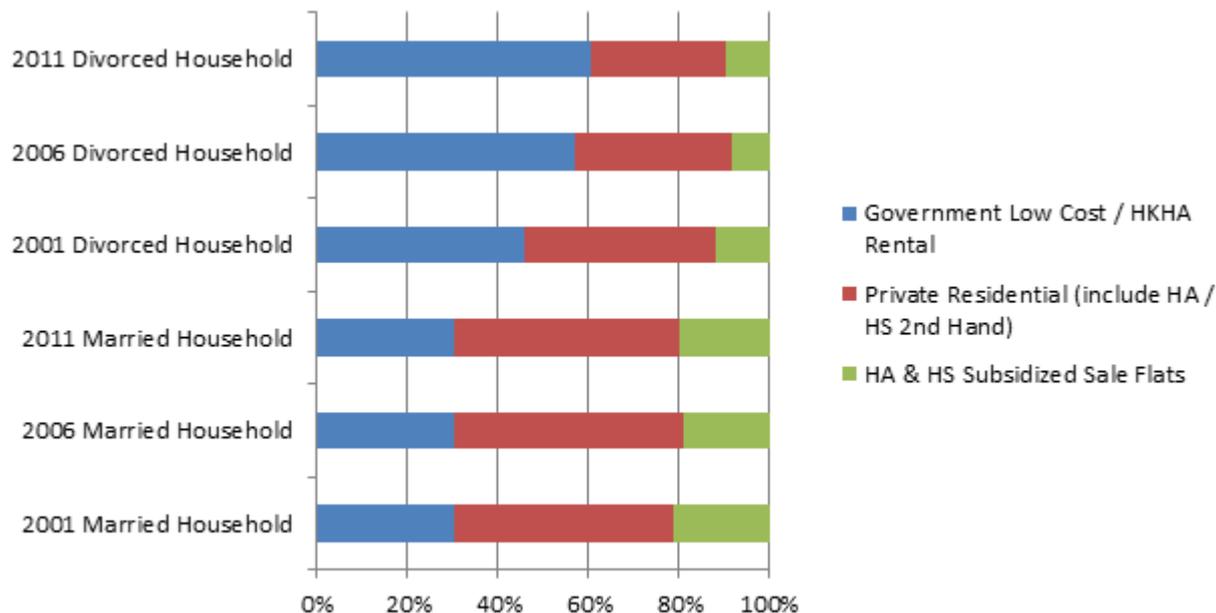
	41.0%	39.0%	35.2%	30.0%	30.0%	24.9%
3 or above	5511	4045	2958	148	137	134
	16.0%	12.0%	9.0%	8.0%	5.0%	5.0%
TOTAL	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864

## 3.1.2 Housing

### 3.1.2.1 Type of housing

Among married households, close to half (45% - 49%) of them live in private residential housing. While a significant proportion (44% - 57%) of divorced households live in government low cost housing (public housing). The proportion of divorced households living in private residential housing drops from 41% in 2001 to 28% in 2011, whilst the ones living in government low cost housing increased from 44% in 2001 to 57% in 2011. There are also a large proportion of widowed households living in government low cost housing, but the change over time is not as drastic as opposed to divorced households. This may suggest that the living situation of divorced households has changed drastically over the past decade, probably due to the increasingly unaffordable price of housing.

Table 21 – Types of housing comparing married households with divorced households **with children under 18**



Based on 5% Census data	<b>Government Low Cost / HKHA Rental</b>			<b>Private Residential (include HA / HS 2nd Hand)</b>			<b>HA &amp; HS Subsidized Sale Flats</b>		
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
	<b>MARRIED</b>	10034	9697	8595	15994	16057	13963	6914	6034
	29.0%	29.3%	27.6%	46.0%	48.5%	44.8%	20.0%	18.0%	18.0%

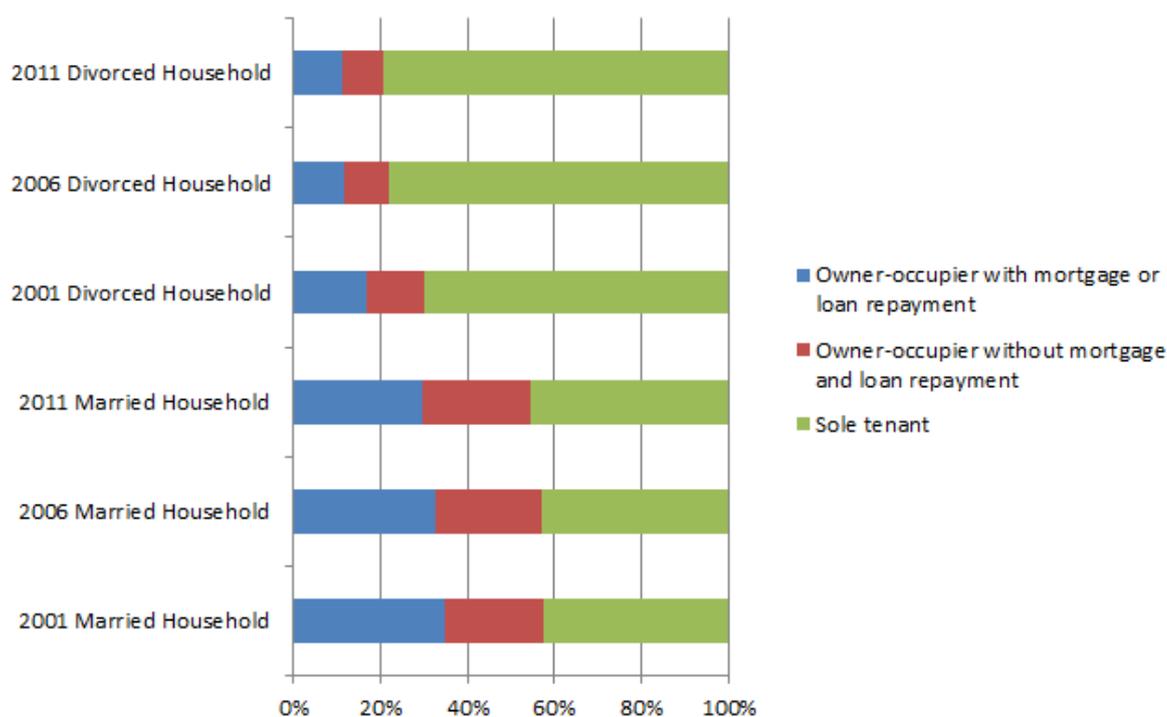


<b>DIVORCED</b>	804	1398	1628	743	849	793	210	209	257
	44.0%	55.6%	56.8%	41.0%	33.8%	27.7%	12.0%	8.0%	9.0%

### 3.1.2.2 Tenure of accommodation

From the table below, the number of owner-occupier with mortgages decreased over the past decade, and more and more heads of household became tenants over the past 10 years. This holds true for both household structures illustrated below. (See Table 66 in Appendix B for other different household types)

Table 22 – Tenure of accommodation by household types comparing married households with divorced households **with children under 18**



Based on 5% Census data	<u>Owner-occupier with mortgage or loan repayment</u>			<u>Owner-occupier without mortgage and loan repayment</u>			<u>Sole tenant</u>		
	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	<b>MARRIED</b>	11384	10419	8827	7361	7713	7355	13821	13627
	33.0%	31.5%	28.3%	21.0%	23.3%	23.6%	40.0%	41.2%	43.3%
<b>DIVORCED</b>	287	281	309	224	252	261	1185	1902	2198
	16.0%	11.2%	10.8%	12.0%	10.0%	9.1%	65.0%	75.7%	76.7%

### 3.1.2.3 Financial burden

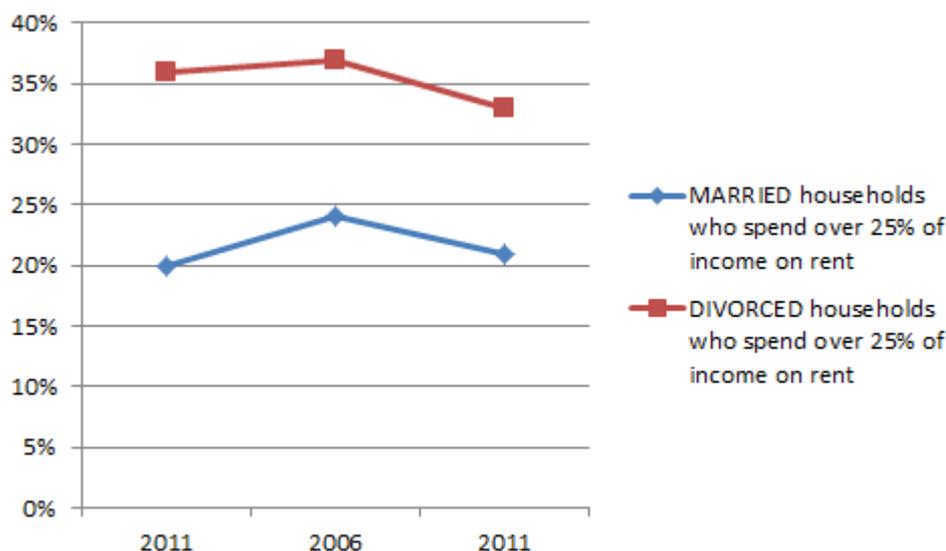
For households with married and never married individuals, 44%-45% of them rent their home; for



households with divorced / separated and never married individuals, 70% rented their home in 2001 and 78% of them rented homes in 2006 and 2011.

The rent-to-income ratios in the table below reveal that of those divorced households who rent homes, around 33-37% spent over a quarter of their income on rent. No more than 24% of households with married and never married individuals spent a quarter of their income on rent. (See Table 67 to Table 68 in Appendix B for other different households)

Table 23 – Households who spend over 25% of income on rent comparing married with divorced household with children under 18



Based on 5% Census data		Households who spend <u>over 25%</u> of their income on rent		
Household type	Year	2011	2006	2011
<b><u>MARRIED</u></b>		3027	3452	2964
		20%	24%	21%
<b><u>DIVORCED</u></b>		465	724	736
		36%	37%	33%

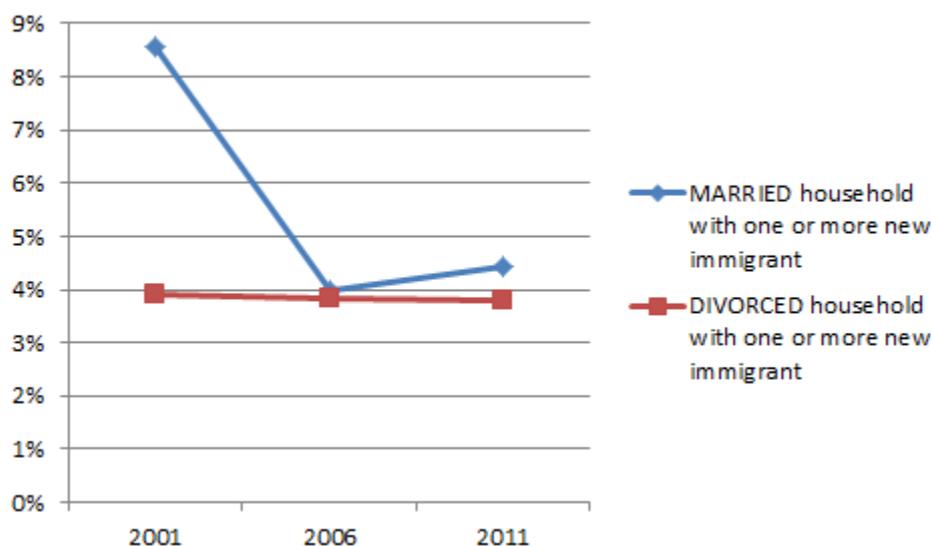
### 3.1.3 Immigration status

A variable has been created to indicate the ‘new immigrant’ status within all the data files including individual data, and then matched with household data afterwards. Individuals who fall into the ‘new immigrant’ status are defined as those whose ‘duration of stay in HK’ is less than 7 years, and their ‘place of

previous residence 5 years ago’ is Mainland China. Those who are aged below 18 are considered children. *However, please note that this definition serves only as a reference. The more accurate picture of households with Mainland mothers and children with Mainland or Hong Kong identity can only be depicted from data collected at the Immigration Department of HKSAR Government.*

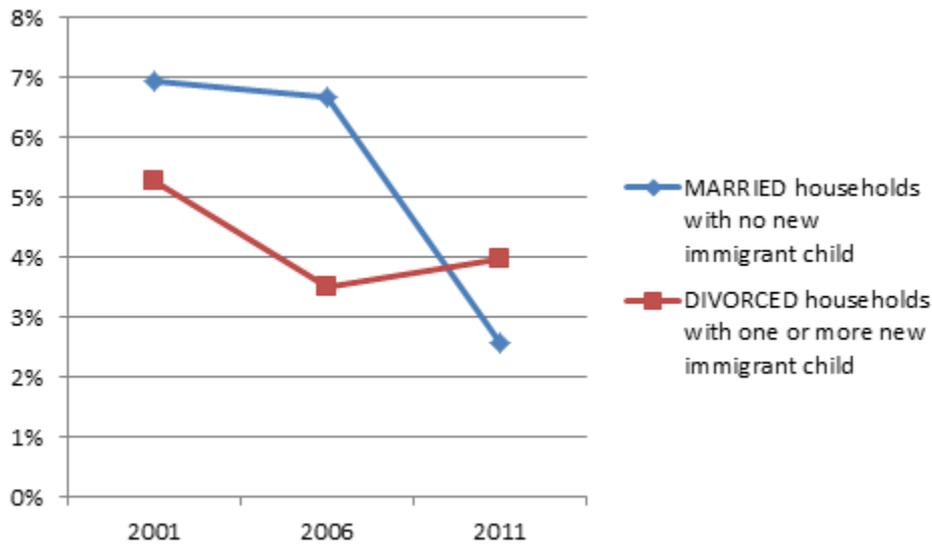
A drop in the absolute number of new immigrant adult(s) and children over the past 10 years is identified among all types of households *except* divorced households with never married children. Amongst divorced households with never married children, the absolute count of households with new immigrant(s) increased over the past decade, but the percentage change is not significant as the base rate of household has increased as well. (See Table 71 - Table 72 in Appendix B for other different household types)

Table 24 – New immigrant adults in married households comparing with divorced households **with children under 18**



Based on 5% Census data	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	<u>MARRIED</u>			<u>DIVORCED</u>		
No new immigrant adult	31690	31781	29779	1745	2418	2755
	91%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%
One or more new immigrant adult	2962	1321	1376	71	96	109
	9%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864

Table 25– New immigrant children in married households comparing with divorced households with children under 18



Based on 5% Census data	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	<u>MARRIED</u>			<u>DIVORCED</u>		
No new immigrant child	32252	30890	30351	1720	2426	2750
	93%	93%	97%	95%	96%	96%
One or more new immigrant child	2400	2212	804	96	88	114
	7%	7%	3%	5%	4%	4%
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864



## 3.2 Individual data by marital status

Based on our 5% micro data from Census, there are approximately 330,000 to 360,000 individuals in each dataset. The following section will present the analysis focusing on ‘now married’ versus ‘divorce/separated’ individuals.

Table 26 – No. of individuals by marital status

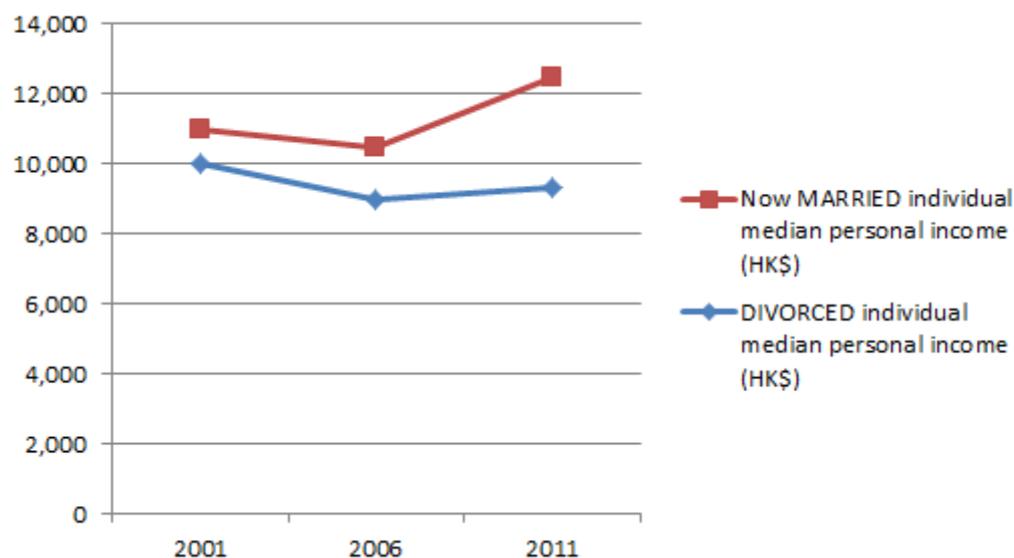
	Now married	Divorce/ Separated	Widowed	Never married (No. of children under 18)	Total
2001	164880	7839	17237	142676 (67852)	332632
	50%	2%	5%	43% (20%)	100%
2006	171124	11167	17547	142689 (60698)	342527
	50%	3%	5%	42% (18%)	100%
2011	185160	14511	20434	144022 (55246)	364127
	51%	4%	6%	40% (15%)	100%

### 3.2.1 Socioeconomic status (SES) differences

#### 3.2.1.1 Total personal income from all employment

Divorced individuals generally earn less than now married individuals. It holds true for every census year. The median personal income for divorced individuals even dropped in 2011.

Table 27 – Total personal income from all employment comparing now married versus divorced/separated individuals



Total Personal Income from All Employment (PPINCOME)	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
	Married HK\$			Divorce/ separated HK\$		
Mean	17,346	16,998	19,904	15,096	14,196	15,233
Median	11,000	10,500	12,500	<u>10,000</u>	<u>9,000</u>	<u>9,300</u>
Standard deviation	20,225	19,812	22,634	18,531	17,537	19,782
Valid N	99147	99715	108920	4635	6432	8472

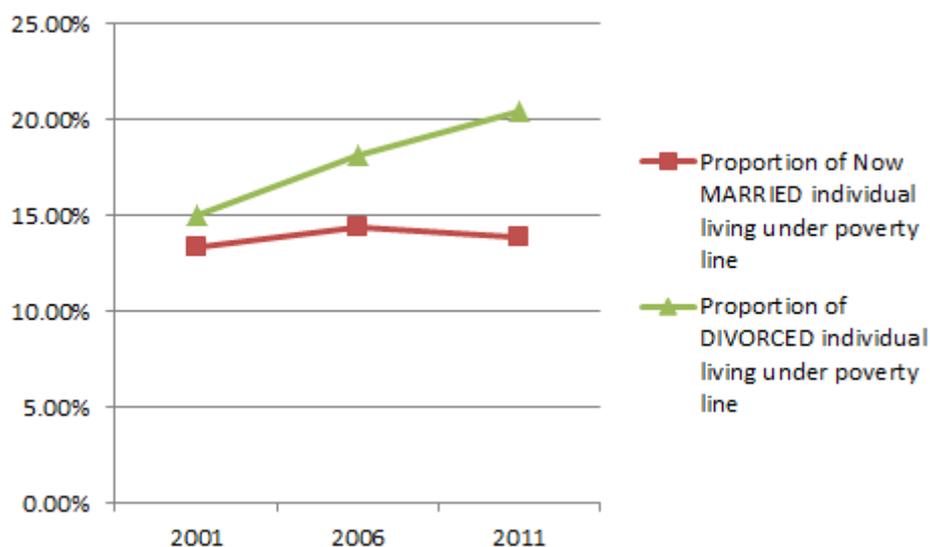
### 3.2.1.2 Poverty situation

In this section, the definition of poverty is the same as the one in page 71 for analysis. The median Personal Incomes from All Employment (PPINCOME) are calculated and shown below.

The absolute number of individuals who live under the individual poverty line (half of the median income) has increased over the past decade for both now married and divorced / separated individuals. The proportion of individuals in poverty, however, has increased considerably among divorced individuals from 15% in 2001 to 20% in 2011.



Table 28 – Poverty situation (based on personal income) comparing now married versus divorced/separated individuals

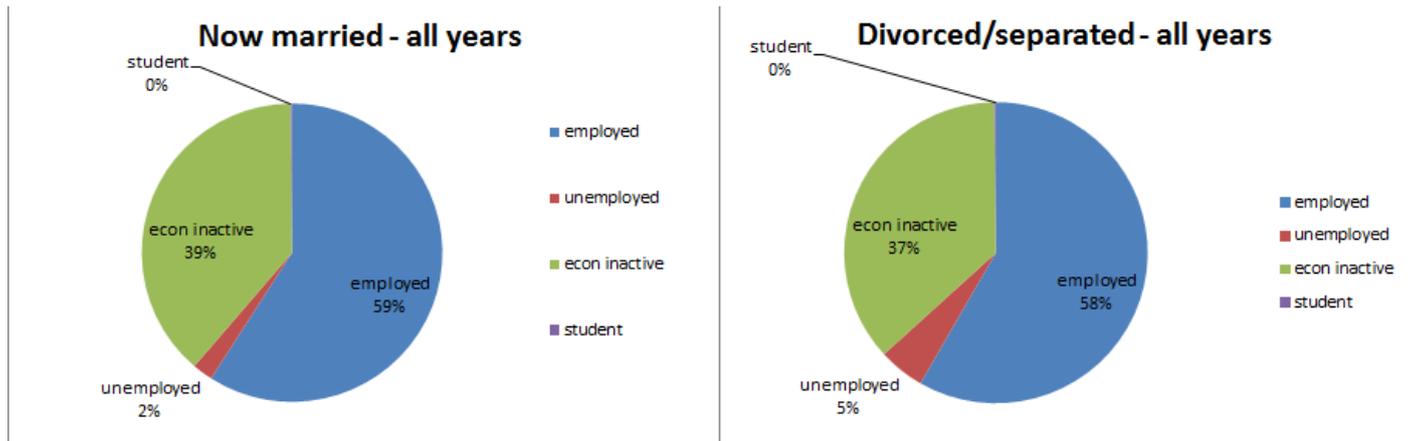


	Married			Divorced/separated		
	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
<b>Median Personal Income from All Employment PPINCOME</b>	\$10000	\$10000	\$11000	\$10000	\$10000	\$11000
<b>Poverty line</b>	\$5000	\$5000	\$5500	\$5000	\$5000	\$5500
<b># of Individuals with PPINCOME below poverty line</b>	13298	14386	15175	695	1167	1725
<b>% of valid N</b>	13.4%	14.4%	13.9%	15%	18.1%	20.4%
<b>Valid N</b>	99147	99715	108920	4635	6432	8472

### 3.2.1.3 Employment status

In general, the proportion of divorced individuals who are unemployed (5%) is larger than the proportion of married individuals who are unemployed (2%). The percentages of employed and unemployed population who are either now married or divorced / separated have both dropped over the past decade, whilst the percentages of economic inactive population among both now married and divorced / separated individuals have increased.

Figure 5- Employment status of individuals by marital statuses (2001, 2006, 2011)



Looking at the bar chart below which compares the percentages of now married and divorced / separated individuals in different economic status, it is noted that an unemployment individual has a higher chance of being divorced/ separated.

Table 29- Comparison between now married and divorced / separated individuals in different employment status (2001, 2006, and 2011)

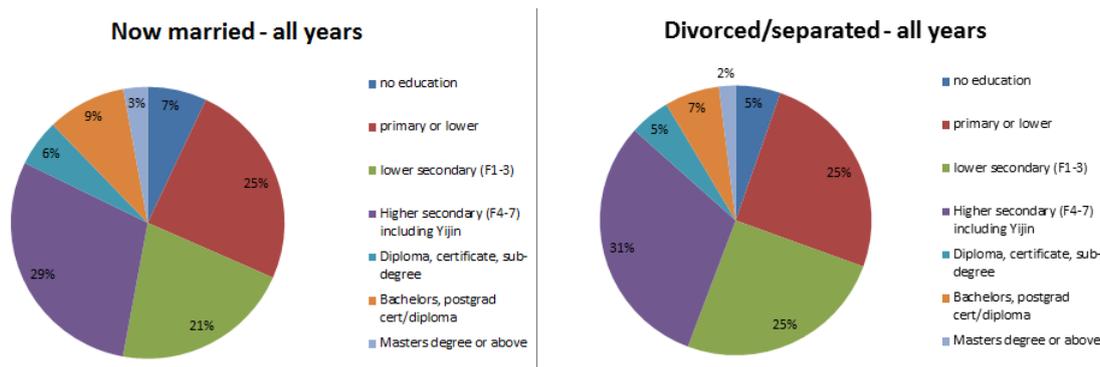
Economic activity status	Now married- all years	Divorced/separated- all years
Employed	307782 (59%)	19539 (58%)
Unemployed	11466 (2%)	1648 (5%)
Econ inactive	201000 (39%)	12267 (37%)
Student	916 (~0%)	63 (~0%)

### 3.2.1.4 Education completed

There is a smaller proportion of divorced individuals in bachelors or above education level (9% vs 12%), compared with the proportion of married individuals. And a larger proportion of divorced individuals have finished higher secondary education compared with married individuals (31% vs 29%).



Figure 6 - Distribution of education completed of individuals by marital statuses



Among different education levels (see bar chart below), the percentage of divorced individuals in lower secondary education level is the highest, compared with other education levels. However, it is noted that the difference between education levels among divorced or married individuals is not that big.

Table 30 - Comparison between individuals by marital statuses with different education levels

Education status	Now married	Divorced/separated
No education	36476 (7%)	1789 (5%)
Primary or lower	128252 (25%)	8454 (25%)
Lower secondary (F1-3)	111029 (21%)	8439 (25%)
Higher secondary (F4-7) including Yijin	152897 (29%)	10354 (31%)
Diploma, certificate, sub-degree	29007 (6%)	1621 (5%)
Bachelors, postgrad cert/diploma	48580 (9%)	2195 (7%)
Master's degree or above	14923 (3%)	665 (2%)

### 3.2.1.5 Occupation & Industry

There is a higher proportion of divorced individuals who work in public, social administration, human & cultural services (31% vs. 25%), and retail, wholesale & hotel industry (31% vs. 28%), compared with married individuals.



In terms of occupations, there is a higher proportion of divorced individuals working in personal and protective service (11.5%-12.4%) than married individuals (8.6-8.7%); higher proportion of divorced individuals working in sales and services elementary occupations (21-27%) than married individuals (18%). There is also slightly more divorced individuals working as office clerks (11-12.3%) or customer services clerks (3.5-4.5%) than married individuals (10.3-10.8% and 2.2-2.5%). Please refer to Table 75 in Appendix B for the figures.

Figure 7- Working industry distribution of individual by marital statuses (2001, 2006, and 2011)

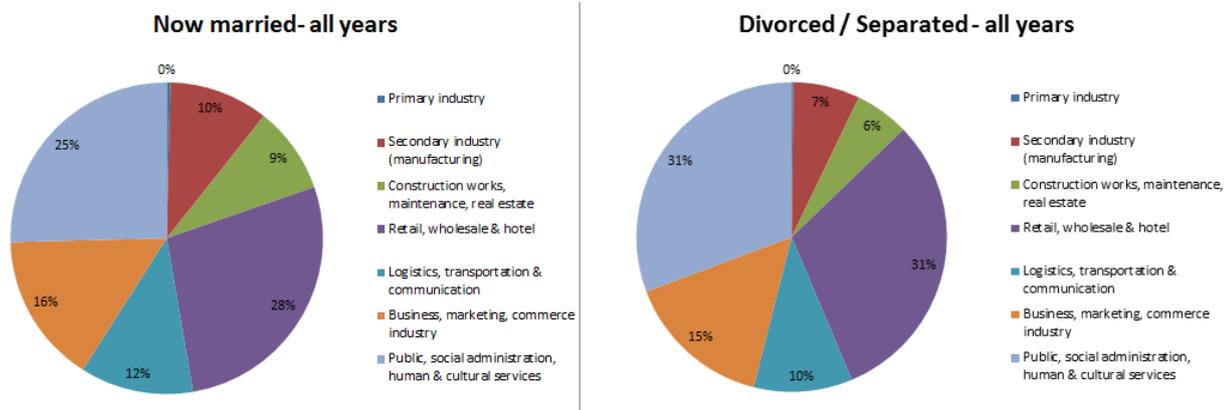


Table 31 -Comparison between individuals at both marital statuses in different working industries (2001, 2006, 2011)

	Now married	Divorced / Separated
Primary industry	1164 (~0%)	35 (~0%)
Secondary industry (manufacturing)	31642 (10%)	1355 (7%)
Construction works, maintenance, real estate	27709 (9%)	1108 (6%)
Retail, wholesale & hotel	84988 (28%)	6028 (31%)
Logistics, transportation & communication	36055 (12%)	2008 (10%)
Business, marketing, commerce industry	47914 (16%)	2992 (15%)
Public, social administration, human & cultural services	78139 (25%)	6002 (31%)



## 3.2.2 Housing

### 3.2.2.1 Housing Type

There is a larger proportion of divorced individuals living in government / housing society rental units (39%) than married individuals (28%). By the same token, a smaller proportion of divorced individuals live in private residential flats.

Over the years, there was an increase in divorced individuals living in government rental units, but not amongst married individuals. There is a percentage decrease in individuals living in private residential flats for both marital groups. Meanwhile, there is a percentage increase in individuals living in Housing Authority (HA)/Housing Society (HS) – flats for both marital groups.

Figure 8- Distribution of different housing types of individuals by marital statuses

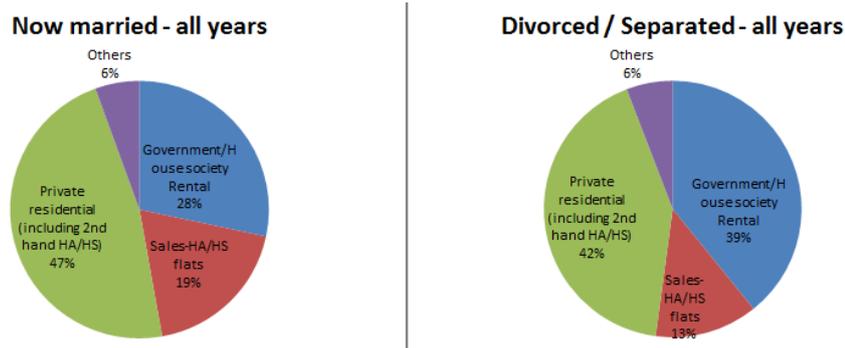


Table 32 -- Comparison of individuals by marital statuses in different housing

	Now married	Divorced / Separated
Government/House society Rental	147629 (28%)	13139 (39%)
Sales-HA/HS flats	98197 (19%)	4330 (13%)
Private residential (including 2nd hand HA/HS)	246183 (47%)	14098 (42%)
Others	28881 (6%)	1948 (6%)



### 3.2.3 Immigration status

#### 3.2.3.1 New immigrant status

The ‘new immigrant’ status - is defined as those whose ‘duration of stay in Hong Kong’ is less than 7 years, and their ‘place of previous residence 5 years ago’ is mainland China. This is adopted from Immigration status on page 78. *However, please note that this definition serves only as a reference, the more accurate picture of households with mainland mothers and children with mainland or Hong Kong identity can only be depicted from data collected at the Immigration Department of HKSAR Government.*

Under this definition, the table below shows the total number of individuals who fit into our definition. The total number of ‘new immigrant’ in 2001 is 11631<sup>30</sup>, going down to 6837 in 2006, and further decreasing to 5505 in 2011. The absolute number of ‘new immigrants’ who are either ‘never married’ or ‘married’ have been decreasing over time. But the absolute number of divorced ‘new immigrants’ has been increasing over time. However, this observation does not necessarily imply ‘new immigrant’ has a higher risk of divorce. More information is needed to determine risk.

Figure 9 - ‘New immigrants’ in different marital statuses

Duration of residence in HK <7 years and resided in China 5 years ago	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
	Never married	Never married	Never married	Now married	Now married	Now married	Now married	Widowed	Widowed	Widowed	Divorced / Separated	Divorced/s eparated
Total count	5906	2993	2480	5413	3603	2766	154	97	64	<b>158</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>195</b>

## 3.3 Hong Kong residents versus New Immigrants from China

‘HK resident’ is defined as individuals whose duration of stay in Hong Kong is over 7 years, and their ‘place of previous residence 5 years ago’ is located in Hong Kong.

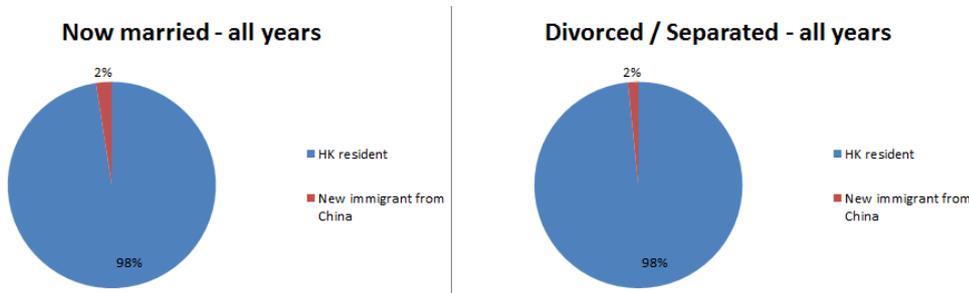
The pie chart tells us the proportion of ‘HK residents’ versus ‘new immigrants’ is similar in the two

<sup>30</sup> The sum of never married, now married, widowed, and divorced/separated individuals of respective year



marital groups.

Figure 10 - ‘HK residents’ and ‘New immigrants’ at both marital statuses (2001, 2006, 2011)



In terms of absolute numbers, there are more new immigrants from China who are married than divorced. And the divorce/now married ratio is no higher than that of the HK resident group.

Table 33 - Comparison between ‘HK residents’ and “new immigrants” at both marital statuses

	Now married - all years	Divorced / Separated - all years	Divorce/Now married ratio
HK resident	468804 (97.5%)	30281 (98.4%)	0.065
New immigrant from China	11782 (2.5%)	497 (1.6%)	0.042

## 3.4 Summary

Chapter 3 has further investigated the socioeconomic and demographic patterns and trend of divorce, which our first research objective focuses on, according to Census data set in terms of the socioeconomic status, the housing condition and immigration status of the divorced couples in Hong Kong. These three aspects have been examined at two levels: households and individuals.

At the *level of households* (with children), findings concerned with the three aspects include:

- The average income of divorced households is less than half of the married households.
- At least 30% of divorced households lived under the poverty line while no more than 20% of married households lived in poverty.
- There are consistently a higher proportion of divorced households with at least one person unemployed compared to married households. However, they are the most ‘economic active’ among all types of households.



- 45% to 49% of married households lived in private residential housing while the proportion of divorced households living in private residential housing dropped from 41% in 2001 to 28% in 2011. In contrast, 44% to 57% (2001 to 2011) of divorced households lived in government low cost housing.
- Majority of divorced households (70% to 78%) rented homes in comparison to married households (44% to 45%). Of these divorced households, 33% to 37% of them spent over 25% of their income on rent, this compared to no more than 24% of married households spending over 25% of their income on rent.
- The number of new immigrant adults and children increased among divorced households compared to a drop of new immigrant number among other types of households.

At the *level of individuals*, findings have been identified from Census statistics with respect to the three aspects, including:

- Income of divorced individuals has been less than that of now married individuals in 2001, 2006 and 2011.
- Among divorced individuals, the proportion of individuals in poverty has increased from 15% in 2001 to 20% in 2011.
- 5% of divorced / separated individuals are unemployed. This figure is over twice the unemployment proportion of now married individuals.
- Compared with married individuals, there is a higher proportion of divorced individuals working in public service and social administration (31% vs. 25%) and retail, wholesale & hotel industry (31% vs. 28%).
- The proportion of divorced individuals living in government rental units increased in the year 2001, 2006 and 2011. This figure kept exceeding the percentage of married individuals in government rental units which has decreased over the years. Meanwhile, both marital groups experienced a percentage decrease in individuals living in private residential flats and the percentage among divorced individuals was smaller than that of married individuals.
- Although the absolute number of divorced ‘new immigrants’ has been increasing, the proportion of divorced individuals amongst ‘new immigrant’ group is not higher than the proportion of divorced individuals amongst HK residents. Thus, the perception of new immigrants is at higher risk of divorce is not supported by current evidence. More data are needed to explore this area.



## 3.5 Issues with Census data set

Census and quarterly General Household Survey do not regularly collect items such as “duration of marriage to date”, or include “remarried” as one of the marital status. As a result, the data necessary for looking at the pool of people at risk of divorce is missing even though we have data collected regarding the length of marriage and the basic remarriage information from the Family Court case files. The missing of the data limits the exploration in whether remarriages increase the risk of divorce, and whether children may serve as protective factor for marriage.



# Chapter 4 to 6 on Qualitative Study

## Recruitment

The qualitative study aims at accomplishing research objectives of understanding the factors affecting marital stability and impacts of divorce on the affected individuals as well as the associated needs of divorced families. Since the quantitative data of Family Court and Census cannot address these areas of investigation, the qualitative method of case interviews is adopted.

Focus groups serve to elicit information and insight in response to the designed interview questions through reaching out to the frontline professionals such as social workers who are the potential readers and users of the study.

## Case interviews

With the assistance and support from the NGOs, a total of 41 case interviews have been conducted across the period from 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012 until 26<sup>th</sup> March 2013. This group of interviewees is composed of 9 males and 32 females. At the point of interviews, 7 of them were considering divorce and 10 were at the stage of separation. 2 filed divorce. 18 have been divorced for less than 1 year to 16 years. 4 have been married for 1 to 40 years. In terms of age, 16 are relatively younger at an age of 40 or below while 4 are 60 or above. Please see Appendix D for details of the characteristics of the cases interviewed.

Please note that this is not a representative sample of all divorced couple. Most of these cases come from less fortunate background, which coincide with our findings in Chapter 3.1.1.3, where divorced families with children under 18 had a lower median income compared with other types of family.

Nevertheless, we have a few cases in each of the following groups:

- Cross-border marriages (14 cases); local marriages (27 cases)
- Marriages with children (38 cases); marriages with no children (3 cases)
- Poor socioeconomic status with current income with \$10,000 or below (29 cases); average or above socioeconomic status with current income with above \$10,000 (12 cases)
- Low level education with no post-secondary degree (33 cases); higher level education attainment with post-secondary degree or above (8 cases)



## Focus groups

Two focus groups have been conducted on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013, with a total of 7 social workers and 1 family mediator (i.e. 8 persons). These frontline professionals have extensive experience in handling cases of divorce. Moreover, a legal professional has given suggestions and comments regarding the numerous cases she has handled.

## Methodology and Approach

Content analysis has been conducted with all case interviews transcripts available. Each transcript has been read and formed into categories and analyzed thematically. The categories are coded into themes using the software NVivo. Please refer to Page 194 (Appendix E) for the themes available. The themes are drafted based on our research questions, which form the structure of our interview questions, and emerging topics were identified and addressed. The questions can be found in Page 190 (Appendix D). Data were analyzed using a general inductive approach to identify key themes relevant to the research questions (Creswell, 2012) (Thomas, 2006) (Patton, 1990). It involves initial reading of the transcripts, followed by systematically identifying text segments relating to research questions. Then, the emerging themes are coded into main themes and sub-themes.

The themes and findings are discussed and deliberated with the co-investigator team. They are being organized by adapting the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1997) to answer our research questions by explore the following:

- Chapter 4 - Using an Ecological model to explain factors that may affect marital stability
- Chapter 5 - Using an Ecological model to illustrate the impacts arising from divorce
- Chapter 6 - Needs of these families





# Chapter 4 - Using an ecological model to explain factors that may affect marital stability

The aim of this chapter is to explore the answers to the following research questions:

- Are there any groups who are at a higher risk of divorce than the others? What are the risk (and protective) factors of divorce?
- What are the changes in the perception of marriage and divorce between different cohorts?
- How did the changes in society shape their perception? How do the perception and attitudes towards marriage and divorce differ between couples who stay married and those who are divorced?
- What are the problems and barriers faced by married and divorced couples at different stages of their life? What are the differences in their help seeking and problem solving behavior when conflicts arise in their marriage?

## 4.1 Individual level

Through examining the interviewed cases, it is found that some factors at the individual level are likely to affect the stability of marriage and one's decision of divorce: 1) expectations on partners cannot be met; 2) there existed certain reasons behind getting married.

### Unmet Expectations

For expectations on partners, most of the interviewed females expressed their husbands were less reliable, responsible and loving than they expected. For instance, from the perspectives of females, one case stated her husband was immature even after he became a father; one expected her husband to be responsible of all the problems encountered; another female voiced she did not have enough care from her



husband when needed (e.g. giving birth to their baby). Some cases informed that they did not gain the right respect and appreciation from their husbands in child upbringing and housework. A few cases expressed their partners perceived marriage as something romantic which they expected a more stable relationship. From the four males' perspectives, some expressed his wife showed undue concern over their relationship and one imputed it to his wife's status as a housewife.

## Reasons of Getting Married

Different reasons for getting married illustrate different perceptions of marriage from interviewed cases. It is noticed that quite a few females held the perception that marriage is a necessary part of women's life and they got married because it is time to do so and there is a need to give birth to children. Some cases believed marriage could help people gain financial support. One got married in order to escape from her family of origin. In these cases, marriage is either perceived as a task or embedded with additional purposes.

It is worth noting that young couples' perception of marriage differs from the middle-aged. Based on the experiences of frontline professionals and NGOs who set up a consultation booth in marriage exhibition on the topic of extra-marital affairs, young couples nowadays are more realistic and pessimistic about marriage. They have lower expectation and less romantic ideals in long-term relationship.

## 4.2 Couple level

Several issues in the couple relations are considered as factors affecting marriage stability include: 1) age gap; 2) weak relationship before marriage; 3) birth of first child; 4) retirement; 5) lack of communication; 6) extra-marital affairs; 7) financial stress; 8) unreasonable behaviors including controlling behaviors, verbal attacks and threats, domestic violence and gambling.

### 4.2.1 Age Gap

Younger parties tend to expect more maturity in older parties and this expectation is often unsatisfied.



One older male expressed age gap affects his relationship with his younger wife as she has more future opportunities (outside the marriage) than him. Most of the cases perceived age gap as a factor that affect the stability of marriage. The cases described in this section had an age gap of 10 years or above.

## 4.2.2 Weak Pre-marriage Relationship

It is noted that most cases did not have a strong foundation in relationship before marriage though they appeared to communicate harmoniously before getting married. Almost half of the couples dated less than one year before marriage. Some cases got married because of family connections, and some made a quick decision in marriage resulting from the pressure of their families. A few cases, especially the cross-border marriages, indicated they had not properly dated before getting married. Two cases got married because of pregnancy.

## 4.2.3 Child-related Issues

Some interviewed couples indicated that birth of first child had negative effect on their marriages because they encountered stress and disagreement in child upbringing after they had the responsibility of being parents. A few husbands complained they felt neglected as their wives spent too much time on their child. One female voiced that her husband unreasonably asked her to be responsible for all the expense of the child. Another case informed that his wife probably had postpartum depression after the birth of their first child, which brought negative impact on their relationship.

Many interviewees expressed that they experienced disagreement with their spouses in terms of children's education, expenses on childcare and distribution of childcare workload. For children's discipline, some interviewees blamed their spouses for spoiling the children while some others complained their partners were too harsh on their children with one case even occasionally hitting the children. Some couples had problems in choosing schools for the children. One case was unhappy about her husband's disrespect for their son's opinion on choice of schools. With respect to expenses on childcare, one husband was dissatisfied with his wife making decision without asking him and refusing to listen to his opinion. In another case, one party felt extra-curricular classes and pre-school are worth paying for, while the other party disagreed. For distribution of childcare workload, many cross-border marriages and local low income couples complained about their husbands' being irresponsible in childcare, including spending little time with children, not attending parents' meetings and having no idea about children's school life.



## 4.2.4 Retirement

Among the interviewed cases, a few couples are at a later life stage and they implied that the change of status from working to retirement negatively affected their marriage. The reasons indicated include: 1) when the couple relationship is already unsatisfactory, conflict between the couple increases with retirement as the spouses spend more time together. As a result, time of privacy reduces and frustration with the marriage escalates; 2) there is a shift in power dynamics between the couple as the retired spouse no longer holds the status and role of a financial provider. When the retired spouse feels his importance and respect in the family being threatened, this may give rise to more conflict between the couple.

## 4.2.5 Lack of Communication

Lack of communication is prevalent among the divorced couples. Failure in expressing one's feelings to partners results in accumulation of marital dissatisfaction. Among the interviewed cases, there are three main reasons: 1) some tried to speak out at first but stopped when their spouse did not listen to them; 2) some conceal their emotions to avoid quarrels; 3) lack of privacy for couples leads to reduced communication between couples. One case said that as she is living with her husband's extended family, she seldom has the opportunity to talk with her husband privately.

## 4.2.6 Extra-marital Affairs

The interviewed cases with extra-marital affairs happen within local Hong Kong marriages. Among the marriages with extra-marital affairs, most are irretrievably broken, except a few where the extra-marital affairs happened a long time ago. Most cases are husbands who had extra-marital affairs. For the cases where the husband suspects his wife of having affairs, the husband finds it difficult to tell others. Two cases involved in extra-marital affairs are couples who had strong love foundations, dating since college. In one case, the interviewee blamed the many temptations in society, implying that the large number of single young ladies with low moral standards tempted her husband. It is implied that extra marital affairs are more accessible with the perceived increasing number of single women in society and a greater number of young women who have little moral guilt in being a mistress. Also, perceptions of extra-marital affairs have changed, and sometimes short-term relations are not regarded as affairs. Some cases indicated that signs showing extra-marital affairs include husband returning home late, spending little time at home and nitpicking their wives. Some cases with extra-marital affairs ended up with husbands stopping providing



financial support or even moving out to live with their mistresses.

Our focus group discussions indicate that extra-marital affair is one of the major causes of divorce. Contrary to previous perception, it no longer only happens with husband seeking mistress from China; an increasing number of mistresses come from Hong Kong. This is in general a result of the work culture and environment in Hong Kong: long working hours and high working pressure reducing family time and endangering couple relationship. In addition, the different attitudes that men and women hold towards sex after marriage may explain why people seek affairs. Some couples no longer have sex life after the birth of their child. Some may not have time. And after having a baby, some wives do not think that it is necessary to fulfill their husband’s sexual needs anymore, driving some husbands to seek extra-marital affairs.

When extra-marital affairs occur, many women will consider redeeming the marriage as they are emotionally dependent on their husband, some even financially. From the perspective of social workers, the husbands who have affairs can help their wives cope better with divorce since the husbands can be responsible in providing tangible assets to ‘compensate’ the suffering that he has caused. The ability of women to deal with divorce often depends on the amount of compensation that the husband is willing to offer.

## 4.2.7 Financial Stress

It appears that many of the interviewed cases faced financial stress, especially for those in lower socioeconomic status, and this stress creates marital instability. Financial stress here includes the husbands’ stress as the sole breadwinner particularly for the cross-border marriages, insufficient financial support from the husbands, housing mortgage and debt problems. In other cases, conflicts may arise from how money is spent, such as imbalance of bill payment, or spending too much money on one’s own parents.

### *Stress from being the sole breadwinner*

Most husbands become the sole breadwinner in cross-border marriages. Their wives cannot legally work before they obtain a one-way permit; thus, the whole financial responsibility falls on the husband. From the description of many cases, the husband is unhappy about being the only breadwinner. They bear huge amounts of stress and complain about it, disparaging the job of a housewife and caring for the child as easy. For example, in one case the husband earns slightly more than \$10,000 for a family of five; in another case the husband bears the financial responsibility for family of six, four of them mentally



challenged children. Such cases can be highly stressful, and some husbands feel very bitter, turning their unhappiness into the nitpicking of their wives, often resulting in their wives feeling unappreciated. There appears room for reflection or evaluation on current immigration and work policy, considered harmonious relation in family can be facilitated via fair share of financial burden.

Some husbands persuade their wives to go out and work when legally permitted. Often, however, the wives need to take care of their children. Some suggest hiring helpers, but their husbands refuse, claiming a lack of money. In a few cases, wives from the Mainland who have yet to receive the work permit plan to begin work immediately after obtaining the permit. They think that once they are no longer financially dependent on their husbands, they can share the financial burden of the household, and no longer have to tolerate their husbands' temper. Only one case, contrary to traditional gender roles, the woman is the sole breadwinner. She felt that it was very unfair, and her husband even relies on her to cover his credit card debts.

### ***Insufficient Financial Support from Husband***

In many cases, interviewees said that they have no financial support from husband. Some rely on their own savings, or their family's provision from China. In one extreme case the interviewee's husband did not even pay the expense needed for her to give birth. Another's husband had affairs and stopped providing money for the family, and she had to work when her daughter got older. In other cases, the wives think that their husbands are not providing enough to cover the expense at home. But they get into conflicts when the husbands, on the other hand, blame them for spending too much. Some of these wives decide to claim CSSA, or seek alternative social resources instead.

A few interviewees said that the financial provision from their husband is very unstable which creates anxiety for them and it is more common among low-income families. The uncertainty creates stress. When they ask their husband for more, their husbands become ill-tempered. The vicious cycle affects their emotional health too. One interviewee said that her husband was very unhappy when she gave money to her own mother, creating conflicts.

### ***Housing mortgage***

Two local Hong Kong cases were unable to afford the mortgage with their private property as a result of the financial crisis. It brought great stress and burden for their families. Other couples voiced that they often argued about how to spend money due to the financial burden from housing. Some cases had



conflicts in deciding whether to purchase a property or not when it was an issue involving their mothers in-law. A few interviewees had to share small flat with their in-laws because of financial stress, resulting in a lack of space and privacy.

### *Debt*

Debt problems often lead to the marriage breaking down irretrievably. In many of these cases, the husbands escaped from the responsibility of repaying the debt. Some debt problems happened because of the males' gambling behavior. These husbands seldom spend time at home, affecting the couple's relationship. Moreover, they borrow money from loan sharks, risking the family's safety. Some interviewees and their children were harassed by loan sharks and decided to move out.

In terms of financial issues, the focus group discussions indicate that economic pressure aggravates the problems in the marriage because the couples will have to argue about the income settlement and to settle the financial burdens. According to the focus group discussion, shared properties and children are common reasons for couples to maintain their marriage.

According to the focus group discussion, the difference in socioeconomic status makes a difference to the nature of marriage. The nature of marriage and the problems faced by couples are different for grassroots class versus middle class. In the grassroots class, marriages between mainland and Hong Kong residents are common. Many of them consist of an elderly Hong Kong husband and a young Mainland wife. In these cases, very often the woman is disappointed with the living environment, while the man is worried that his wife is using him as a means to move to Hong Kong, and is concerned about the possibility of being betrayed by his wife. Some older Hong Kong men use violence to threaten their wives, leading to family violence. In the end, family violence leads to divorce.

Even when both parties are of similar ages and both from grassroots class, professionals observe that very often they have no time to maintain their marriage. They are all busy in handling practical problems such as housing problems.

In middle class marriages, both parties usually have some financial capacity, so the divorce decision is less bound by financial dependence. Most divorce because of mismatch or clash of personality. In terms of education level, those with higher education tend to pursue a high-quality marriage, and they are more rational in handling conflicts. These marriages differ from traditional marriages, where tolerance is highly



preferred. Couples in the past also tend to wait until finance problems or children related problems are solved before considering divorce.

## 4.2.8 Unreasonable Behaviors

The unreasonable behaviors identified in the examined cases include controlling behaviors, verbal attacks, domestic violence and gambling. They often correlate with each other. For example, among the cases, a husband would attack with threats and violence when he is drunk, and another one is more likely to verbally attack his wife after gambling. Most of the spouses with unreasonable behaviors are in a low socioeconomic status.

### *Controlling Behaviors*

According to the interviewees' descriptions, it appears many spouses control their partner in one way or another. This ranges from restraining the partner's personal time and space, controlling the partner's everyday living, to treating the partner like a domestic helper.

### *Verbal Attacks*

Many of the interviewed cases voiced they have been verbally attacked by spouses, including nitpicking about housework, shouting with disrespect, using of insulting words and foul language and threats of violence. These verbal attacks result in serious harm to dignity.

### *Domestic Violence*

Domestic violence usually happens in low income families. Some husbands cannot control their temper, especially after gambling or being asked to financially support the family. They threaten to hit the wife, throw things on her or turn to hit the children. One case is involved with sexual violence. She said her husband treats her as a sex slave. But she chooses to tolerate most of the time, out of the intention to protect the children. It is noticed only one case who has higher education compared to the others stopped her husband's violent behaviors through using prosecution as a threat.

### *Gambling*

Many cases suffer from issues arising from gambling matters. Sometimes, the husband would ask for money to gamble. In another case, the husband loses his rationality when he gambles, and does not bear consequences following losing the game. In another case, the husband rationalizes his gambling behavior



that he wants to win a sum of money to pay for down payment. This case's husband has debts even before their marriage, but after marriage, his behavior gets worse. He throws a bad temper when he loses money, affecting their marital relations. He even uses the wife's money to buy stocks online and trade margins. He applies for credit cards to cover his debts and borrow money to gamble more.

## 4.3 Family and Friends level

Views of one's family and friends play an influential role in a couple's consideration of divorce. Among the interviewed cases, most of the couples' parents regard divorce as a shame and they are strongly against the couples' decision of divorce. It is due to Chinese older generation's traditional concept that marriage is a life-long commitment. Some cases' parents blamed the children for their intolerance. Two cases mentioned their parents-in-law objected to their divorce. One case confided that she never told her parents the conflicts with her husband as they could not accept divorce.

### 4.3.1 Extended Family

Chinese society values family highly. Marriage often involves not just two persons but the entire family. The following section illustrates how extended families affect couples' marital stability.

#### 4.3.1.1 Conflicts with extended family members

In-law problems are mostly prevalent in poor families, probably due to the high costs of living independently. Case interviews indicate that living with in-law parents can be difficult. Conflicts between mother-in-law and wife often revolve around child care-taking. In many cases, especially in low income families and cross-border marriages, the wife feels ill-treated by the mother-in-law.

#### *Difficulties in living with in-laws*

Many poorer families live with their in-laws, and many conflicts arise between the wife and mother-in-law. These conflicts can arise from the differences in habits and rituals, standards of hygiene, meal preferences, etc. For example, their sleep may be affected due to differences in habit. In some cases, the interviewee was unhappy about having to take care of her husband's family, including his parents and siblings. They also felt that it was difficult to please their mother-in-law, and sometimes felt that the husband's family was teaming up against them. There is only one case where the husband moved into the wife's extended family; the wife believes that her husband's ego suffered as a result, and their relationship began to deteriorate, resulting in the husband spending less time at home.



In most cases, the wives live with the husbands' family. Some wives felt that she has no personal space or couple time when living with extended family. For example, one case complained she cannot talk to her husband privately at home, as her mother-in-law often interrupts their conversation.

### ***Conflicts between mother-in-law and wife in child care-taking***

Conflicts between mother-in-law and wife often revolve around child care-taking. This situation is mostly prevalent in poorer families. In some cases, the parents have no time to take care of their children and need to rely on the in-law parents. In some cases, the wife was reprimanded by her mother-in-law for not knowing how to discipline the child. In one case, the interviewee fought with her in-laws as the mother-in-law drove a wedge between the interviewee and her child. One mother in-law even encouraged abortion.

### ***Treatment by in-laws***

Among several cases, particular in poor and cross-border marriages, the mother-in-laws treated the wives poorly. For example, one mother-in-law opposed the marriage because they looked down on a mainland woman marrying her son. The interviewees from poorer families reported they were shouted at and controlled by their mother-in-laws. For example, one interviewee's mother-in-law did not allow her to eat certain foods. In another more extreme case, the mother-in-law hit the interviewee. Another interviewee reported that she was treated as a domestic helper, shouting at her to do house chores even when she was pregnant. A few cases voiced that the extended family team up with the mother-in-law to abuse the interviewee verbally.

#### **4.3.1.2 Extended family members' involvement in marriage and divorce**

This section illustrates cases where some in-law parents would initiate divorce before the couple does so. Some get involved with property or assets split between the couple.

### ***In-laws involved in breaking up (or saving) the marriage***

In some cases, parents-in-laws initiate and suggest the idea of divorce to the couple. For instance, in one example the mother-in-law threatened her son to choose either his mother or his wife. In some cases, the husband listened to his mother and initiated divorce.



### ***In-laws involved in property or assets splitting***

In one case, the mother-in-law and husband persuaded the interviewee to pay the down payment for a property, but did not add her name to the contract and the flat was occupied by her husband's family. The interviewee felt very dissatisfied. In another case, the husband added his mother's name to their company, and the wife requested her name to be added as well, but was refused.

## **4.4 Society level**

Through investigating the cases and the focus group, several factors in a societal level affect their perception of divorce: 1) media's portrayal of divorce; 2) working system and culture; 3) society's perception of gender roles. Additionally, the last part of this section will focus on the cross-border marriages among the examined cases.

### **Media's Portrayal of Divorce**

Most of the cases believe that the media has some impact on their perception of divorce. They commonly expressed that divorce is portrayed as a common phenomenon by the media, especially among celebrities. Some added that the media hold an open attitude towards divorce and they sometimes depict life after divorce glamorous. Thus, they perceive people nowadays become less responsible in marriage.

### **Working System and Culture**

According to the professionals, the working system and culture in Hong Kong have great influence on the marriage stability. For instance, the contracting working system may be associated with low birth rate and late marriage. The increase in contract jobs makes career path and income source highly unstable for young people. People will not get married until they are financially stable. For those who get married, they hesitate to have a baby under financial pressure. As mentioned before, married couples with no children may easily get divorce. Besides, the long working hour culture in Hong Kong also influences marriage stability. Long working hours result in less time spent with family. Some interviewees in the focus group even implied that long work hours may increase chances of extra-marital affairs in workplace. Thus, the working system and culture in Hong Kong affect marriage stability.



## Society’s Perception of Gender Roles

It is found that our society still has certain perception of different roles between females and males and the discrepancy increases conflicts between couples. For instance, many of the examined cases who are divorced or filing divorce are full-time housewives while their husband is the breadwinner. One of the cases expressed that she felt risky depending all on her husband. Most of these cases are cross-border marriages. Although other cases tend to be equal in finance, especially amongst the local Hong Kong couples, several female raised the issue that they and their husbands both work to earn money, but they are the only one taking care of children and housework. One case said her husband will become ill-tempered when she is unwilling to cook after work sometimes. In a few cases, women earn more than their husbands. One male case complained that his wife is dominant and is believed to have extra-marital affairs. Another female case said her husband’s self-esteem is hurt as he feels he has to rely on her family.

### 4.4.1 Case study on cross-border marriages

A case study looking at cross-border marriages is conducted as the prevalence of cross-border marriages is quite high. According to Table 34 below, since 2006, around 27-31% of the divorce cases filed are relating to marriages in Mainland. Although this only provides a proxy number for “cross-border” marriages, it still takes up a significant portion of all divorces filed each year in Hong Kong. Our case interviews reveal the characteristics of cross-border marriages: relationship foundation is not strong (very short dating period); partial arranged marriages; the perception of such marriage is generally poor, and the children of these marriages often live under a constantly changing environment as well.

Table 34 – Data obtained from the Family Court

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
No. of divorce cases filed	<b>18,172</b>	<b>17,803</b>	<b>18,030</b>	<b>19,263</b>	<b>20,849</b>	<b>22,543</b>	<b>23,255</b>
No of divorce cases filed relating to marriages in Mainland	<b>5,655</b>	<b>5,405</b>	<b>5,331</b>	<b>5,655</b>	<b>5,828</b>	<b>6,064</b>	<b>6,320</b>
%	<i>31%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>28%</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>27%</i>

Please take note that the percentages should be interpreted with caution as this table does not account for changes in the local marriages



The perception of cross-border marriages is generally poor amongst Hong Kong residents. They believe these cross-border marriages divorce easily. Mainland women look for financial security when they marry to Hong Kong men. One case who's a Hong Kong resident believes children born out of cross-border marriages are delinquent. Their single parent does not discipline them well and they often bully children from local marriages. She believes the mainland women often deprive resources from Hong Kong residents in real need, such as CSSA and NGO's free day-care service.

The perception of cross-border marriages, from the perspective as a Mainland female, is quite interesting. One Mainland female also thinks other Mainland women marry to Hong Kong for a better life, and another agrees that money is a major concern in cross-border marriages. One case said she does not mind her husband being poor in Hong Kong. She believes Hong Kong is full of opportunities if they work hard. Another case said that she often hears of stories where Hong Kong husbands trust their mothers with their money and property assets more than they trust their Mainland wives. One Mainland female thinks only Hong Kong men of poor quality (i.e. education) will marry women from Mainland. And that creates further social problem. In another case, she feels the stigma associated with cross-border marriages from Hong Kong local residents.

Aside from stigma and poor perception of cross-border marriages, the cases in our interview also have very poor relations with their mother in-law. Some of the mothers-in-law are dissatisfied with their son marrying a Mainland woman. And one perceives her in-law judging her to be one of those women with hidden agenda behind the marriage.

Most of these couples had their relationship partly arranged, and they have not gone through dating much. It is assumed that the relationship foundation is not strong.

The children of these cross-border marriages often live under a constantly changing environment, running back and forth between Mainland and Hong Kong. Whilst the mothers are waiting for the Hong Kong permit to be approved, they have to go back to mainland every several months; their children either follow them along, or are taken cared by grandparents remaining in Hong Kong. There gives an opportunity of conflicts between the cases and their mothers-in-law. In some cases, their children grow up in China, and come back to Hong Kong for kindergarten education. Education opportunity is one of the factors they move back.



Several cases said they have difficulty adapting to the Hong Kong culture. Living in a very confined space, unfamiliarity with the rituals and language, have made them feel quite isolated and they have to rely on their husband's family. One even described as if she is living in a prison, and another said she lost her dignity marrying to Hong Kong.

### *Focus group findings*

Professionals discussed specifically about cross border marriages in the focus group. They suggest that there occur many problems for cross-border marriage. There are easily cultural differences on how to raise children. Stigma from in-laws is a tough issue faced by the Mainland wives. The mainland women usually find it hard to adapt to the difficulties after moving to Hong Kong and to the challenges brought by divorce. They find it hard to seek help from families in Mainland as it is difficult to express or explain. Thus they often feel helpless.

For most marriages of this kind, the function of marriage has deteriorated. Some of the marriages are based on other hidden agendas. The characteristics of cross border marriages include mostly grass-root couples. The husband is much older than the wife from Mainland. Some are even illiterate. Many wives are willing to get married to a much older men with the intent of getting the right of abode. In other more complicated cases, either party is in a re-marriage. In terms of service needs, financial problems top the decision over custodial arrangements. Mediation services, despite the low service utilization, are utilized by grass-roots couples mostly. The professionals have to deal with domestic violence more than providing marital counseling amongst these couples.

The cross-border marriages nowadays involve more Mainland women who are more educated. However, they are still being stigmatized by their family. The NGO services are mostly utilized by grass-roots, and less so for middle class.

Comparing the cross border marriages with the local marriages, professionals suggest there are great differences in the foundation of marriage. For local marriage, the couples usually have a smaller age gap, better communication and stronger emotional dependency with each other. They make effort to maintain their marriage. Moreover, local couples are more open-minded towards premarital sex and cohabitation.



When local couples consider divorce, they are relatively financially independent. Thus, financial stress is seldom a factor leading to marital conflicts. They are both willing to contribute to expenditure in taking care of their children. For cross border marriages that involve Mainland women from urban city, their marriage foundation and problems they encounter are similar to local marriages. For example, if they are urban residents, they tend to make their own decisions, and consider mismatch of personalities. However, if the woman is from sub-urban or country-side in China, she will usually tolerate her husband, adopting the traditional gender role and attitudes. These couples usually have to overcome financial stress as they are mostly from grass-roots. Therefore, in most cases there are lots of cultural differences, including the adapting to the difference between reality and their expectation of life in Hong Kong. In summary, cross border marriage and local marriage differs in terms of their marriage foundation, and problems they encounter in their marriage.

## 4.5 Summary

In summary, factors that are considered to affect the marital stability of the interviewed cases include:

- Individuals’ expectations on their partners cannot be met;
- There are some certain reasons for getting married, including financial reasons and pressure from families;
- A considerable age gap and weak relationship foundation before marriage can be factors that affect marital stability;
- Birth of the first child may bring stress to couples, and disagreement on children’s education, expenses on children and distribution of childcare workload may lead to marital instability;
- Retirement of spouses is likely to change the power dynamic and cause instability in marriage;
- Lack of communication between couples is a major negative factor;
- Extra-marital affairs among the interviewed cases happened between Hong Kong local marriages. It is one of the major factor to disruption of marriage;
- Financial stress including stress from being sole breadwinners, insufficient financial support from husbands, housing mortgage and debt are common factors arising in marital conflicts;
- Unreasonable behaviors including controlling behaviors, verbal attacks, domestic violence and gambling often result in irretrievable breaking in marriage;
- Conflicts with extended family members and their involvement in marriage and divorce often lead to the instability relationship between couples.



- At the societal level, it is reflected that media’s portrayal of divorce as an open and common phenomenon may have some impact on people’s perception of divorce;
- The working system and culture (i.e. long working hours) have a negative influence on family relationship;
- Society still has certain perception of different roles between females and males and the discrepancy increases conflicts between couples;
- The case study on cross-border marriages reveals that the relationship is usually not strong and many of them are partial arranged marriage. Society perceives this type of marriage negatively and children of these marriages often face changing environment.



# Chapter 5 - Using an Ecological model to illustrate the impacts of divorce

The aim of this chapter is to explore the answers to the following research questions:

- What are the impacts of divorce on couples and children (if any)?
- How do they cope with these family transitions?

## 5.1 Impacts on Individual

### 5.1.1 Impact on Individuals' Emotions

A majority of the interviewed cases expressed negative feelings caused by either internal factors such as being involved with marital conflicts or external factors such as the stress from legal filing procedures. A few cases believed their divorce has influenced them positively such as being happier, more outgoing and independent than before and found things meaningful and interesting to do.

#### 5.1.1.1 Negative Impact

##### *Internal Factors*

Divorce and marital conflicts generate negative feelings within involved individuals. Among the interviewed cases, the most common feeling is sadness, even depression. Many of them cried frequently about their distressed situations. Even during the case interviews, a majority of them shed tears when recalling their experiences. For the interviewees who are considering divorce or remain married with marital conflicts, some of them live in fear of either verbal or physical threat of violence from their spouses. The interviewees who have been nitpicked by their spouses felt inferior and had lowered self-esteem as well as self-doubt. Some of the cases suppressed their feelings and pretended to be fine. One of the reasons is they found it shameful to talk about their family problems to people around including neighbors and friends. The others suppressed feelings to protect their children. One interviewee voiced the need for a safe and private place (i.e. counseling center) for her to release the negative emotions. Some of them suffered from depression and uncontrollable emotions, which are particularly common amongst cases involving domestic violence, husband with addictive gambling and extra-marital affairs. Several cases even attempted suicide or became suicidal. Some gave up their suicide idea because they did not want their children to become orphans or to be taken care of by their spouses. A good proportion (around 9 cases) of



interviewees is currently taking or has taken medications for the depression diagnosis. For the cases in separation or divorce, they also described their feelings as stressful, tired and painful. The pain and stress were either from the negative influence of their spouses and family-in-laws or from the family burden as single parents.

### ***External Factors***

The identified external factors here are mainly the stress arising from legal procedures. Some interviewees reported that the legal procedures of divorce were far more complicated than expected, especially for those who could not afford to hire lawyers. For example, even a highly educated interviewee was very confused about the co-parenting regulations. One interviewee complained that she had to travel from office to office repeatedly to complete the divorce procedures. Another interviewee said that she was ill during the procedure and no government department or organization could help her, so she had to agree all her ex-husband's requirements.

#### **5.1.1.2 Positive Impact**

Positive impacts are reflected among some of the interviewed cases. Some of them are mentally healthier after divorce. Two said they were at a better emotional status than before. One male said he felt relieved after they decided to divorce. Some interviewees expressed they learnt a lesson from the divorce experiences. Several females mentioned that they rebuilt their confidence and are no longer dependent on their husbands. One interviewee said she would not be so proactive in her life if she did not divorce. Some found things meaningful and interesting to cope with changes and live a fulfilling life by volunteering. Some interviewees went to theatre and parks to enjoy family time with children after divorce. Some sought friends to talk. Some joined NGO activities, especially those organized for single parents. It appears that quite a few interviewees relied on religion to cope with their psychological trauma. Christians found themselves happier and less anxious after divorce. They prayed and read religious books, which helps alleviate depressive symptoms. Christian faith embedded emotional support and hope in them.

### **5.1.2 Views on remarriage**

One interviewee still believes in marriage. She still believes that there is a perfect one for her, but she has no idea if she can meet him. She has learned a lot from the unsuccessful marriage and she will look for different things if she gets married again.



Some other interviewees said that as children have become a major consideration, they are not sure if they will get married again. Another two interviewees assert that they will not get married again. They have lost their trust in marriage.

## 5.2 Impacts on Children and Family

### 5.2.1 Impact on Children

Commonly, problematic couple relationship of the interviewed cases has impact on the academic performance, behaviors and emotions of the children. In terms of the children’s academic performance, some observed that their children’s motivation has dropped, or their attitude in school was slacking. Amongst the interviewees who are already divorced, they observed that their children’s academic performance is generally poor. Their results drop significantly especially during the time of parental conflicts, or during change of environment such as house moving.

In terms of children’s behaviors, it should be noted that it is difficult to observe behavioral impacts unless the cases have divorced for long enough. However, children generally responded to parental conflicts negatively. It includes behaviors such as crying, throwing temper or being indifferent to the conflicts between the parents. Parents have different comments about their children’s behavior. Some said their children, especially the eldest sibling, are independent and mature. Others think that their children are rebellious and behave in an attention-seeking manner. Quite a few said that their children became more quiet than usual, possibly due to a lowered self-esteem or confidence. A few mothers reported that their son imitated their fathers to scold them. Influenced by the father, one case’s daughter spoke foul language.

In some cases having children at a young age (e.g. kindergarten children), the parents observed that the children became more anxious than before. For example, one interviewee's son is scared of loud noises and will hide himself. His mother immediately informed his kindergarten teacher to keep an eye on her son’s behavior. Another interviewee's daughter crossed out his father’s face on a wedding photo.

Emotional impact on children is described in two stages: during marital conflicts and after parents’ separation or divorce. During marital conflicts, children’s common response was crying. One child refused to eat or drink. In other cases, the children lived in fear especially those under threat of violence or suicide, or disturbance by loan sharks. A few children told they were scared of being alone and felt helpless. Some



children expressed that they felt suffering as their parents threw temper on them because of the couples' conflicts.

After the parents' separation or divorce, a few children's emotions were unstable and difficult to control. One case's daughter has ADHD. In other cases, the children became more anxious, less happy and less confident. One particular interviewee reported that his son cried at school and blames himself for his parent's separation. The social worker in school had to specially cope with his emotions. One interviewee's children felt ashamed when being asked about the family in school. Several interviewees' children were easily irritated, angry and had temper tantrums. Only one case observed that the daughter felt much happier after her parents' divorce.

## 5.2.2 Impact on Relationship between Children and Parents

It is noted that most of the children have their own preference in choosing their custodial parents. Some children express hatred or strong dislike of one parent. These feelings may be influenced by negative comments by the other parent. Some interviewees report serious negative comments towards one parent by the other one. One case said that her husband was abnormal because he did not wear underwear at home even when he was in the same room with his two daughters. Another interviewee said that her husband's family has no idea how to teach her children. One interviewee discussed openly with her children and let them choose which parent to follow.

As professionals observe, during the conflicts on custody, the children often become the topic of debate. Both parties want their children to take sides. Sometimes, parental alienation happens. One side may not allow the children to visit the other, or he / she will send their children as “detective” to collect the latest updates on their ex-partner.

### *Children and Non-custodial Parents*

For non-custodial parents who still see their children, some meet quite frequently, and they may share some childcare duty. Some meet monthly, or on special occasions like Fathers' Day. Some non-custodial parents request to meet the children, but whether the children are willing to do so is another matter. Children who still keep in touch with the non-custodial parents hold positive relationship with them.

Concerned with the attitude of custodial parents, some support their children to meet the other parent,



or at least give them the choice of doing so. Others are more ambivalent. The parents gave the phone number of the non-custodial parents to their children, and asked them to call if they miss him / her. Some children met their fathers when they were grown-up. Some interviewees initially forbade the children from meeting their non-custodial parent. However, they gradually became lenient as time went by. Still there are some interviewees who are non-custodial parents cannot see their children frequently. Some are forbidden from seeing their non-custodial parents since the custodial parents are uncooperative.

### *Children and Custodial Parents*

Amongst the divorced cases, the relationship between the children and the custodial parents is not always positive. In some cases, it is worse than before and some children even blamed the custodial parents for the deteriorative financial situation at home. Some children blamed their mother for depriving them of opportunities to develop their hobbies. In another case, the interviewee thought her daughter encountered some emotional issues as she accused her mother of abusing her. It is unclear whether the daughter's emotional problems are due to the family conflicts she has experienced before.

Nevertheless, in some other cases, the custodial parents and the children feel that they live a much better and happier life together after divorce for there are no more quarrels and abuse in the families. One interviewee expressed the relationship between her and her daughter has become much closer. This may be due to more time spent with her, and her daughter has more attention from her mother after divorce. In another case, the son complained about the situation when he was young. He may blame his mother for all the changes he needed to adapt to. However, as he grew older, he no longer complains as he understands that his mother is not to blame. He understands that his mother bears a lot of stress bringing him up.

## **5.3 Societal impacts**

At the level of society, the impact of divorce is mainly concerned with community's stigma about single-parent family.

### **5.3.1 Stigma about single-parent family**

A number of the cases expressed difficulties living in the neighborhood as a single parent. They share experiences of being stigmatized and this has added stress to their life as a single parent. Stigma is on both single parents and their children. For single parents' children, the community perceives a child's family background complicated if he / she comes from a divorced family. These children are labeled as rebellious.



One case said that her daughter was bullied at school, as her classmates think she is weak without having a father. In another case, the neighbor refused to give red packets as single parents' children are 'misfortune'. Most of the children think of themselves as worse than other school children, especially in primary schools.

For single parents, single mothers and single fathers are perceived differently in society. Single mothers are perceived as weak, and their children can be easily bullied. One single mother was even verbally abused and bullied by her landlord. Single fathers are viewed in a different manner. For single fathers, one said community paid more attention on him as a single father when he took up the childcare role. A few cases mentioned self-stigmatizing exists as well with themselves and their children. One female prefers not to tell others about her status.

As a response to such stigma, these interviewees are not inclined to reveal their family situation to others. Some isolate themselves and have little social support. Two interviewees also cover up the divorce status to their children in order to protect them. One interviewee suggested that the Government should use a less discriminatory term on their status. For instance, differentiating widowhood and divorcee is unnecessary.

## 5.4 Summary

Focusing on the affected individuals, including the couples and their children, this chapter studied the impacts of divorce at the levels of individuals, children and family, and society, as well as the ways these affected individuals coped with their life transitions. Through analyzing the interviewee cases and the focus group, findings regarding the divorce impacts include:

- There are both negative and positive impacts on the couples either divorced or experiencing marital conflicts. The most common negative impacts are the emotions of sadness, distress and depression. These feelings arose from the fear of the verbal or physical violence of husbands, the role of single parents, or the stress from people around including family-in-laws. The complex legal procedures also results in negative feelings in individuals involved in divorce filing cases;



- Positive impacts of divorce on the couples include a better emotional status such as feeling relieved, rebuilding of self-confidence, taking part in meaningful social activities and a better relationship with children;
- The interviewees hold different views on remarriage. For those taking a dim view on remarriage, children are their major concern;
- The impacts of divorce on children are mostly negative in terms of their academic, behavior and emotional performances. Most of them lost motivation in learning, felt inferior and behaved rebellious at school, and easily turned ill-tempered at home;
- Among the interviewed cases, most of the couples wanted the right of children’s custody. As a result, conflicts on custody and parental alienation may appear;
- Children meet their non-custodial parents with different frequency. Some of the children are unwilling to meet their non-custodial parents. Custodial parents hold different attitudes towards the relationship between their children and the non-custodial parents: some let the children to make their own decisions while some forbid them from seeing their non-custodial parents;
- Among the divorced cases, some children responded negatively towards their custodial parents, and some had better bonding with their custodial parents.
- It is commonly reflected that single parents and their children face the difficulties of being stigmatized in community. Most of them do not actively take actions to remove the stigma and gain social support. Instead, they prefer not to reveal their family situation in public.
- Divorce education designed for children and parents to minimize the negative impacts can be considered in the recommendations.



## Chapter 6 - Needs of the families

Based on the information elicited from each interview which addresses the concerns and needs that the interviewee would like the government to address, the following research questions are investigated:

- What are the factors that may hinder them from help-seeking?
- How do they perceive mediation services available in Hong Kong?
- What kind of support services they expect to be available in the community?

### 6.1 Process of Decision Making

Given that so many conflicts arise from marriage, there are several factors that the interviewees considered when deciding whether and when to divorce: 1) whether they are emotionally capable enough to carry on the marriage; 2) worrying about damaging the close relationship between the two families of the spouses; 3) wanting to receive the Hong Kong residence permit; 4) the desire to protect the children; 5) the strength of the couples' love foundation; 6) their current age (i.e. Older individuals are likely to take longer time in making the divorce decision and are unwilling to go through the troubles caused by filing a divorce.); 7) being threatened of violence; 8) spouse disappearing as a result of debt; 9) whether they are financially and emotionally capable enough to be single parents.

On the basis of the focus group interview, there are plenty of considerations during the divorce process. First, ambiguous understanding of the divorce process may delay their decisions and make the process more stressful than necessary. Such understanding may be improved by more education about the Family Court.

Second, the division of property is another major consideration in filing divorce. The husband usually disagrees with equal division of property, while the wife considers more on the influence on their children. Nevertheless, only few of them want to split the family. Besides, the success rate of applying for public housing also affects the divorce decision. Many of the unsuccessful applicants may decide not to get divorce, in spite of the family violence they are facing.

Third, there are some stereotypes on custody arrangement decisions. The husband may believe that the Court will be biased towards the female due to the caretaking responsibilities; while the wife fears her



lack of financial capability may have an influence on the legal professional’s decision. The legal professional’s criteria usually lie in areas such as caretaking, time available of each spouse, length of marriage and each party’s contribution to their marriage. Therefore, according to the professionals, education about judgment criteria like custodial arrangements and the legal rights for each party may help clarify some of the myths. This can begin from checking the legal professional’s decisions uploaded to the “Legal Reference System” for each divorce case that goes through Court. The judgment criteria can be understood by reading these.

As professionals understood, there are different reasons why people refuse to divorce, especially among men. This re-confirms the higher percentage of female petitioners from the data in Family Court. Men often refuse to divorce as they may be perceived as a failure, damaging their self-esteem. Men getting a divorce may also be perceived as abandoning their wife and responsibilities. From the men’s perspective, should there be marital conflicts, they can seek other solutions to divert their attention, rather than think about divorce. It could be sports activities, spending more time at work, or even extra marital affairs. Thus, they usually procrastinate and are passive about making the decision, and even the divorce procedures, as divorce is a total loss to men. They are likely to encounter financial loss, property/asset loss, custodial loss, not to mention the changes in their daily life and emotions. Professionals believe that a divorced status damages male ego, affecting their openness in seeking help from others.

Reasons that people refuse to divorce that are applicable to both genders include consideration of their children, emotional dependence, and their image. Professionals noted for ethnic minority groups, their religion does not encourage divorce. Yet, in some of the cases, ethnic minority couples and their children experience domestic violence as a result of marital conflicts. This should be noted by the government.

## 6.2 Help seeking and service utilization

There are several sources of help that a party to a marital conflict or one considering divorce will seek. They include social workers, doctors, church community, district council, online support groups, legal aid office etc. Some will look for information themselves. In the services used, many interviewees consider shelters and respite centers provided by NGO very helpful. Information on legal procedures is also claimed to be needed. Only a few married interviewees mentioned marital counseling, but there are challenges, including resistance from spouses. One interviewee said she met many couples who do not know how to handle conflicts in marriage. She suggests that awareness of seeking help should be cultivated in



community. There are some interviewees who seldom seek help. Interviewees who are new immigrants fear of stigmatization, while others believe that what happens in the family should stay in the family.

Social workers are the most commonly sought source of help, which is normal as most of these interviewees are recruited from NGOs and are usually of lower socioeconomic status.

Some of those who have emotional issues from marital conflicts seek help from doctors, who will be the point of contact where referrals to medical social workers or counselors will be made. Some other interviewees with higher education will look up information themselves for divorce procedures or counselor information. Other sources of help include district council members, online single parent support groups, legal aid offices, etc.

Churches (whether Catholic or Protestant) are another common point of contact where interviewees seek help. Sometimes they seek pastors/ priests for counseling, referrals for professional counseling or referrals for legal help. It also appears that the awareness of emotional need is more prevalent amongst those of a higher socioeconomic status.

In terms of the help received from professionals, interviewees consider the following to be helpful: one interviewee thinks there is more support available in the community already. They can seek help from the government, as well as church affiliated organizations. Another interviewee explored the resources in the community and she is currently using food bank, as well as applying for subsidy on children's school fees textbooks.

The shelters and respite centers provided by NGOs for emergency cases are very helpful. It provides a safe place for them to stay and calm down, as some do not want to inform their origin family. One interviewee said that the time out made her husband reflect on himself and changed slightly. Another interviewee said that NGOs can provide a peaceful space for her child to complete his homework.

Information on legal procedures is also in high demand, whether obtained through social workers or other sources. Other than that, social workers are helpful in assisting them with practical needs and applications.

Social workers can provide some level of emotional support in allowing clients to vent. They have an



opportunity to let out all their suppressed feelings. In some cases, social workers assist and encourage them to re-build their self-confidence.

Counselors are helpful in assisting the interviewees in managing their children’s emotions, especially with younger children (kindergarten). One interviewee mentioned that it was useful for counselors to teach them how to break the news to the children. It is noted that interviewees of a higher socioeconomic status are usually more capable of affording such services, or be aware of such needs.

Comments regarding family mediation services have been limited. It may partly be due to the limited use of the services, or as some interviewees have commented, it was not necessary as they had no assets to split. One interviewee, however, said that it was helpful for the mediator to analyze her situation. This facilitated her decision making regarding what requests to make in court.

In interviewees' opinion, there are a few challenges in marital counseling. The resistance from their spouse is a huge one. Many interviewees' spouses think that marital counseling is unnecessary. They are unwilling to attend sessions and miss or discontinue the sessions. Some are uncooperative and unwilling to talk in the sessions. Another challenge is the sparseness of counseling sessions. A few interviewees just do not believe that it works, feeling that the suggestions are unpractical, or the solutions unsustainable. It is noted that two of the three interviewees that mentioned marital counseling remain married.

There are several interviewees who seldom seek help from professionals or family and friends. Some are new immigrants who have poor social support, partly due to the fear of other’s gossiping about their family matters. Some hold traditional thoughts where family matters should not be told outside of their family. They do not trust others. Another interviewee delayed seeking help as she did not want others to interfere with her decision. One interviewee said that she did not know where to get help.

Although some interviewees may not be very active in seeking help, with the support of other family/friends, some interviewees' attitude improved towards seeking help from professionals. In one case, with the support of her daughter, the interviewee (an elderly) was more willing to seek help. Two other interviewees were unwilling to disclose family matter to social workers, but some triggering event made it unbearable, and they relied on the workers for emotional support. They said that the more they talked about it, the more comfortable they became in disclosing.



Regardless of the service quality, whether a service provision can be helpful depends on the assumption and attitude of the client. Sometimes, clients think that fundamental differences between couples cannot be solved by professionals. Another interviewee believed that her conflicts are result of her immediate environment, which could not be solved by professionals. She sounded pessimistic on the usefulness of NGO activities as well.

Some cases voiced their dissatisfaction regarding the services they receive. One case was unhappy with her social worker disclosing her personal information to others, including the amount of subsidy she was receiving, her date of divorce, etc. to the neighbours. Another interviewee thinks that her social worker was unwilling to look in depth into a problem, which made her feel more alone. In another similar case, the interviewee said that her psychiatrists' attitude was poor, and that social workers could only offer her a limited time to talk. Such experiences made her feel helpless and wanted to give up seeking help. She thinks that social workers probably wanted to close the file in a hasty manner. In other cases, the interviewees think the professional offered solutions that were simply not feasible

After marital conflicts arise, some individuals seek help from NGOs. For instance, professionals can assist couples who had problems relating to extra-marital affairs in two ways. They provide legal information in the first stage, and give psychological support in the second. For women, extra-marital affairs support groups are very popular, and the group members are closely connected. They are willing to help and support others actively. One example professionals gave was that group members immediately exchanged phone numbers and opened a Whatsapp group chat.

However, it is generally harder to communicate and help men who need support in their marriage. They do not usually discuss marital problems with their friends. In another focus group, however, professionals offered different opinions, and believed that men usually seek help from friends rather than professionals. Most of them are hesitant to communicate with social workers. Professionals observe that it is harder for men to form group supports like women do. There are fewer such support groups for male, and the drop-out rate is high. This may result from the unwillingness of men to publicize their divorce status to protect their self-esteem and image. Another reason the group attendance is low is because men sometimes avoid addressing the problem by indulging themselves into their work.

Nevertheless, according to the focus groups, men are more willing to seek help nowadays, in particular when they have some specific questions that need to be answered, such as legal information.



Some men are sometimes not satisfied with female case workers, as they believe that female professionals are usually biased and tend to support women.

As time goes by, divorces seem to leave deeper emotional trauma on the husband, which may be due to their increased willingness to express themselves compared with decades ago. Compared to women, however, they are still less willing to seek help, and have less group support.

## 6.3 Tangible needs

### 6.3.1 Housing

There is a huge need for housing. Our interviewees said the rent of private housing is unaffordable and they need to wait a long time for public housing. Most of these cases are from lower socioeconomic status. If they do not fall below the CSSA bracket, the rent almost takes up 50% of their income, in addition to other expenses for their children. Moreover, the environment of those affordable rental places is not suitable for children to stay. For example, they can only afford shared flats, and have to share a washroom with many other strangers. They expressed dissatisfaction regarding the stringent requirements for public housing. Some interviewees suggested that the government can help by at least providing interim or temporary housing.

### 6.3.2 CSSA, other income allowance, subsidy

Another area that the interviewees request is the adequate provision of CSSA. For those who are currently receiving CSSA, a few interviewees mentioned that the provision is inadequate, while another said that she is grateful and content with the provision. In another case with 3 children who are mentally challenged, she is grateful that the disability allowance helps her family a lot. Nevertheless, there is a request for the application procedure to be simplified and information to be easily obtainable, as the complex application procedure poses additional stress to the single mother who is also filing divorce at the same time. Another hope is that the government can provide transitory support or imminent financial support. For those not eligible for CSSA, one interviewee suggests that the eligibility criteria should be adjusted to fit the current economic situation.



For interviewees with average socioeconomic status, one interviewee thinks that HK permanent residents cannot benefit from social welfare, as resources are often utilized by new immigrants. One suggested that the government can also help reduce burden for single parents by tax reduction, not only for divorced individuals, but also for separated individuals, as the separation period can last for longer than one year.

### **6.3.3 Childcare services**

It seems there is a need for more childcare services amongst the poor. It is difficult for single parents to go to work and take care of their children at the same time. Some single parents suggested that childcare services or after school care can be available from kindergarten to secondary school. One interviewee suggests that emotional support should be provided for children affected by divorce.

## **6.4 Intangible needs**

### **6.4.1 Emotional support**

It appears people with average socioeconomic status are more aware of their own emotional needs. These interviewees mention that immediate emotional support is not readily available. For instance, the caseload for social workers is too heavy. Interviewees think that social workers do not have enough time to support them and look deeply into the problem, or they have to wait too long (2 months) to see social workers. By the time their turn comes, many things could have happened.

### **6.4.2 Equal opportunities for children**

Cases from poorer background hope that the government can provide more sustainable subsidies on educational expenses. Not every case is qualified to enjoy the benefits. For instance, textbook prices are inflating, which makes it harder to afford. Most importantly, many cases said that the government can subsidize their children to participate in extra-curricular activities. For example, piano or dancing classes usually cost a lot and it is out of their budgets. The interviewees think that such interest class seems to be exclusive to rich people only, and their children with potential and interest are at a disadvantage. These children should not be deprived of the opportunity to explore their interests, maximize their potential, and



strive to be competitive.

### **6.4.3 Work culture and policy**

On the macro level, one interviewee mentions that the government should promote a family-friendly work culture. She thinks that Hong Kong is too focused on economic development, and that places a cost on family time. Another interviewee thinks that the government should be reminded of the social problems that children from single parent family may create, and they should address it quickly. Lastly, one interviewee thinks that the government should do more work to alleviate the stigma against cross-border marriages or families. Being a single parent who's a new immigrant to Hong Kong experiences doubles the stigma and it is very stressful on top of all her responsibilities.

## **6.5 Other needs suggested by frontline professionals and social workers**

Though there are currently some services provided for divorcing couples, the feedbacks and comments from the focus groups reveal greater needs for these families and service utilization.

### **6.5.1 Filing procedures**

First, frontline professionals suggest that the divorce filing procedures need to be simplified. The lengthiness of the procedure often brings more negative impacts on the family. However, from the perspective of the legal professional, such information provided in the lengthy application is necessary to serve current case example (e.g. domestic violence). The applicants should be reminded that the current effort in filling the lengthy forms could save them many future visits to the court. Both frontline and legal professionals agree that education about the procedures should be strengthened and more easily comprehensible.



## 6.5.2 Maintenance order

Also, professionals believe that people often fail to comply with the maintenance order, making the party receiving maintenance right live in constant uncertainty. Also, in cases of domestic violence, courts order the abuser to undergo services, but loopholes remain as court orders are not compulsory. Bearing the cost of changes in legal procedure in mind, case workers wonder if Hong Kong can take Singapore as a reference, making counseling mandatory, or set up procedures to enforce strictly the payment of maintenance.

## 6.5.3 Divorce application

The frontline professionals reflected that there are common complaints regarding divorce application. They complain that the grounds of divorce do not often reveal the real reason to divorce. For example, cases of extra-marital affairs cannot usually use “adultery” as the grounds of divorce, as the law requires the gathering of evidence to prove adultery (e.g. photos of mistress and husband), which is often not possible. The legal professionals will usually persuade the party to use “unreasonable behavior” or “separation” as the grounds of divorce. Interviewees complain to professionals and say this is not a fair law in terms of the compensation they get. Moreover, the legal professional believes that the information collection is not adequate to provide them enough knowledge and update about the current phenomenon in Hong Kong. Speaking of the Family Court, frontline professionals believe that the Family Court needs to set up some private rooms or areas for social workers to discuss sensitive and personal information with their case.

## 6.5.4 Prenuptial agreement

There are some discussions with frontline professionals regarding the promotion of prenuptial agreement in Hong Kong. Although it is agreed that this topic is quite controversial in Chinese society, it may worth exploring. This is because this may shorten the length divorce procedures. This concept may be introduced in pre-marital counseling.



## 6.5.5 Mediation

The impression by frontline professionals on mediation is that it is relatively underutilized by couples. The low service utilization<sup>31</sup> may be due to a requirement of both parties' consensus in order to proceed, which is uncommon. In frontline professionals' perceptions, sometime lawyers do want their clients to receive mediation, as it shortens their legal service period. Moreover, frontline professionals said that their clients sometimes have no property or assets to split, and thus there is no need for mediation services.

## 6.6 Summary

In summary, needs suggested by both the case interviewees and the focus groups including the frontline professionals include:

- Divorced couples, especially single parents, are in a great need for housing. Many of the interviewees are dissatisfied with the existing application procedures and regulations of public housing;
- For the interviewees who currently receive CSSA, they are mostly satisfied with it. The interviewees who are not eligible for CSSA, they suggested that the eligibility should be adjusted to current situation. Additionally, there is a need for simplifying the application procedures.
- There is a need for more childcare services amongst the poor, especially for single parents.
- The interviewees, especially ones in average socioeconomic status, suggested that immediate emotional support from social workers is not readily available due to their high case load;
- The cases from low-income families hope that the government can provide more sustainable subsidies on educational expenses to ensure equal opportunities for children from divorced families;
- There is suggestion regarding the work culture in Hong Kong: a more family-friendly working environment is encouraged;
- The frontline professionals suggested that the divorce filing procedures need to be simplified;
- Procedures to enforce the compliment with the maintenance payment should be taken.
- Prenuptial agreement is encouraged; however it is difficult to promote given the concerns under the context of traditional Chinese culture;
- Mediation is relative underutilized by couples considered lawyers' benefit and petitioners' finance condition.

<sup>31</sup> as discussed in the focus group; on an additional note, of the 1200 reviewed case files from Family Court, none of which agreed to use the mediation services (according to the mandatory form completed by each applicant)



# Conclusion

As a mix method research adopting both quantitative and qualitative data, this study examined the phenomenon of divorce in Hong Kong. Based on the limited quantitative data from Family Court and Census, the demographic and socioeconomic patterns and trend of divorce in Hong Kong has been analyzed and different associations of marriage have been examined.

Demographically, the number of divorces is on the rise, and those involving remarriages appears to be also on the rise. The average length of marriage ending in divorce was around 11-12 years. The most common ground of divorce is “separation for one year with consent”. Children turns out to be an influential factor in divorce with the following implications: having no children may face excessive risks of divorce in comparison with married couples with children; the marriage length shows positive association with numbers of children that couples have; more and more couples without children jointly applied for divorce in the years studied. Concerned with new immigrants, although there is more “new immigrants<sup>32</sup>” involved in marriages ending in divorce and they tended to marry and divorce at a younger age, the proportion of divorce new immigrants is not higher than that of HK resident group. There is still a lack of evidence to conclude that the increase of divorce cases over time is related to cross-border marriages.

Socioeconomically, compared with married households and individuals, divorced households and individuals face greater economic challenges with a much less average income, a higher proportion of them live under the poverty line, being unemployed and working in primary industry, and on average had lower education level. With respect to housing conditions, divorced households and individuals had a lower proportion living in private housing and paying mortgage; and a higher proportion renting homes and being in governmental renting units.

With the 41 interviewed cases who were either divorced, filing divorce, considering divorce or at the status of separation at the point of interviews, the qualitative data indicate the factors affecting stability in marriage, the impacts of divorce on couples and children, and the needs of divorced families. Through the analysis from levels of individuals, children and family, as well as society, it has been found that some interviewees got married without thorough consideration and strong love relationship. Issues including birth of the first child, children’s education and childcare, a spouse’s retirement, extra-marital affairs,

---

<sup>32</sup> only a proxy number derived from Census data



financial stress, lack of communication between couples and spouses' unreasonable behaviors are the ones that give rise to marital conflicts. Conflicts with extended family are a particularly common trigger in marital instability. Faced with divorce situation, most of the interviewees responded to their family transitions negatively with the emotions of sadness, stress and depression. The involved children were also negatively influenced academically, behaviorally and emotionally. Single parents and their children experience the difficulty of being stigmatized in community and it has significant impact to their lives.

The divorced families, indicated by the interviewees and the focus group involving frontline professionals and social workers, are in great need for housing and financial support (i.e. CSSA). Emotional support from social workers, childcare service and educational subsidies for children are also in demand. Additionally, the procedures of applying for public housing and filing divorce are suggested to be simplified and these indicate a need of strengthening education on the legal procedures regarding filing divorce with a fair compensation.

This study adopted a comprehensive mixed methods approach, utilizing quantitative data from the Family Court and the Census combined with qualitative case interviews and focus group with frontline professionals. This study is not only a breakthrough to reinforce our impression of divorce in Hong Kong and clears some common myths, but also identifies gaps and areas for improvements in services. This is important to informing policy.

Needless to say, divorce is not a simple matter between the two adults. The impact is much more far-fetched to our society than imagined. Society bears the social cost and everyone is responsible for the cost it creates.

### ***Limitations of the study***

There are several limitations in each data source of the study. Firstly, readers have to be reminded the Family Court data are based on 1200 divorce cases selected at random in four different time points<sup>33</sup> (1999, 2004, 2009, and 2011). Therefore, readers should interpret with care as generalization may not be applicable to all cases. Secondly, risk and protective factors could not be identified as the divorce case files obtained from Family Court only provide us limited information regarding the couples' demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, from the western literature, one important risk factor associated

<sup>33</sup> A total of 65611 divorce decrees were filed in 1999, 2004, 2009, 2011



with higher risk of divorce is the lower education level compared to the married. However, the case files from Family Court do not contain this information. Moreover, other possible risk factors, including income earnings and marital infidelity, cannot be located in the Family Court case files. Thirdly, it is worth noting that frontline professionals commonly hold the impression that cross-border marriages are at a higher risk of divorce. However, it cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed in this study. It is difficult to ascertain whether the couple is a ‘cross-border’ marriage, inter-racial marriage, or local marriage based on the Family Court case files. An agreed definition should be set prior to the research. Additionally, data from sources such as the marriage registry and the Immigration Department can be explored for future research.

Two variables, which are essential to establish risk or protective factors, are missing from the Census micro dataset in this study. Items such as “duration of marriage to date” or “remarriage” status are not available in the Census dataset. Even though such information are collected in the Family Court, if the base number is unknown at the population level, the missing of the data limits the exploration in whether remarriages increase the risk of divorce, and whether children may serve as protective factor for marriage. In the future, these two variables can be considered to be collected at a regular interval in the General Household Survey or the Census.

Moreover, findings regarding poverty and other characteristics of divorced households may be different from those reports published by the Commission on Poverty and the Census and Statistics Department. One of the reasons is that the definition of poverty line, which has been calculated and analyzed before the establishment of the official poverty line, may be different than the official one established by the Commission on Poverty. Another reason is that the calculation based on 5% micro dataset in this study maybe different from the analysis conducted based on the full dataset.

In depth analysis of ethnic minority and gender-headed households based on the Census micro dataset are not available in this report. The importance of ethnic minority household is being acknowledged, however, the number of such households in our micro dataset may be limited. Drawing implications from limited scale of households may be inappropriate. Moreover, the needs of ethnic minority families in Hong Kong warrant new research attention and should not be limited only to divorced households. New research study to look at ethnic minority households can be considered in the future.

Gender-headed household characteristics analysis have not been included in this report as similar analysis can be found in C&SD’s thematic report on Single Parents. Our study focused on the data analysis



of the Family Court instead, as this has not been conducted elsewhere. Also, our analysis of Census micro dataset distinguishes itself from the thematic report by comparing married households with divorced households, as the thematic report did not delineate the comparison of households by marital status<sup>34</sup>. Detailed comparisons of divorced and married households are reported in the main report, and delineation of single parents' households into divorced versus widowed households can be found in Appendix B.

---

<sup>34</sup> Their report analysed the profile of single parents household as a sub-group and compare it with all households with children (which is inclusive of both single parents and intact family)



# Recommendations

Divorce is a complex issue, as it brings impact to individuals, which affect their families, which affect the school and workplaces, and hence affecting society as a whole. When tackling the issues brought upon by divorce, stakeholders and policy makers should utilize a comprehensive and multilayer approach to come up with feasible solutions.

First, stakeholders and policy makers should take note of the increase in divorces handled by the Family Court every year. The number of affected individuals and especially the children is on the rise. Although the evidence is mild at the moment, the cross-generation effect of divorce may not be ruled out in the future. Moreover, divorce is not only limited to cross-border marriages, that is estimated to be about 30% of all divorce case handled each year. Unlike our preconception, it penetrates all age groups. There are cases filing divorce in their 20s, and also cases filing divorce in their 70s or above. Based on our data, divorce occurs across various income groups; it penetrates all societal level. The quantitative data shows most divorced families with children are not doing well financially (low average median income). From our case studies, most of them belong to the low income group, and utilize different levels of community resources. However, there are also cases with average socioeconomic status expressing their concern for the lack of available service for them. As frontline professionals also agreed, the different income groups may have specific demands for social welfare and services. They also have different demands for how the services are being delivered as well.

Hence, with the awareness of the surging demand for customized services, the following paragraphs lay the basis for recommendations to policy makers and stakeholders:

## 1 The divorce decision is a process of struggle, which warrants service attention

As Section 6.1 illustrates, there are many struggles and considerations in the decision making process. It may extend over a long period, going through various stages of change in relationship and fluctuation in decision. This results in enhanced stress levels experienced by the divorcing couples.

This stage warrants service attention. Policy makers and stakeholders should take note that intervention does not necessarily equate with efforts to prevent divorce; instead, it aims to alleviate stress experiences and explore solutions as a result of marital ups and downs.



1.1 **Marital counseling** (which may include pre-marital education) can play a role in preventing problems from escalating to a point beyond salvage. It can cover topics such as: how to communicate with the spouse, gender role and expectations, understanding the spouse’s family of origin, how to live with extended family members, how to transition into a new life stage (new born baby, or retirement), how to face external challenges (financial stress, etc.). In particular, living with in-law parents seems to be as big a challenge as relating with one’s spouse; marital counseling targeting in-law parents may be a new direction to consider. Moreover, communicating one’s feelings is important, even at the cost of creating some constructive conflicts. Some cases tend to avoid conflicts and suppress their feelings and hence eventually accumulate a lot of negative emotions in the marriage. Miscommunication often leads to feelings of disrespect and not being appreciated; these are some feelings that need to be reconciled in marital counseling. One of the specific needs for the lower income and less educated group may be more attention on problem solving, as lower education is often associated with poorer problem-solving skills.

The timing of marital counseling is important. It is proposed that policy makers and stakeholders can advocate the need for marital health check-up. It should serve as a monitor of the marital health level at the *pre-marital stage* and *during marriage* in face of new transition or challenges. We also note the need for *post-divorce counseling* or the need for *stepped family counseling* as the increase in number of remarriages is observed. These can be advocated, like mediation services, in case the marriage has irretrievably broken down.

## 2 Divorce creates damage which must be minimized

### 2.1 Children

It is no doubt divorce brings impact on children’s academic performance, emotions and social functioning. For instance, some children’s learning motivation drops, and they get slack in school work. Children respond negatively to parent’s marital conflicts, and in the longer term, some get easily anxious, less happy and less confident. Parents and school professionals should take note of the academic and emotional impact brought forward by divorce on the children. Where necessary, policy makers and stakeholders can take reference from **specific programs** from abroad designed for children experiencing divorce. These programs may be held in the school and in the community setting to help children manage their emotions and strengthen their coping skills.



Also, professionals should take note of the changes brought by the diminished competence in parenting when people face the struggles and demands associated with divorce. It is strongly noted that the negative emotional impact brought upon the adults may turn into bad temper and maltreating of their children. Policy makers and stakeholders can also **support interventions (such as post-divorce counseling)** designed to help single parents cope with their own emotions and life demands and improve their parenting skills.

When marital breakdown is inevitable, specific interventions, such as **divorce education**, designed for children and parents experiencing divorce can be considered. Divorce education increases parents' awareness of the impact of divorce on children. It generally covers information-based and skills-based education that aims to reduce disputes needed to be settled in the court.

In addition, divorce will diminish the relationship of the children with one of the parents (usually the non-custodial parent) to a certain extent and as observed from our interviews, parental alienation has occurred in some cases. Frontline professionals need **to advise against parent alienation** by helping the parents resolve their anger and work for the best interest of their children. It is recognized that the Social Welfare Department has placed advertisements advocating responsible parenthood; it appears that there is a need for reinforcement of such effort.

## 2.2 Adults

The **mental health needs** of the affected individuals should be noted, as it is seen to be quite prevalent in our qualitative study. Regardless of the individual's socioeconomic status, the emotional impact is often negative. Signs and symptoms of depression are prevalent, with insomnia, inability to work and loss of productivity having serious impact upon the lives of individuals. A number of cases even attempted suicide or have suicidal ideation.

The willingness to seek support differs for men and women. Women seem to have stronger supportive network and better emotional support as compared with men. For men, their mental health needs are particularly subject to concern. Since self-esteem and image problems are obstacles for men in help-seeking, it may be worth considering to increase the availability of **self-help materials**. The materials can cover topics ranging from: practical needs such as precise and concise legal information on divorce, single-parent allowance, CSSA, housing benefits, to less tangible needs of emotional awareness, life adjustment, and support group information etc.



### 2.3 Family

Family functioning, parent-child relationship, and relationship with extended family network are influenced by the divorce of two individuals. Interventions on the family level are needed to restore family functioning and enhance parent-child relationship. It must be noted that the extended family network, including one's family of origin and the family of the ex-spouse, may be an important supportive resource to the divorced person and the children, or they may become a significant stressor if the relationship is strained. The wider family network should therefore also be considered in intervention.

### 2.4 Society

Society makes up of individuals and families. And when their functioning is being affected by divorce as stated above, it will certainly bring impact to society as a whole. The number of divorces has increased year after year since 1981. Policy makers and stakeholders should note that the development of policies and services has to catch up with the alarming pace of rise in divorces, and that quick action is called for to reduce the long term social cost to society.

- 3 Support services must be improved and enhanced to reduce mismatch of services, fill service gaps, create new services to meet demand of different socioeconomic class, and improve the quality and quantity of current service provisions.

#### 3.1 Financial difficulties

It is noted from both quantitative and qualitative data that a large proportion of the divorced families come from the low income group. According to their own requests, and as frontline professionals suggest, the different types of welfare such as provision of CSSA and **single parent allowance** should be adjusted for inflation and the current economic situation. It is also noted the group just above the CSSA bracket is a service gap that warrants the government's attention.

Some cases experience financial difficulties as the **spouse does not fulfill their maintenance order duty**. This may warrant further discussion among policy makers and legal professional stakeholders regarding measures to enforce maintenance payment order.



Aside from providing immediate financial support, it is recommended that the policy makers and stakeholders should encourage and support the release of the labor force by providing good infrastructure for these families.

For instance, they can enhance the **provision of childcare services**, in particular, the **after school care services**. There are voices of request for more childcare services, as most of the low cost or free ones are often fully subscribed. Some services should also be extended to secondary schools. Having the children in a trusted place allows single parents to look for a job. Stable hours of child-care may also allow these parents to look for jobs with stable hours, and enhance their likelihood to find full-time jobs.

Single parents carry many duties as a primary care-taker, as well as a breadwinner. In the focus group discussion, it is suggested a **family friendly working environment** be promoted for the families in need. Flexible work mode and work hours will be ideal for parents to be able to fulfill both duties as care-taker and breadwinner.

As enlightened from this study, the long term aim for policy makers and stakeholders is to lower the proportion of divorced families living in low income statuses. This can very well be part of the effort in combating poverty and reducing inter-generational poverty.

### 3.2 Housing difficulties

There are hardly any cases in the qualitative study that do not talk about their housing needs. From the focus group and co-investigator meetings, it is suggested to speed up the process of applying for compassionate rehousing. Also, consider providing **interim housing** for families in need who may not qualify for conditional tenancy in public housing on compassionate ground. Although the issue of stigmatization needs consideration, the benefits of interim housing lies in the prevention of possible family violence for couples who are forced to stay under the same roof. It is also recommended that policy makers and stakeholders note the needs of the group who are not eligible for public housing and yet cannot afford private housing rentals or mortgage.

### 3.3 Legal procedures

Findings from qualitative study support this recommendation for **the application for divorce to be simplified**. Despite the argument from the legal professional perspective that the complicated forms will save future runarounds for attending courts, the jargons on the application forms can still be simplified.



More education or assistance on the application procedure should be promoted, not only to simplify the procedure, but to lower the stress level of the divorcing individuals. **Educational pamphlets** can be provided at the Family Court or Integrated Family Service Centres, covering the topics on understanding the divorce process, legal rights of both parties, criteria for custodial arrangements etc. Therefore, the assistance from the Court can be provided in several aspects: first, the Court can provide assistance in forms filling; second, provide educational pamphlet with clear information on legal procedures; and third, provide emotional support for the cases for example by developing social work/ counseling services stationing at the Court.

#### 3.4 Psychosocial (Emotional) needs

The psychosocial needs of individuals and children involved in divorce have been highlighted, and the damage should be minimized. Therefore, **easy access to support** in different districts is important. Easy access not only refers to the geographically-based support, but also to the easy access of services for people of different societal status. For instance, people with average socioeconomic status in our qualitative study have voiced complaints that the welfare services (for which they are tax payers too) cannot meet their needs, as the services are all utilized by the lower income groups.

**Gender sensitive support** should be highlighted. As discussed earlier, men are less likely to seek help and have less social support. Different ways to engage different gender should be readily available. Aside from help-seeking, the needs of both the custodial and non-custodial parent should be noted as well. The spotlight usually shines on the custodial parent, however, the non-custodial parent may experience complex feelings resulting from many losses in one go. Such emotional needs should also be addressed by frontline professionals.

Unresolved feelings against the spouse should be noted. Some individuals may not be aware of such unresolved feelings; hence, the anger towards the estranged spouse may give rise to parental alienation. It is recommended that policy makers and stakeholders should promote the message of “forever parents” and **“responsible co-parenting”** via putting pamphlets at the Family Court and make emotional support more accessible at the Family Court. Such message can be promoted via media as well.

Speaking of the media, it is recommended that there should be a balanced view in the reporting of divorce and that **divorce adjustment support** should be promoted as well. In spite of the negative impact brought to the individual, some individuals experience positive growth and develop resilience from the



experience. Some cope well by attending support groups, and even volunteer to share their experiences to help those going through divorce. Such positive message can be portrayed as the silver lining in every cloud.

### 3.5 School's role in view of the rise of single parent children

As discussed earlier, there is a **large demand for childcare services**, as evident from the qualitative study. Thus, the school has an important role, or perhaps is a strategic partner in handling the rising number of children of divorce. Policy makers and stakeholders can explore the possibility of increasing resources for schools to provide after school care service for the families in need. This not only releases labor participation opportunities for single parents, but may also serve to prevent delinquency and other social problems.

In light of the rise of the children from divorced families, the school teachers and professionals can be more sensitive to the needs of these children and their parents. It should also be noted that stigmatizing and bullying problems may happen in school.

### 3.6 Professionals across different fields can offer help to divorced individuals and their children

The services provided by the NGOs are currently highly utilized, and some receive good evidence of support. They include temporary respite and shelters for families in crisis, group support and mentorship programs, legal information enquiry sessions etc. These are in high demand and the provision of such services should continue. For those who are less willing to seek help, policy makers and stakeholders should invest in developing self-help services. These may include educational pamphlets and packages on legal information, resources for practical needs, and resources for emotional support. Hotline services can be another option as well.

While knowledge of family law is a core requirement of **professional social work training**, not all training institutions have included the study of divorce in their curriculum. It is recommended that the topics of understanding the impact of divorce, divorce procedures, needs of single parent families, etc. be incorporated into the existing social work curriculum so that social workers can be better equipped to respond to needs arising from the climbing numbers of divorces in Hong Kong.

The **sensitivity of professionals in multi-disciplinary areas should be enhanced**. In addition to social workers (in family services, schools, mental health services, etc.), psychiatrists, para-professionals,



and especially family doctors should be sensitive to the needs of the divorced individuals and their children.

Family doctors, in particular, are sometimes the first point of contact in the radar of service utilization.

### 3.7 Combating stigma, public education and advocacy

Despite the commonality of divorce perceived in the community, stigma against single parent families (especially divorced families) is prevalent in society, as evidenced in the qualitative study. Some interviewees experience multiple stigma being a new immigrant from Mainland, suffering mental health issues, and being a divorced single parent. The discrimination they experience adds to the stress they need to face in going through divorce. **Public education programs** and anti-stigma campaigns should be organized to address the problem.

The portrayal of divorce in the media is common, and it should be noted that they should avoid amplifying the problems brought by divorce, so as to reduce stigma. As seen from the cases in the qualitative study, some have coped well with divorce and have even experienced post-divorce growth. The media should also show the resilience of divorced families instead of just focusing on problems.

With the rise of divorces and remarriages, it must be noted that single parent families and stepfamilies make up a considerable percentage of all families in Hong Kong. Policy makers and stakeholders can also consider promoting public education on the existence of various family forms in a pluralistic society as well as on the concept of respect and acceptance of differences.

**Pre-marital counseling** should be advocated as part of public education. Not only couples with religious background need to go through pre-marital counseling. It is advocated that all couples should go through pre-marital counseling prior to entering marriage. Apart from topics such as communication and conflict resolution that are usually included, strong emphasis should also be given to the issue of in-law relationship that is particularly relevant to Chinese families. Though the concept of prenuptial agreement is controversial, consideration may be given to exploring it with the less conservative couples.

## 4 Evidence- based policy is essential

The data from the Family Court has supplied information for this study, however, it is yet to be improved as a good data set to track social phenomenon. The case files only provide us with limited information regarding the couples' demographics, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Other data, for



instance, information on education and income status of divorced persons, the instances of multiple divorces, and the number of dependent children involved in multiple transitions, remain a mystery. Such information may be necessary for the Judges to make informed decision, and for policy makers and stakeholders to track the phenomenon. For example, there is good initial evidence that divorce and poverty may be related. The ongoing surveillance and research is necessary to track such social phenomenon. Also, remarriages and children in family transition are increasingly common. Evaluation of the effectiveness of pre-and post-divorce interventions is necessary, and the data availability is yet to be improved.

4.1 Empowerment of the Family Court: The workload of the Family Court has increased considerably and the judicial and administrative support to the Family Court should be strengthened. It should include data collection from the divorced couples for better understanding, monitoring divorce trend and its development. It will help policy formulation in meeting the challenges arising from the increase of divorces.

Service evaluation is necessary regarding mediation services. The feedback of the cases from the qualitative study tells us that the service utilization is low. Although there has been a report on the evaluation of the family mediation pilot scheme, it is outdated as at 2004. It is recommended that an updated study should be carried out to explore in depth into the reasons for not utilizing mediation services and to identify effective ways to promote the services.

Tracking social phenomenon and exploring solutions for policy makers calls for the open access to data. It is indeed very helpful to collect data on the length of marriage, basic re-married status from the Family Court case files. It serves as the numerator to calculate risk ratios. However, the data necessary for the denominator is missing from the Census and Statistics Department. It is known that Census or quarterly General Household Survey do not regularly collect items such as “duration of marriage to date”, or include “re-married” as one of the marital status. These items will be helpful to explore whether re-marriages increase the risk of divorce, and whether children may serve as a protective factor for marriage.

To conclude this report, this commissioned study is a small step taken to explore the phenomenon of divorce, which has been on the rise since 1981. This is a small step marching towards the next big step that warrants for more research in order to compile more evidence to support policy making. Divorce is not only a matter of two persons; it involves the whole society as it changes the family composition, challenging our traditional values as a Chinese society. Such change bears social cost, some seen, and some unseen, on society, and on you and me. It is the responsibility of each of us to contribute to minimizing the negative impact brought by divorce.



---

<End of report>

## Appendix A – Data tables from Family Court

Table 35- Distribution of length of marriage in years

Year of divorce*	n	Length of marriage (years)				Frequency of different length of marriage (% of total)			
		Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Distribution	0 – 2 years	2 – 7 years	7 – 15 years	15+ years
1999	299	11.5	0.6	40.8		20 (6.7%)	93 (31.1%)	95 (31.8%)	91 (30.4%)
2004	296	12.5	0.2	42.8		11 (3.7%)	82 (27.7%)	106 (35.8%)	97 (32.8%)

2009	300	12.3	0.8	51.8		11 (3.7%)	81 (27.0%)	121 (40.3%)	87 (29.0%)
2011	305	12.7	1	49.8		13 (4.3%)	102 (33.4%)	96 (31.5%)	94 (30.8%)

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

Table 36- Age distribution at the time of divorce petition by gender

Year of divorce	n <sup>@</sup>	Age at the time of divorce petition	
		Male Distribution	Female Distribution

<p><b>1999</b></p>	<p>290</p>	<p>Mean 40.3; Min 22; Max 76</p>	<p>Mean 35.6; Min 17; Max 64</p>
<p><b>2004</b></p>	<p>287</p>	<p>Mean 42.7; Min 23; Max 73</p>	<p>Mean 37.4; Min 20; Max 66</p>

<p><b>2009</b></p>	<p>300</p>	<p>Mean 45.1; Min 21; Max 85</p>	<p>Mean 38.7; Min 19; Max 74</p>
<p><b>2011</b></p>	<p>304</p>	<p>Mean 47; Min 23; Max 81</p>	<p>Mean 40.8; Min 22; Max 75</p>

@Some of the ages are missing in the divorce case files

Table 37- Information from certificate of marriage

Year of divorce*	n <sup>@</sup>	Age at marriage		Place of marriage certificate issued			First marriage by gender <sup>@</sup>		Number of marriages, that filed divorce			
		Mean (Range)		# (%)			# (%)		First marriage for both parties	Re-marriage for either party	Re-marriage for both parties	Unknown as limited by data availability
		Male	Female	HK	China	Others	Male	Female				
1999	290	28.8 (17 – 69)	24.1 (16 – 47)	234 (78.3%)	57 (19.1%)	8 (2.7%)	228 (76.3%)	224 (74.9%)	218	19	5	48
2004	296	30.1 (17 – 65)	24.8 (16 – 57)	188 (63.5%)	88 (29.7%)	20 (6.8%)	180 (60.8%)	179 (60.5%)	174	17	11	94
2009	300	32.9 (17 – 79)	26.7 (16 – 53)	189 (63.0%)	101 (33.7%)	10 (3.3%)	168 (56.0%)	164 (54.7%)	146	43	7	104
2011	309	34.71 (18-74)	28.51 (16-59)	211 (68.3%)	89 (28.8%)	8 (2.6%)	255 (83.1%)	244 (79.7%)	224	50	32	3
									184			

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

<sup>@</sup> Some data are missing as data availability is dependent upon information available on marriage certificates

Table 38 - Basic information of the couple at time of divorce petition – employment status and matrimonial home

Year of divorce*	Employment status <sup>@</sup>							Matrimonial home <sup>^</sup>	
	# (%)							# (%)	
	Male			Female				Public housing estate	Self-owned (HOS & Private)
Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Housewife			
1999	232 (77.6%)	35 (11.7%)	7 (2.3%)	189 (63.2%)	33 (11.0%)	0 (0.0%)	65 (21.7%)	81 (50.3%)	80 (49.7%)
2004	221 (74.7%)	42 (14.2%)	11 (3.7%)	199 (67.2%)	31 (10.5%)	3 (1.0%)	45 (15.2%)	63 (45%)	77 (55%)
2009	227 (75.7%)	44 (14.7%)	16 (5.3%)	193 (64.3%)	38 (12.7%)	2 (0.7%)	52 (17.3%)	74 (52%)	68 (48%)

<b>2011</b>	224 (72.5%)	43 (13.9%)	16 (5.2%)	207 (67%)	35 (11.3%)	2 (0.6%)	54 (17.5%)	120 (51%)	114 (49%)
-------------	-------------	------------	-----------	-----------	------------	----------	------------	-----------	-----------

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

@ Some data are missing from the case files

^ 24% - 53% data are missing

Table 39- Basic information of children at time of divorce petition

Year of divorce*	Number of children per couple <sup>@</sup>			Age distribution of the children					Total # of children	Reports or threats of child abuse
	# of couple (%)			# of children(%)						
	Couples with 0 children	Couples with 1 - 2 children	Couples with 3 or above children	Age 0 - 5	Age 6 - 12	Age 13 - 18	Age 19 - 30	Age 31+		
<b>1999</b>	82 (27.8%)	173 (58.6%)	40 (13.6%)	74 (19.4%)	111 (29.1%)	92 (24.1%)	94 (24.7%)	10 (2.6%)	381	18
<b>2004</b>	98 (33.1%)	173 (58.4%)	25 (8.4%)	52 (16.0%)	96 (29.4%)	70 (21.5%)	86 (26.4%)	22 (6.7%)	326	19
<b>2009</b>	122 (40.8%)	154 (51.5%)	23 (7.7%)	49 (17.1%)	91 (31.8%)	66 (23.1%)	61 (21.3%)	19 (6.6%)	286	11
<b>2011</b>	141 (45.6%)	147 (47.5%)	21 (6.8%)	42 (15%)	50 (17.9%)	54 (19.3%)	93 (33.2%)	41 (14.6%)	280	3

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

@ Some data are missing in 1999, 2004, 2009

Table 40- Children’s living, childcare and financial arrangements prior to divorce proceedings

Year of divorce*	% of whom the child was living with <sup>@</sup>				% of who involved in the child’s care and upbringing <sup>@</sup>				% of who gave financial support to the child <sup>@</sup>		
	Father	Mother	Grandparents	Domestic helper	Father	Mother	Grandparents	Domestic helper	Father	Mother	CSSA
<b>1999</b>	36.9%	78.7%	15.6%	6.3%	32.8%	78.4%	22.4%	14.0%	61.7%	64.2%	23.6%
<b>2004</b>	46.9%	71.6%	12.6%	2.9%	38.4%	70.2%	28.0%	10.0%	58.7%	63.6%	21.8%
<b>2009</b>	51.4%	74.5%	26.0%	3.3%	41.3%	75.1%	37.2%	7.3%	65.6%	71.5%	23.6%
<b>2011</b>	35.3%	74.7%	6.7%	0%	27.3%	77.3%	16.7%	0.6%	65.3%	62.7%	9.5%

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

@ Some data are missing and percentages are calculated based on available data

Table 41a - Basic information of divorce proceedings –application details

Year of divorce*	Petition vs Joint applications	Who initiated the divorce proceedings?		% of the parties who were represented	% of use of legal aids
		Petition	The first person in Joint application		

		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>1999</b>	200 / 99	55	145	42	57	30.4%	60.5%	5.0%	17.1%
<b>2004</b>	199 / 97	82	117	42	55	32.8%	48.6%	7.4%	12.8%
<b>2009</b>	200 / 100	66	134	57	43	21.7%	40.7%	6.3%	10.3%
<b>2011</b>	243 / 66	85	158	32	34	26.6%	49%	2.3%	8.4%

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

Table 42- Basic information of divorce proceedings – grounds of divorce

Year of divorce*	Ground of divorce (as stated in the petition)				
	# (%)				
	Adultery	Unreasonable behavior	Living apart for at least 1 year (with consent)	Living apart for at least 2 years	Having been deserted for at least 1 year
<b>1999</b>	1 (0.3%)	36 (12.0%)	181 (60.5%)	72 (24.1%)	9 (3.0%)
<b>2004</b>	1 (0.3%)	34 (11.5%)	169 (57.1%)	88 (29.7%)	5 (1.7%)
<b>2009</b>	0 (0.0%)	33 (11.0%)	178 (59.3%)	85 (28.3%)	3 (1.0%)
<b>2011</b>	0	32 (10.4%)	176 (57%)	100 (32.4%)	1 (0.3%)

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

Table 43 - Basic information of divorce proceedings – length of separation

Year of divorce*	Length of separation before filling the divorce Proceedings (years)			Distribution
	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	
<b>1999</b>	2.5	0.0	23.3	
<b>2004</b>	2.5	0.0	19.0	
<b>2009</b>	2.6	0.0	17.0	
<b>2011</b>	3.1	0.25	29.3	

\*Where data is available

Table 44- Basic information of divorce proceedings – issues to be dealt with by court

Year of divorce*	Issues required to be dealt with by court (as stated in the petition) @					
	# (%)					
	Child custody / access	Maintenance (for spouse)	Maintenance (for children)	Property arrangement	Other ancillary relief	Other court related cost
1999	173 (57.9%)	139 (46.5%)	84 (28.2%)	33 (11.0%)	17 (5.7%)	206 (68.9%)
2004	151 (51.0%)	105 (35.5%)	60 (20.3%)	33 (11.1%)	9 (3.0%)	140 (47.3%)
2009	135 (45.0%)	104 (34.7%)	59 (19.7%)	28 (9.5%)	1 (0.3%)	225 (75.0%)
2011	109 (35.3%)	84 (27.2%)	47 (15.4%)	24 (7.9%)	9 (2.9%)	288 (94.1%)

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis @These are not mutually exclusive

Table 45 - Information about divorce decree – Court’s decision on child custody and financial support

Year of divorce*	With a date of granting of decree nisi	With a date of granting of decree absolute	To whom was the child’s custody granted		Court’s decision on who will be financially supporting the child		
			Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA)
1999	93.6%	93.3%	36.6%	82.0%	75.7%	57.1%	17.6%
2004	91.9%	90.2%	42.3%	74.4%	77.2%	51.2%	11.4%
2009	93.7%	90.2%	46.6%	81.4%	76.6%	64.0%	20.2%
2011	89.9%	87.3%	27.1%	77.4%	73.9%	54.5%	6.7%

\*Some cases are not divorced in the year of interest are excluded in the analysis

Table 46- Age at re-marriage and second divorce

	Remarried and divorced Male (N=110)			Remarried and divorced Female (N=128)			Remarried male (Data source <sup>35</sup> )	Remarried female (Data source)
	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Median
Age at re-marriage	43.6	26	72	35.9	21	58	50.7 in 1981 to 58.4 in 2011	39.9 in 1981 to 44.9 in 2011
Age at divorce	51.4	27	77	43	24	66	-	-

<sup>35</sup> Data from Demographic Trends in HK (1981-2011), published by Census and Statistics Department of HKSAR

Table 47 - Re-marriage divorce filed by petition and joint application

Number of re-marriage divorce	Petition	Joint applications	% of the parties who were represented		% of use of legal aids	
			Male	Female	Male	Female
	149	35	32.1%	48.9%	7.6%	10.9%

Table 48- Re-marriage divorce in different places

Year of divorce (re-marriages)	Place of marriage # (%)		
	HK	China	Others
All years (1999, 2004, 2009, 2011)	172 (93.5%)	10 (5.4%)	2 (1.1%)

Table 49 - Employment status of female and male involved in re-marriage divorce

Year of re-marriage divorce	Employment status # (%)								
	Male				Female				
	Employed/ Part time	Unemployed	Retired	Uncertain	Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Housewife	Uncertain
All years (1999, 2004, 2009, 2011)	134 (73.2%)	27 (14.7%)	13 (7.1%)	9 (4.9%)	112 (60.8%)	25 (13.6%)	2 (1.1%)	34 (18.5%)	11 (6%)

Table 50 - Number of couple with children in different age groups and age distribution of children involved in re-marriage divorce

Year of divorce (re-marriages)	Number of children per couple			Age distribution of children					Total # of children	Reports or threats of child abuse
	# of couple (%)			# of children(%)						
	Couples with 0 children	Couples with 1 – 2 children	Couples with 3 or above children	Age 0 – 5	Age 6 – 12	Age13 – 18	Age 19 – 30	Age 31+		
All years (1999, 2004, 2009, 2011)	107 (58.2%)	67 (36.4%)	10 (5.4%)	27 (25%)	22 (20%)	31 (28%)	24 (22%)	5 (5%)	109 plus 2 unknown age	6 out of 77 (9%)

## Appendix B –Tables from Census Data Set

Table 51 - Household size by household composition (number of households)

<b>Household size</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children		
2 persons household	294	320	195	780	1112	1448	189	214	272	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0.80%	1.00%	0.60%	43.00%	44.20%	50.60%	24.10%	27.10%	37.40%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
3 persons household	8713	9547	9914	723	1081	1082	348	374	288	84	66	79	54	103	102
	25.10%	28.80%	31.80%	39.80%	43.00%	37.80%	44.40%	47.40%	39.60%	2.90%	2.80%	3.40%	37.00%	59.90%	55.70%
4 persons household	14793	14345	12822	250	260	280	169	141	135	759	777	801	59	54	62
	42.70%	43.30%	41.20%	13.80%	10.30%	9.80%	21.60%	17.90%	18.60%	26.10%	33.30%	34.60%	40.40%	31.40%	33.90%
5 persons household	7490	6302	5973	48	43	46	54	48	26	1223	959	942	24	7	14
	21.60%	19.00%	19.20%	2.60%	1.70%	1.60%	6.90%	6.10%	3.60%	42.10%	41.10%	40.70%	16.40%	4.10%	7.70%
6 or more persons household	3362	2588	2251	15	18	8	24	12	6	841	532	490	9	8	5
	9.70%	7.80%	7.20%	0.80%	0.70%	0.30%	3.10%	1.50%	0.80%	28.90%	22.80%	21.20%	6.20%	4.70%	2.70%
	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864	784	789	727	2907	2334	2312	146	172	183

Table 52 – Monthly household income comparing different household types

	<b>Monthly household income excluding FDH (mean)</b>	<b>Monthly household income excluding FDH (median)</b>

Household type	Year					
	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
Households with married individuals and never married children	HK\$28,339	HK\$29,186	HK\$36,604	HK\$20,000	HK\$19,750	HK\$25,000
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	HK\$13,784	HK\$12,722	HK\$15,157	<u>HK\$10,000</u>	<u>HK\$9,000</u>	<u>HK\$9,500</u>
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	<u>HK\$14,016</u>	<u>HK\$13,607</u>	<u>HK\$13,915</u>	<u>HK\$10,000</u>	<u>HK\$9,200</u>	<u>HK\$9,500</u>
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	HK\$30,726	HK\$31,987	HK\$37,835	HK\$21,900	HK\$21,500	HK\$26,035
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	HK\$19,100	HK\$16,937	HK\$23,294	HK\$13,160	HK\$13,000	HK\$15,000

Table 53- Monthly household income per capita comparing different household types

Household income/household size (mean) excluding FDH per capita(人均收入)	2001	2006	2011	Household	2001	2006	2011
				income/household size (median) excluding FDH per capita(人均收入)			
Households with married individuals and never married children	HK\$6,938	HK\$7,291	HK\$9,156	Households with married individuals and never married children	HK\$5,000	HK\$5,000	HK\$6,333
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	HK\$5,162	HK\$4,827	HK\$5,913	Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	<u>HK\$3,850</u>	<u>HK\$3,333</u>	<u>HK\$3,759</u>
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	HK\$4,518	HK\$4,567	HK\$4,813	Households with widowed individuals and never married children	<u>HK\$3,317</u>	<u>HK\$3,000</u>	<u>HK\$3,467</u>

				individuals and never married children			
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	HK\$6,010	HK\$6,458	HK\$7,650	Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	HK\$4,406	HK\$4,600	HK\$5,543
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	HK\$4,731	HK\$4,686	HK\$6,399	Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	HK\$3,534	HK\$3,918	HK\$4,429

Table 54 – Average working household members

<b><u>Average working Household members excluding FDH(mean)</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>
Households with married individuals and never married children	1.59	1.58	1.61
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	0.81	0.81	0.77
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	0.93	0.94	0.90
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	1.76	1.69	1.71
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	1.11	1.11	1.04

Table 55 - Percentage of 2 persons household living under poverty line by household structure

# and % of 2 persons household living under poverty line									
	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	Households with married individuals and never married children <sup>36</sup>			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children		
Living under poverty line (half of median income)	107	134	72	296	500	664	92	107	147
	36%	42%	37%	38%	45%	46%	49%	50%	54%
Total # of 2 persons households	294	320	195	780	1112	1448	189	214	272

Table 56 - Percentage of 3 persons household living under poverty line by household structure

# and % of 3 persons household living under poverty line															
	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children		

<sup>36</sup> 2 persons married individuals and never married children household may imply the married individual do not have their spouse living in the same household

Living under poverty line (half of median income)	1296	1643	1795	312	505	538	188	194	161	30	22	27	25	38	36
	14.9%	17.2%	18.1%	43.2%	46.7%	49.7%	54.0%	51.9%	55.9%	35.7%	33.3%	34.2%	46.3%	36.9%	35.3%
Total # of 3 persons households	8713	9547	9914	723	1081	1082	348	374	288	84	66	79	54	103	102

Table 57- Percentage of 4 person’s household living under poverty line by household structure

# and % of 4 persons household living under poverty line	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
		Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	
Living under poverty line (half of median income)	2877	3268	2821	91	110	149	70	59	59	145	169	170	22	15	24
	19.4%	22.8%	22.0%	36.4%	42.3%	53.2%	41.4%	41.8%	43.7%	19.1%	21.8%	21.2%	37.3%	27.8%	38.7%
Total # of 4 persons	14793	14345	12822	250	260	280	169	141	135	759	777	801	59	54	62

households															
------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Table 58 - Percentage of 5 persons household living under poverty line by household structure

# and % of 5 persons household living under poverty line	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
		Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	
Living under poverty line (half of median income)	1670	1489	1325	19	20	27	22	22	10	259	241	232	4	1	2
	22.3%	23.6%	22.2%	39.6%	46.5%	58.7%	40.7%	45.8%	38.5%	21.2%	25.1%	24.6%	16.7%	14.3%	14.3%
Total # of 5 persons households	7490	6302	5973	48	43	46	54	48	26	1223	959	942	24	7	14

Table 59- Percentage of 6 person’s household living under poverty line by household structure

# and % of 6 or more persons	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011

<b>household living under poverty line</b>															
	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children		
Living under poverty line (half of median income)	816	688	488	8	6	2	6	8	1	147	90	69	3	2	0
	24.3%	26.6%	21.7%	53.3%	33.3%	25.0%	25.0%	66.7%	16.7%	17.5%	16.9%	14.1%	33.3%	25.0%	0.0%
Total # of 6 persons households	3362	2588	2251	15	18	8	24	12	6	841	532	490	9	8	5

Table 60 – Unemployed persons in different household types

<b>Unemployed persons in household</b>															
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children		

0	32171	30295	29173	1623	2235	2648	679	705	653	2738	2181	2175	139	157	170
	93%	91.5%	93.6%	89%	88.9%	92.5%	87%	89.4%	89.8%	94%	93.4%	94.1%	95%	91.3%	92.9%
1	2287	2591	1853	177	267	201	94	74	67	160	146	125	6	15	13
	7%	7.8%	5.9%	<u>10%</u>	<u>10.6%</u>	<u>7.0%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>9.4%</u>	<u>9.2%</u>	6%	6.3%	5.4%	4%	8.7%	7.1%
2 or more	194	216	129	16	12	15	11	10	7	9	7	12	1	0	0
	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864	784	789	727	2907	2334	2312	146	172	183

Table 61 – Economically inactive persons in different household types

<b><u>Economically inactive persons in household</u></b>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
	Households with married individuals and never married children	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	
.00	12560	13209	12145	1057	1524	1647	354	404	354	85	109	140	7	11	13
	36%	39.9%	39.0%	<u>58%</u>	<u>60.6%</u>	<u>57.5%</u>	45%	51.2%	48.7%	3%	4.7%	6.1%	5%	6.4%	7.1%
1.00	15971	14246	13143	696	912	1112	377	338	314	1306	1125	1121	96	126	124
	46%	43.0%	42.2%	38%	36.3%	38.8%	48%	42.8%	43.2%	45%	48.2%	48.5%	66%	73.3%	67.8%
2.00	4727	4441	4476	59	73	100	47	46	48	1127	813	788	32	30	41

	14%	13.4%	14.4%	3%	2.9%	3.5%	6%	5.8%	6.6%	39%	34.8%	34.1%	22%	17.4%	22.4%
3 or more	1394	1206	1391	4	5	5	6	1	11	389	287	263	11	5	5
	4%	4%	4%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	13%	12%	11%	8%	3%	3%
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864	784	789	727	2907	2334	2312	146	172	183

Table 62 – Average no. of dependents and children under 18 in different household types

<b>Average # of DEPENDENTS (children and elderly under 18 or over 65)</b>				<b>Average # of children under 18</b>			
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>		<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
Households with married individuals and never married children	1.77	1.66	1.57	Households with married individuals and never married children	1.66	1.55	1.46
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	1.47	1.43	1.35	Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	1.47	1.41	1.33
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	1.66	1.55	1.42	Households with widowed individuals and never married children	1.56	1.45	1.31
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	2.46	2.38	2.27	Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	1.60	1.51	1.44
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	2.13	1.95	2.01	Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children households	1.33	1.17	1.18

Table 63 – No. of dependents in households in different household types

<b>No of Dependents (children and elderly under 18 or over 65)</b>															
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children		
1	15053	16279	17221	1129	1611	2017	394	430	460	228	212	260	24	34	24
	43%	49%	55.3%	62.2%	64.1%	70.4%	50%	54%	63.3%	8%	9%	11.2%	16%	20%	13.1%
2	14088	12778	10976	539	766	713	290	293	229	1384	1207	1290	86	116	134
	41%	39%	35.2%	30%	30%	24.9%	37%	37%	31.5%	48%	52%	55.8%	59%	67%	73.2%
3 or above	5511	4045	2958	148	137	134	100	66	38	1295	915	762	36	22	25
	16%	12%	9%	8%	5%	5%	13%	8%	5%	45%	39%	33%	25%	13%	14%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34652</b>	<b>33102</b>	<b>31155</b>	<b>1816</b>	<b>2514</b>	<b>2864</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>789</b>	<b>727</b>	<b>2907</b>	<b>2334</b>	<b>2312</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>183</b>

Table 64 - No. of children in households in different household types

<b>No of children aged under 18</b>															
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>												

	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children		
1	16578	17934	18815	1140	1637	2044	445	490	529	1462	1336	1419	105	148	151
	48%	54%	60.4%	63%	65%	71.4%	57%	62%	72.8%	50%	57%	61.4%	72%	86%	82.5%
2	14105	12616	10725	532	745	695	263	249	170	1199	838	774	37	21	31
	41%	38%	34.4%	29%	30%	24.3%	34%	32%	23.4%	41%	36%	33.5%	25%	12%	16.9%
3 or above	3969	2552	1615	144	132	125	76	50	28	246	160	119	4	3	1
	11%	8%	5%	8%	5%	4%	10%	6%	4%	8%	7%	5%	3%	2%	1%
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864	784	789	727	2907	2334	2312	146	172	183

Table 65 – Types of housing by household types

<b><u>Government Low Cost / HKHA Rental</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>Private Residential (include HA / HS 2nd Hand)</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>HA &amp; HS Subsidized Sale Flats</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>
% of M&NM households	29%	29.3%	27.6%	46%	48.5%	44.8%	20%	18%	18%		
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	804	1398	1628	743	849	793	210	209	257		

% of D&NM households	44%	55.6%	56.8%		41%	33.8%	27.7%		12%	8%	9%
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	439	421	441		219	225	156		89	114	87
% of W&NM households	56%	53.4%	60.7%		28%	28.5%	21.5%		11%	14%	12%
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	1095	735	755		1129	945	839		572	563	517
% of M&W&NM households	38%	31.5%	32.7%		39%	40.5%	36.3%		20%	24%	22%
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	70	72	84		48	56	54		20	37	27
% of DS&W&NM households	48%	41.9%	45.9%		33%	32.6%	29.5%		14%	22%	15%

Table 66 – Tenure of accommodation by household types

<u>Owner-occupier with mortgage or loan repayment</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>Owner-occupier without mortgage and loan repayment</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>Sole tenant</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2011</u>
% of M&NM households	33%	31.5%	28.3%	21%	23.3%	23.6%	40%	41.2%	43.3%		
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	287	281	309	224	252	261	1185	1902	2198		
% of D&NM households	16%	11.2%	10.8%	12%	10.0%	9.1%	65%	75.7%	76.7%		
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	79	90	41	162	176	173	510	503	496		
% of W&NM households	10%	11.4%	5.6%	21%	22.3%	23.8%	65%	63.8%	68.2%		

Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	784	723	586		779	640	730		1282	920	928
% of M&W&NM households	27%	31.0%	25.3%		27%	27.4%	31.6%		44%	39.4%	40.1%
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	17	32	29		40	48	44		87	91	104
% of DS&W&NM households	12%	18.6%	15.8%		27%	27.9%	24.0%		60%	52.9%	56.8%

Table 67 – Households who spend 0-20% of their income on rent

Households who spend 0-10% of their income on rent				Households who spend 10-15% of their income on rent				Households who spend 15-20% of their income on rent			
	2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011
Households with married individuals and never married children	6456	4194	5174	Households with married individuals and never married children	2959	2947	2778	Households with married individuals and never married children	1865	2263	1813
%	42%	29%	37%	%	19%	20%	20%	%	12%	16%	13%
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	250	316	469	Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	215	305	438	Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	237	331	330
%	20%	16%	21%	%	17%	16%	19%	%	19%	17%	15%
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	140	92	108	Households with widowed individuals and never married children	119	91	102	Households with widowed individuals and never married children	97	98	82

%	26%	18%	22%		%	22%	18%	20%		%	18%	19%	16%
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	660	298	467		Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	278	237	205		Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	156	161	109
%	50%	32%	49%		%	21%	25%	22%		%	12%	17%	11%
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	24	27	35		Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	25	17	19		Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	17	13	16
%	27%	29%	33%		%	28%	18%	18%		%	19%	14%	15%

Table 68 - Households who spend 20% or more of their income on rent

Households who spend 20-25% of their income on rent				Households who spend over 25% of their income on rent			
	2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011
Households with married individuals and never married children	1181	1604	1307	Households with married individuals and never married children	3027	3452	2964
%	8%	11%	9%	%	20%	24%	21%

Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	113	277	276	Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	465	724	736
%	9%	14%	12%	%	36%	37%	33%
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	62	73	68	Households with widowed individuals and never married children	116	157	142
%	12%	14%	14%	%	22%	31%	28%
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	75	82	60	Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	152	167	109
%	6%	9%	6%	%	12%	18%	11%
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	6	11	11	Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	17	24	24
%	7%	12%	10%	%	19%	26%	23%

Table 69 –Households who spend 0-40% or more of their income on mortgage (based rate is households that own a property)

Households who spend 0-20% of their income on mortgage				Households who spend 20-30% of their income on mortgage					Households who spend 30-40% of their income on mortgage			
	2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011	

Households with married individuals and never married children	3510	3410	4904		Households with married individuals and never married children	2824	2697	2135		Households with married individuals and never married children	2316	1764	968
%	31%	34%	56%		%	25%	27%	24%		%	20%	17%	11%
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	76	94	113		Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	62	55	78		Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	60	46	55
%	26%	33%	37%		%	22%	20%	25%		%	21%	16%	18%
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	28	34	16		Households with widowed individuals and never married children	14	18	10		Households with widowed individuals and never married children	15	9	11
%	35%	38%	39%		%	18%	20%	24%		%	19%	10%	27%
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	305	277	352		Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	160	201	136		Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	162	117	54
%	39%	39%	60%		%	20%	28%	23%		%	21%	17%	9%
Households with divorced/ separated	4	10	13		Households with divorced/ separated	4	8	6		Households with divorced/ separated	7	10	6

individuals, widowed individuals and never married children					individuals, widowed individuals and never married children					individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			
%	24%	31%	45%		%	24%	25%	21%		%	41%	31%	21%

Table 70—Households who spend over 40% of their income on mortgage (based rate is households that own a property)

Households who spend 40-50% of their income on mortgage				Households who spend over 50% of their income on mortgage			
	2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011
Households with married individuals and never married children	1409	961	386	Households with married individuals and never married children	1320	1327	423
%	12%	9%	4%	%	12%	13%	5%
Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	43	38	31	Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children	46	48	32
%	15%	14%	10%	%	16%	17%	10%
Households with widowed individuals and never married children	10	10	1	Households with widowed individuals and never married children	12	19	3
%	13%	11%	2%	%	15%	21%	7%
Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married	87	49	29	Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married	69	65	12

children					children			
%	11%	7%	5%		%	9%	9%	2%
Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	2	0	3		Households with divorced/ separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children	0	4	1
%	12%	0%	10%		%	0%	13%	3%

Table 71 – New immigrant adults in different types of households

<b><u>New immigrant adults within household</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>
	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children		
0 new immigrant adults	31690	31781	29779	1745	2418	2755	716	743	701	2626	2226	2162	142	164	182
	91%	96.0%	95.6%	96%	96.2%	96.2%	91%	94.2%	96.4%	90%	95.4%	93.5%	97%	95.3%	99.5%
1-2 new immigrant adults	2929	1257	1349	71	95	108	68	40	26	280	104	148	4	8	1
	8%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	9%	5%	4%	10%	4%	6%	3%	5%	1%
3 or above new immigrant adults	33	64	27	0	1	1	0	6	0	1	4	2	0	0	0
	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864	784	789	727	2907	2334	2312	146	172	183
-------	-------	-------	-------	------	------	------	-----	-----	-----	------	------	------	-----	-----	-----

Table 72– New immigrant children in different types of households

<b><u>New immigrant children within household</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2001</u></b>	<b><u>2006</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>
	Households with married individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals and never married children			Households with widowed individuals and never married children			Households with married individuals, widowed individuals and never married children			Households with divorced/separated individuals, widowed individuals and never married children		
0 new immigrant children	32252	30890	30351	1720	2426	2750	707	747	703	2763	2121	2258	142	168	179
	93%	93.3%	97.4%	95%	96.5%	96.0%	90%	94.7%	96.7%	95%	90.9%	97.7%	97%	97.7%	97.8%
1-2 new immigrant children	2102	2188	778	89	88	111	65	41	24	138	210	52	4	4	4
	6%	7%	2%	5%	4%	4%	8%	5%	3%	5%	9%	2%	3%	2%	2%
3 or above new immigrant children	298	24	26	7	0	3	12	1	0	6	3	2	0	0	0
	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	34652	33102	31155	1816	2514	2864	784	789	727	2907	2334	2312	146	172	183

Table 73- Employment status of individuals in both marital statuses

				2001	2006	2011					2001	2006	2011					
				<b>Now married</b>			<b>Divorced / separated</b>											
Recorded	Econ	Employed	Count	99147			99715			108920			4635		6432		8472	

activity status		% within marital status	60.1%	58.3%	58.8%	59.1%	57.6%	58.4%
	Unemployed	Count	3615	4344	3507	473	591	584
		% within marital status	2.2%	2.5%	1.9%	6.0%	5.3%	4.0%
	Econ inactive	Count	61855	66707	72438	2715	4124	5428
		% within marital status	37.5%	39.0%	39.1%	34.6%	36.9%	37.4%
	Student	Count	263	358	295	16	20	27
		% within marital status	.2%	.2%	.2%	.2%	.2%	.2%
	Total	Count	164880	171124	185160	7839	11167	14511
% within marital status		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 74 - Education completed of individuals in both marital statuses

			2001	2006	2011			
			<b>Now married</b>			<b>Divorced / separated</b>		
Highest education completed (recoded)	No education	Count	13831	11657	10988	518	620	651
		% within the marital status	8.4%	6.8%	5.9%	6.6%	5.6%	4.5%

Primary or lower	Count	46097	42013	40142	2172	2838	3444
	% within the marital status	28.0%	24.6%	21.7%	27.7%	25.4%	23.7%
Lower secondary (F1-3)	Count	34741	36991	39297	1890	2803	3746
	% within the marital status	21.1%	21.6%	21.2%	24.1%	25.1%	25.8%
Higher secondary (F4-7) including Yijin	Count	47094	50722	55081	2353	3416	4585
	% within the marital status	28.6%	29.6%	29.7%	30.0%	30.6%	31.6%
Diploma, certificate, sub-degree	Count	7060	9180	12767	274	518	829
	% within the marital status	4.3%	5.4%	6.9%	3.5%	4.6%	5.7%
Bachelors, postgrad cert/diploma	Count	13121	16003	19456	517	757	921
	% within the marital status	8.0%	9.4%	10.5%	6.6%	6.8%	6.3%

	Master’s degree or above	Count	2936	4558	7429		115	215	335
		% within the marital status	1.8%	2.7%	4.0%		1.5%	1.9%	2.3%
Total		Count	164880	171124	185160		7839	11167	14511
		% within the marital status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 75- Working industries of individuals at both marital statuses

			2001	2006	2011			
			<b>Now married</b>	<b>Now married</b>	<b>Now married</b>	<b>Divorced / separated</b>	<b>Divorced / separated</b>	<b>Divorced / separated</b>
Recorded industry	Primary industry	Count	533	334	297	7	13	15
		% within Marital Status	.5%	.3%	.3%	.2%	.2%	.2%
	Secondary industry (manufacturing)	Count	14209	11134	6299	490	522	343
		% within Marital Status	14.3%	11.2%	5.8%	10.6%	8.1%	4.0%
	Construction works,	Count	8800	8478	10431	254	326	528

	maintenance, real estate	% within Marital Status	8.9%	8.5%	9.6%		5.5%	5.1%	6.2%
	Retail, wholesale & hotel	Count	26322	26378	32288		1379	1963	2686
		% within Marital Status	26.6%	26.5%	29.6%		29.8%	30.6%	31.7%
	Logistics, transportation & communication	Count	11586	12139	12330		468	694	846
		% within Marital Status	11.7%	12.2%	11.3%		10.1%	10.8%	10.0%
	Business, marketing, commerce industry	Count	14422	15807	17685		711	983	1298
		% within Marital Status	14.6%	15.9%	16.2%		15.3%	15.3%	15.3%
	Public, social administration, human & cultural services	Count	23211	25338	29590		1323	1923	2756
		% within Marital Status	23.4%	25.4%	27.2%		28.6%	29.9%	32.5%
Total		Count	99083	99608	108920		4632	6424	8472
		% within Marital Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 76 – Occupations of individuals by marital status

	2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011
	Now married	Now married	Now married		Divorced	Divorced	Divorced

							Separated	Separated	Separated
Occupation	Government administrators and foreign diplomats	Count	68	36	50		2	0	2
		% within Marital Status	.1%	.0%	.0%		.0%	0.0%	.0%
	Corporate managers	Count	4731	5218	10409		173	226	499
		% within Marital Status	4.8%	5.2%	9.6%		3.7%	3.5%	5.9%
	Small business managers	Count	8936	8166	2841		359	471	160
		% within Marital Status	9.0%	8.2%	2.6%		7.7%	7.3%	1.9%
	Physical, mathematical and engineering science professionals	Count	961	1034	1357		35	23	43
		% within Marital Status	1.0%	1.0%	1.2%		.8%	.4%	.5%
	Life science and health professionals	Count	352	517	647		9	17	34
		% within Marital Status	.4%	.5%	.6%		.2%	.3%	.4%
	Teaching professionals	Count	1285	1262	1604		40	47	75
		% within Marital Status	1.3%	1.3%	1.5%		.9%	.7%	.9%
	Legal, accounting,	Count	870	1210	1600		35	60	78

business and related professionals	% within Marital Status	.9%	1.2%	1.5%		.8%	.9%	.9%
	Count	592	664	694		18	31	34
Social science and other professionals	% within Marital Status	.6%	.7%	.6%		.4%	.5%	.4%
	Count	553	638	616		10	13	16
IT / Computer Professionals	% within Marital Status	.6%	.6%	.6%		.2%	.2%	.2%
	Count	2204	2316	3399		51	78	136
Physical, mathematical and engineering science associate professionals	% within Marital Status	2.2%	2.3%	3.1%		1.1%	1.2%	1.6%
	Count	1435	1452	1435		65	87	93
Life science and health associate professionals	% within Marital Status	1.4%	1.5%	1.3%		1.4%	1.4%	1.1%
	Count	1238	1302	1810		62	79	139
Teaching associate professionals	% within Marital Status	1.2%	1.3%	1.7%		1.3%	1.2%	1.6%
	Count	6861	7883	11171		372	499	733
Legal, accounting, business and related associate professionals	% within Marital Status	6.9%	7.9%	10.3%		8.0%	7.8%	8.7%
	Count							

Social services and other associate professionals	Count	580	611	709		34	43	54
	% within Marital Status	.6%	.6%	.7%		.7%	.7%	.6%
IT / Computer Associate Professionals	Count	261	429	835		10	25	44
	% within Marital Status	.3%	.4%	.8%		.2%	.4%	.5%
Office clerks	Count	10340	10801	11183		514	791	936
	% within Marital Status	10.4%	10.8%	10.3%		11.1%	12.3%	11.0%
Customer services clerks	Count	2173	2249	2769		210	225	310
	% within Marital Status	2.2%	2.3%	2.5%		4.5%	3.5%	3.7%
IT assistants	Count	32	23	70		2	2	2
	% within Marital Status	.0%	.0%	.1%		.0%	.0%	.0%
Personal and protective services workers	Count	8607	8613	9529		563	742	1054
	% within Marital Status	8.7%	8.6%	8.7%		<u>12.2%</u>	<u>11.5%</u>	<u>12.4%</u>
Salespersons and models	Count	5087	5631	5425		287	462	549
	% within Marital Status	5.1%	5.7%	5.0%		6.2%	7.2%	6.5%

Transport and other services workers	Count	624	739	892		31	44	67
	% within Marital Status	.6%	.7%	.8%		.7%	.7%	.8%
Market-oriented skilled agricultural and fishery workers	Count	371	268	154		4	12	1
	% within Marital Status	.4%	.3%	.1%		.1%	.2%	.0%
Extraction and building trades workers	Count	4431	4292	4534		129	188	222
	% within Marital Status	4.5%	4.3%	4.2%		2.8%	2.9%	2.6%
Metal and machinery trades workers	Count	3876	3668	3455		118	131	167
	% within Marital Status	3.9%	3.7%	3.2%		2.5%	2.0%	2.0%
Precision, handcraft, printing and related trades workers	Count	774	547	478		19	19	29
	% within Marital Status	.8%	.5%	.4%		.4%	.3%	.3%
Other craft and related workers	Count	1798	1612	1230		63	96	79
	% within Marital Status	1.8%	1.6%	1.1%		1.4%	1.5%	.9%
Industrial plant operators	Count	266	171	513		8	8	28
	% within Marital Status	.3%	.2%	.5%		.2%	.1%	.3%

Stationary machine operators and assemblers	Count	1832	1015	559	74	63	37
	% within Marital Status	1.8%	1.0%	.5%	1.6%	1.0%	.4%
Drivers and mobile machine operators	Count	7049	6948	6821	270	355	419
	% within Marital Status	7.1%	7.0%	6.3%	5.8%	5.5%	4.9%
Sales and services elementary occupations	Count	18097	18301	20164	962	1475	2271
	% within Marital Status	18.3%	18.4%	18.5%	<u>20.8%</u>	<u>23.0%</u>	<u>26.8%</u>
Labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing, agriculture and fishing	Count	2826	2026	1967	104	113	161
	% within Marital Status	2.9%	2.0%	1.8%	2.2%	1.8%	1.9%
Total	Count	99110	99642	108920	4633	6425	8472
	% within Marital Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

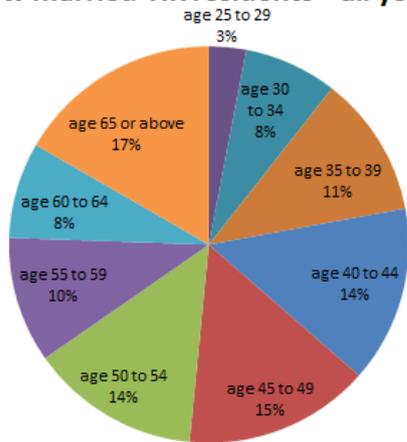
Table 77 - Housing of individuals by marital statuses

	2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011
					<b>Divorced / Separated</b>	<b>Divorced / Separated</b>	<b>Divorced / Separated</b>
	<b>Now married</b>	<b>Now married</b>	<b>Now married</b>				

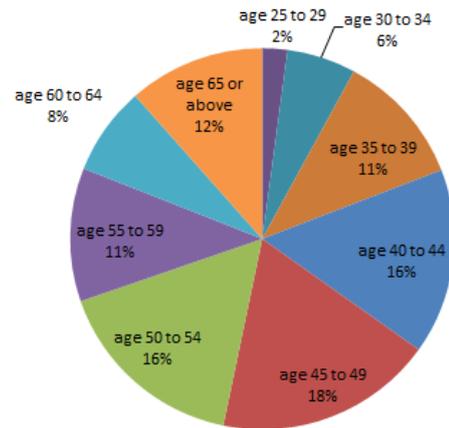
Type of Quarters recoded	Government/House	Count	49294	49101	49234		2720	4448	5971	
	society Rental									
		% within Marital Status	29.9%	28.7%	26.6%			34.7%	39.8%	41.1%
	Sales-HA/HS flats	Count	29261	31359	37577			915	1292	2123
		% within Marital Status	17.8%	18.3%	20.3%			11.7%	11.6%	14.6%
	Private residential (including 2nd hand HA/HS)	Count	79750	85301	81132			3868	5099	5131
		% within Marital Status	48.4%	49.9%	43.8%			49.3%	45.7%	35.4%
	Others	Count	6402	5262	17217			335	327	1286
	% within Marital Status	3.9%	3.1%	9.3%		4.3%	2.9%	8.9%		
Total	Count		164707	171023	185160		7838	11166	14511	
	% within Marital Status		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	



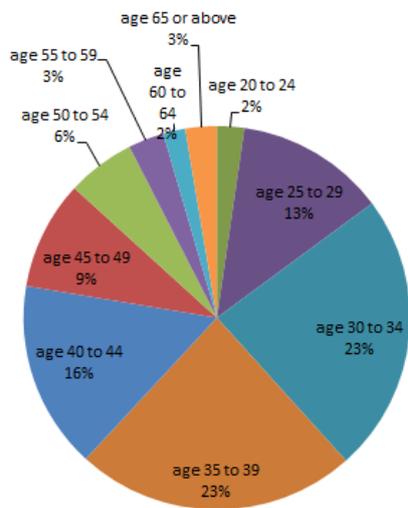
Now married 'HK residents' - all years



Divorced / Separated 'HK residents' - all years



Now married 'new immigrants' - all years



Divorced / Separated 'new immigrants' - all years

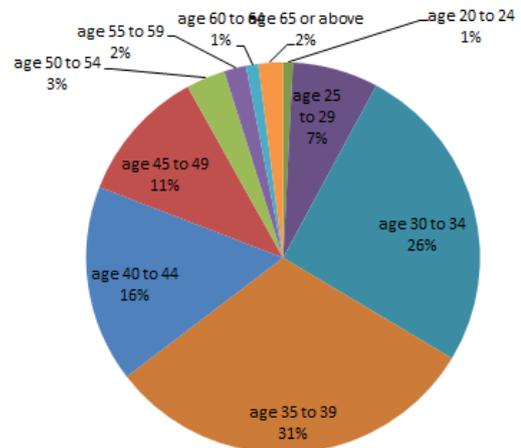


Figure 11 - Age distribution of ‘HK residents’ and ‘new immigrants’ by marital statuses

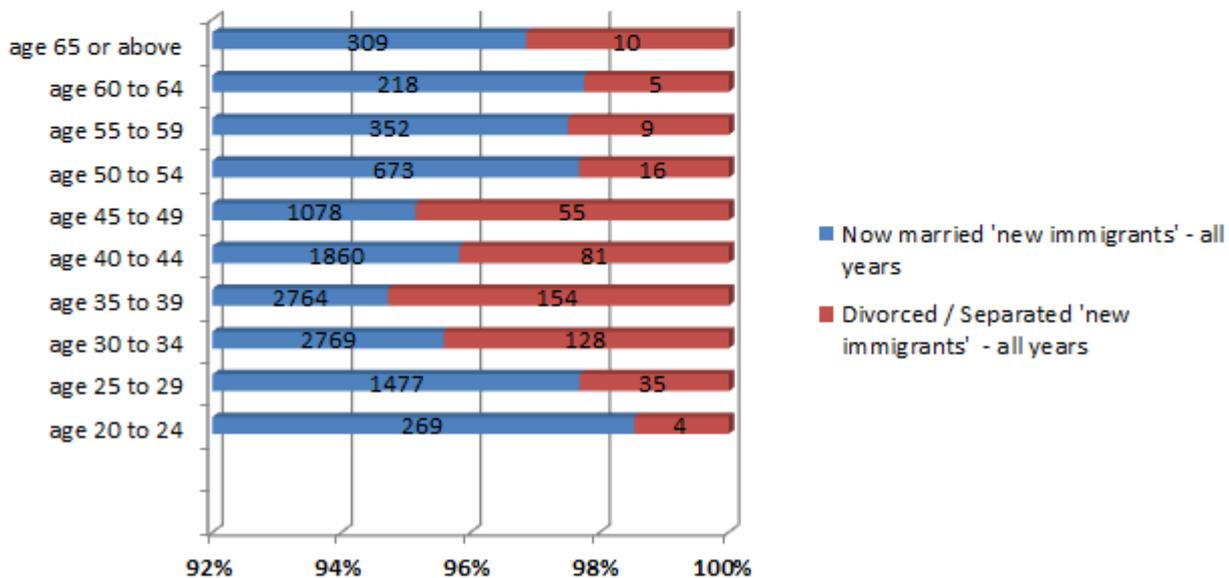
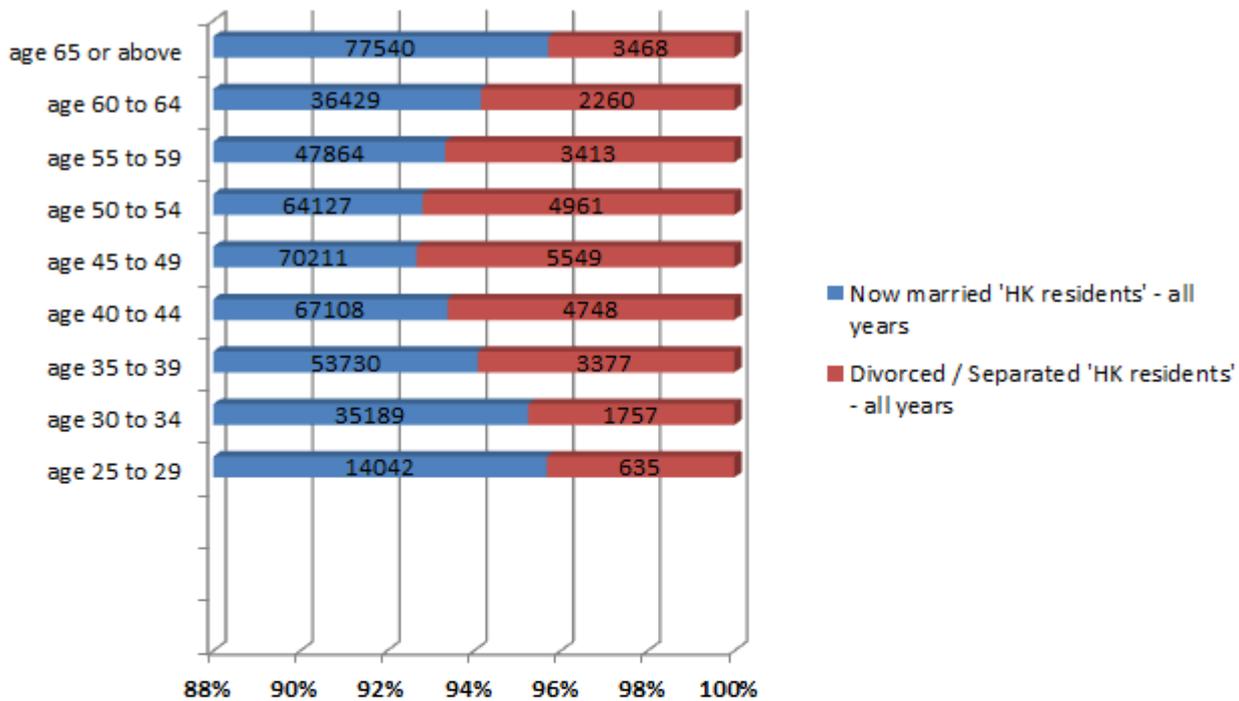


Table 78 – ‘New immigrants’ by age group and marital status

		2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
Duration of residence in HK <7 years and residence in China 5 years ago		Now married	Now married	Now married	Divorced / Separated	Divorced / Separated	Divorced / Separated
age 0 to 14	Count	1	0	0	0	0	0
	% within Marital	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

	Status							
age 15 to 19	Count	6	4	2	0	0	0	
	% within Marital Status	.1%	.1%	.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
age 20 to 24	Count	89	74	106	3	0	1	
	% within Marital Status	1.6%	2.1%	3.8%	1.9%	0.0%	.5%	
age 25 to 29	Count	627	463	387	16	8	11	
	% within Marital Status	11.6%	12.9%	14.0%	10.1%	5.6%	5.6%	
age 30 to 34	Count	1070	1061	638	43	40	45	
	% within Marital Status	19.8%	29.4%	23.1%	27.2%	27.8%	23.1%	
age 35 to 39	Count	1245	920	599	48	53	53	
	% within Marital Status	23.0%	25.5%	21.7%	30.4%	36.8%	27.2%	
age 40 to 44	Count	807	584	469	20	27	34	
	% within Marital Status	14.9%	16.2%	17.0%	12.7%	18.8%	17.4%	
age 45 to 49	Count	591	197	290	14	8	33	
	% within Marital Status	10.9%	5.5%	10.5%	8.9%	5.6%	16.9%	
age 50 to 54	Count	418	114	141	6	2	8	
	% within Marital Status	7.7%	3.2%	5.1%	3.8%	1.4%	4.1%	
age 55 to 59	Count	210	83	59	1	2	6	
	% within Marital Status	3.9%	2.3%	2.1%	.6%	1.4%	3.1%	
age 60 to 64	Count	155	29	34	2	1	2	
	% within Marital Status	2.9%	.8%	1.2%	1.3%	.7%	1.0%	
age 65 or above	Count	194	74	41	5	3	2	

	% within Marital Status	3.6%	2.1%	1.5%		3.2%	2.1%	1.0%
Total	Count	5413	3603	2766		158	144	195
	% within Marital Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 79 – Hong Kong resident by age group and marital status

		2001	2006	2011		2001	2006	2011
HK resident		Now married	Now married	Now married		Divorced / Separated	Divorced / Separated	Divorced / Separated
age 0 to 14	Count	1	0	25		0	0	4
	% within Marital Status	.0%	0.0%	.0%		0.0%	0.0%	.0%
age 15 to 19	Count	85	62	45		2	0	1
	% within Marital Status	.1%	.0%	.0%		.0%	0.0%	.0%
age 20 to 24	Count	1027	762	557		48	28	30
	% within Marital Status	.7%	.5%	.3%		.7%	.3%	.2%
age 25 to 29	Count	5614	4251	4177		226	213	196
	% within Marital Status	3.8%	2.8%	2.5%		3.2%	2.1%	1.5%
age 30 to 34	Count	12822	11228	11139		571	607	579
	% within Marital Status	8.7%	7.3%	6.6%		8.1%	6.0%	4.4%
age 35 to 39	Count	21090	16476	16164		1030	1133	1214
	% within Marital Status	14.4%	10.7%	9.6%		14.5%	11.3%	9.2%
age 40 to 44	Count	25003	22912	19193		1405	1663	1680
	% within Marital Status	17.0%	14.9%	11.4%		19.8%	16.6%	12.8%
age 45 to 49	Count	20817	25204	24190		1216	2013	2320

	% within Marital Status	14.2%	16.4%	14.4%		17.1%	20.0%	17.7%
age 50 to 54	Count	17348	21144	25635		932	1667	2362
	% within Marital Status	11.8%	13.7%	15.2%		13.1%	16.6%	18.0%
age 55 to 59	Count	10352	16797	20715		435	1112	1866
	% within Marital Status	7.1%	10.9%	12.3%		6.1%	11.1%	14.2%
age 60 to 64	Count	10137	9845	16447		393	560	1307
	% within Marital Status	6.9%	6.4%	9.8%		5.5%	5.6%	9.9%
age 65 or above	Count	22391	25322	29827		835	1051	1582
	% within Marital Status	15.3%	16.4%	17.7%		11.8%	10.5%	12.0%
Total	Count	146687	154003	168114		7093	10047	13141
	% within Marital Status	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

## Appendix C – Methodology of household data analysis

### *Brief methodology*

The 5% micro-dataset from Census contains rows of household data (containing household variables), together with individual data living in that particular household (containing individual variables). First, we split the composite set of data into household only file and individuals only file. A personal serial ID number (ID\_PPN) is created for every individual and if the person is married, their spouse is given a spouse serial ID number (ID\_SSN). The individual file is then split by marital status (4 statuses: never married, now married, divorced/separated, and widowed) into four individual by marital status files. Then, a unique household ID is computed in all files. The household ID is the key to match household data and individual data. With the household ID, different combination of household composition by marital status is listed out. For instance, the 4 marital statuses make 15 combinations of household composition which are mutually exclusive (See flowchart below).

Figure 12 – Flow chart for household combinations

	All households by MARIT status composition (2001: 108,140/ 2006: 117,670/ 2011: 126,171 households based on 5% Census data)															
	M: Married individuals				NM: Never married individuals				D: Divorced individuals				W: Widowed individuals			
	M_NM	D_NM	W_NM	M_DS_N M	DS_W_N M	M_W_NM	M_DS_W _NM	M only	D only	W only	NvM only	M_W	DS_W	M_DS	M_DS_W	
<b>2001</b>	52833	3406	5351	951	347	4606	120	20975	2093	3315	12260	1298	198	361	26	
<b>2006</b>	54644	5070	5874	1097	417	3895	126	23757	3228	3745	13788	1255	271	455	48	
<b>2011</b>	56716	6341	6587	1752	497	4206	220	25253	3955	4631	13217	1628	413	678	77	

*Brief methodology (continued)*

For instance, M\_NM households meant the household incorporates married individuals with never married individuals (2 generation household), D\_NM households meant the household incorporates divorced individuals with never married individuals, DS\_W\_NM households meant the household incorporates divorced, widowed, and never married individuals (likely a household with 3 generations) etc. Prior to that, 3 filters have been used to filter out some irrelevant households to aid our calculations.

- 5 Drop 1 filter - filters out one person households, non-family nucleus households, and non-domestic households (2-3% of all relevant households)
- 6 Drop 2 filter – filters out households with relatives living in same household (e.g. brother or sister (in-laws) and other relatives of the household head)

This is because when we look at household income, the presence of relatives other than the family nucleus will inflate the household income (4-5% of all relevant households)

- 7 Drop 3 filter – filters out households where the indicated spouse of the married individual do not live in same household

These households are then filtered, and separated into 15 relevant household combinations. For the households with never married individuals (\_NM), we further filter out those with never married adults (aged over 18), so that the focus of our analysis lies on comparing the households with never married children (aged under 18). Please refer to the flow chart below, and the results of the highlighted groups are presented in Households with children aged under 18.

Figure 13 – Flow chart to illustrate the filtering of households

All households by MARIT status composition  
(2001: 108,140/ 2006: 117,670/ 2011: 126,171  
households based on 5% Census data)

M: Married individuals

NM: Never married  
individuals

D: Divorced individuals

W: Widowed individuals

	M_NM	D_NM	W_NM	M_DS_N M	DS_W_N M	M_W_NM	M_DS_W _NM
<b>2001</b>	52833	3406	5351	951	347	4606	120
<b>2006</b>	54644	5070	5874	1097	417	3895	126
<b>2011</b>	56716	6341	6567	1752	497	4206	220

Drop 1 filter = dropping out irrelevant households (2001: 2%/2006: 2%/2011:3% of households with NM)

Drop 2 filter = dropping out irrelevant relationships in households (2001: 4%/2006: 4%/2011:5% of households with NM)

Drop 3 filter = dropping out married households with their spouse not living in same household (maybe oversea) (2001: 1%/2006: 2%/2011:2% of households with NM)

	M_NM	D_NM	W_NM	M_DS_N M	DS_W_N M	M_W_NM	M_DS_W _NM
<b>2001</b>	49720	2960	4487	747	259	3968	68
<b>2006</b>	51415	4384	4972	892	328	3338	62
<b>2011</b>	52694	5502	5283	1381	362	3524	94

household with <18 individuals

	M_NM (w<18)	D_NM (w<18)	W_NM (w<18)	M_DS_N M (w<18)	DS_W_N M (w<18)	M_W_NM (w<18)	M_DS_W _NM (w<18)	Total
<b>2001</b>	34652	1816	784	557	146	2907	55	40917
<b>2006</b>	33102	2514	789	643	172	2334	52	39606
<b>2011</b>	31155	2864	727	1006	183	2312	66	38313

## Appendix D – Case interview and focus group questions

	No. of cases
<b>Gender:</b>	9 Male 32 Female
<b>Current marital status</b>	
Considering divorce	7
Filing divorce	2
Separation	10
Divorced (range from less than 1 to 16 years)	18
Married	4
<b>Length of marriage:</b>	Range from 1- 40 years
<b>Length of dating:</b>	Range from 0 - 10 years Note: 2 cases have their marriage arranged; 15 cases dated for less than 12 months; 7 cases dated between 1 to 2 years; 9 cases dated over 3 years; remaining couples are uncertain
<b>No. of children:</b>	3 cases have no children (all other cases have children) Note: 4 cases got pregnant before marriage
<b>Cross-border marriages:</b>	14 cases (HK men marry Mainland women) Note: If they mention 單程証 [one- way permit] or learnt that they are from Mainland in the interview, we count

	them as cross-border marriage
<b>Age of the case:</b>	Range from 28-70+ Note: 16 cases are relatively younger (aged 40 or below), 4 cases are relatively older (aged 60 or above); remaining lies in between
<b>Place of birth:</b>	17 born in HK; 22 born in Mainland China Note: remaining cases are born elsewhere
<b>Length of residence in HK:</b>	16 lived in HK since birth; 8 lived in HK for less than ten years Note: remaining cases lies in between
<b>Type of origin family structure:</b>	31 cases grew up in intact family background; remaining cases grew up in single parent families
<b>Highest education attainment level:</b>	16 attained F.3 or below; 16 attained DSE/ F.5 level; 8 attained post-secondary degree Note: One is illiterate
<b>Current income level:</b>	14 has no income; 15 earn less than 10,000 per month; Others earn over 10,000
<b>Factors affecting marriage (not mutually exclusive):</b>	10 cases mentioned problem with spouse gambling; Around 4 involved with alcohol abuse or domestic violence;

	Around 11 involved with extra-marital affairs
--	---

### **Questions for case studies and focus groups (semi-structured)**

- External influence 外在因素影響
  - i. How do you think divorce is being depicted in the media? 你認為廣泛傳媒是如何形容離婚呢？
  - ii. What do you think is society’s attitude regarding divorce? 就社會對離婚的態度，你有何見解？ / How do you think people in our society view divorce? 你認為社會人士對離婚有甚麼看法？
  - iii. How are you influenced by such attitude? 就以上所述的社會態度，你本身如何受到影響？
  - iv. Do you think society’s attitude towards divorce is different for young people/ middle aged people/ old people? If yes, how different? Why do you think it is so? 你認為社會人士就不同年齡層對離婚的看法而有所分別嗎？如是者，有何不同？請解釋。
  - v. As you observe, how does your social circle (family and relatives, friends) marital status affect each other? Do you have people in your social circle who are divorced? 就你觀察，身邊親友的婚姻狀況是如何互相影響？在你的生活圈子中，有沒有已離婚的親友？
  
- Internal - Personal values, believes, attitudes, and traits 內在影響（個人價值觀、信念、態度、特質）
  - i. How do you perceive marriage? What are your expectations of marriage? 婚前及現在，你對婚姻有何看法？你對婚姻抱甚麼期望？部份是否已經達成？(Before you get married? What about now? Have your expectations been met?)
  - ii. What does commitment mean to you? 對你來說，婚姻的承諾有甚麼意義？
  - iii. How do you perceive divorce? 你對離婚有何看法？
  - iv. *In your marriage, can you describe the gender role between you and your partner? 你和伴侶在婚姻中擔當了怎樣的男女角色？與社會的看法有何異同？*
  - v. *In your marriage, how do you and your partner handle finance (and assets)? In your view, what’s the role of men and women respectively in marriage? 結婚後，你和伴侶如何處理家庭收支和資產？你認為男性和女性在婚姻中就財政上應擔當甚麼角色？*

vi. How would you describe your personality? 你會如何形容自己的個性?

● Marital factors 婚姻因素

- i. Can you describe your relationship with your partner before marriage 你可否何形容與伴侶在婚前的關係? (mention: any premarital cohabitation? Significant partnership breakdown? Length of courtship? Period of consideration before marriage?)
- ii. Can you describe your current (or most recent) marriage? How would you describe the family dynamics? 你可否講述最近的婚姻狀況及家庭狀態

● Process of divorce 考慮離婚的過程(→ Consideration of divorce →Separation→Divorce)

- i. Can you describe the conflicts you and your partner experienced? 你可否描述與伴侶發生爭執的經歷  
(Observe if it's cross-border marriage) If so, how does the couple cope with the cultural differences? Whether cultural differences affect the marriage and communication 你與伴侶如何解決/適應文化兩地的差異? 文化差異如何影響你們的婚姻和溝通?
- ii. In your opinion, what do you think of seeking help from others (friends, relatives) regarding family (aka marital) conflicts? What about seeking help from professionals? 你如何看待就家庭糾紛尋求親友及專業協助?  
(For those divorced)  
What is your opinion about seeking help from family mediation services? 你對家事調解服務有何意見?
- iii. (For those divorced)

When did you start considering divorce? For how long have you considered doing so? Is this an “on and off” concept/thought? What led you to decide to get a divorce? Or accept the petition raised by your partner? Anything that draws you back? 你幾時開始有離婚的想法? 這個想法維持了多久? 這個想法有沒有經常困擾着你? 例如, 你會否經常打消、之後又再重新思考這個問題? 有甚麼原因令你作出或放棄離婚(或接受伴侶提出離婚)的決定? 過程當中, 有甚麼因素曾令你卻步?

(For those remains intact)

Have you considered divorce? What stops you or hinders you from getting one? 你有否考慮過離婚? 有甚麼原因令你作出或放棄離婚 (或接受伴侶提出離婚) 的決定?

● Coping 應對離婚的辦法

(intact family)

- i. What impacts have the conflicts brought onto your children? How are the children (if any) coping with the conflicts? (include physical, psychological, financial etc.) 婚姻糾紛為你的子女帶來甚麼影響? 你的子女如何面對? (身體上, 心理上, 財政上等)
- ii. (If they have children) Tell us more about your children. When were they born, and their relationship with you and your partner? 你的子女有多大? 自他們出生以來, 跟你和伴侶的關係是怎樣呢?
- iii. What about yourself? How are you coping with these conflicts 你如何面對這些糾紛?  
(filed divorce/ already divorced)
- iv. What are the changes observed in your children and family after filing divorce? How has the divorce affected your children and yourself? 以你觀察所得, 在申請離婚後, 你的子女及家庭方面有何改變
- v. How are you and your children (if any) coping with the divorce? 你如何面對離婚的問題? 你的子女如何面對父母離異的局面  
(If they have children) Tell us more about your children. When were they born, and their relationship with you and your partner? What are the custody arrangements in place (including the visitation frequency and arrangements)? 請你說一下有關你子女的事情。他們跟你伴侶和你的關係如何 (離婚前後和撫養權安排)? 多見面嗎?

● Costs of divorce 離婚的代價(for already divorced)

How costly is it to you to get a divorce? As a percentage of your income, how much does it cost? 你離婚的代價有幾大? 離婚對家庭收入方面有多大影響

## Appendix E – Nodes coded in Nvivo

Nodes		
Name	Sources	References
Background factors_demographics	2	2
AGE GAP	5	11
Child	38	55
PREGNANT BEFORE MARRIAGE	4	7
Education-low	2	2
FAMILY BACKGROUND	12	25
MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS	12	41
RELIGIOUS FAITH	9	18
X-BORDER	19	64
Conflicts_to Divorce	40	1296
Between couples	38	343
BEING TREATED	24	91
FEELINGS GENERATED FROM SPOUSE	26	126
BETWEEN IN-LAW & CASE	25	166
Feelings gen from in-laws	11	31
DIFF_CULTURAL	11	31
DIFF_EDUCATION BG	2	5
DIFF_HABIT_LIFESTYLE	18	39
DIFF_VALUES	8	40
Expectations management	9	20
RELATION AFTER CHILD HAS GROWN UP	4	11
STRESS_PROB-CHILD RELATED	28	138
STRESS_PROB-EMA	13	60
STRESS_PROB-FINANCE	32	161
DEBT	7	20
STRESS_PROB-SPACE	27	72
STRESS_Prob-TIME SPENT AT HOME	20	68
UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOR	18	78
When did conflicts arise	31	58

● Coping_Impacts	38	1221
● Actions to cope with changes_stresses	22	52
● Changes in family-accommodation	24	63
● Changes in family-financial	22	59
● Changes in family-lifestyle_habits	25	50
● Changes in family-relational betwn spouse and children	33	117
● Child as protective factor	16	29
● CHILDREN-ACADEMIC IMPACTS	20	42
● CHILDREN-BEHAVIORAL IMPACTS	33	155
● CHILDREN-EMOTIONAL IMPACTS	34	133
● DEALING WITH STIGMA	9	22
● Legal order to custody_arrangements_caretaking	22	60
● Life and relations of case with children post divorce	17	56
● SELF-EMOTIONAL IMPACTS	35	228
● suicidal thoughts	12	28
● Self-Physical impacts	15	31
● Self-role and identity impacts	25	64
● Learnings	8	14
● stress_Divorce procedures	21	58
● External influence	34	252
● HOW IS CASE INFLUENCE BY EXT. FACTORS	31	94
● VIEW ON DIVORCE- MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL	9	9
● VIEW ON DIVORCE-FAMILY AND SOCIAL CIRCLE	31	97
● VIEW ON DIVORCE-SOCIETY	25	52
● How parents explain to child	11	23
● Internal-values, beliefs, attitudes, traits	40	777
● EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE	32	171
● Gender role within marriage (inc. finance handling, assets etc)	35	152
● PERCEPTION OF DIVORCE	31	103
● PERCEPTION OF MARRIAGE	34	168
● Personality of self and spouse	36	183
● Marital factors	40	498
● Communication style	35	263
● Decision making style	21	69
● Relation before children	16	23
● Relationship before marriage	36	101

● Coping_Impacts	38	1221
● Actions to cope with changes_stresses	22	52
● Changes in family-accommodation	24	63
● Changes in family-financial	22	59
● Changes in family-lifestyle_habits	25	50
● Changes in family-relational betwn spouse and children	33	117
● Child as protective factor	16	29
● CHILDREN-ACADEMIC IMPACTS	20	42
● CHILDREN-BEHAVIORAL IMPACTS	33	155
● CHILDREN-EMOTIONAL IMPACTS	34	133
● DEALING WITH STIGMA	9	22
● Legal order to custody_arrangements_caretaking	22	60
● Life and relations of case with children post divorce	17	56
● SELF-EMOTIONAL IMPACTS	35	228
● suicidal thoughts	12	28
● Self-Physical impacts	15	31
● Self-role and identity impacts	25	64
● Learnings	8	14
● stress_Divorce procedures	21	58
● External influence	34	252
● HOW IS CASE INFLUENCE BY EXT. FACTORS	31	94
● VIEW ON DIVORCE- MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL	9	9
● VIEW ON DIVORCE-FAMILY AND SOCIAL CIRCLE	31	97
● VIEW ON DIVORCE-SOCIETY	25	52
● How parents explain to child	11	23
● Internal-values, beliefs, attitudes, traits	40	777
● EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE	32	171
● Gender role within marriage (inc. finance handling, assets etc)	35	152
● PERCEPTION OF DIVORCE	31	103
● PERCEPTION OF MARRIAGE	34	168
● Personality of self and spouse	36	183
● Marital factors	40	498
● Communication style	35	263
● Decision making style	21	69
● Relation before children	16	23
● Relationship before marriage	36	101

Needs of these cases	27	113
Imminent needs	21	64
Long term needs	9	18
Medium term needs	13	28
Problem-solving	40	956
ACTIONS TO PROB SOLVE CONFLICTS	34	173
Attitudes re_mediation services	13	22
Beliefs about change	25	78
CONSIDERATIONS DURING DIVORCE PROCESS	39	263
HELP SEEKING ATTITUDE-PROFESSIONAL HELP	36	176
Perception of available support	40	236

## Appendix F – Glossary

### Chapter 1

Section 1.1 “no-fault” divorce	No-fault divorce is a type of divorce proceedings where neither party need to provide evidence of ‘fault’ in their marriage. Such ‘fault’ may include adultery, desertion, abandonment, abuse etc.
Section 1.1 Marriage frauds	This refers to marriages that are not based on a love relationship. It often involves trading in exchange of benefits for either party, this may include monetary benefits, residential permits of a country or city etc.
Section 1.6 stonewalling	Stonewalling in this context refers to refusal of communication or cooperation between the couple.
Section 1.7.1 Grounds of divorce	<p>Grounds of divorce refer to the reason for filing divorce, and this reason has to be proven that the marriage has irretrievably broken down.</p> <p>According to the Family Court, they accept one or more of the following reasons as grounds of divorce:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. your partner has committed adultery and it is intolerable to live with him / her</li> <li>2. your partner behaved in an unreasonable way that you cannot be reasonably expected to live with him / her</li> <li>3. you and your partner have lived apart for at least one continuous year prior to filing for divorce and that both party agrees to get divorce</li> <li>4. you and your partner have lived apart for at least two continuous year prior to filing for divorce (no consent to a divorce is required)</li> <li>5. your partner has deserted you for at least one year before filing the petition</li> </ol> <p>(information adopted from the Family Court's website)</p>
Section 1.7.1 Court-connected program	Court-connected program refers to interventions or programs that are court-mandated participation or that they are recommended by the judge.

## Chapter 2

Divorce decree	It refers to the court official order that has the force of the law.
Section 2.2 Matrimonial home	Matrimonial home refers to the home address of the couple where they live together after their marriage.
Section 2.4.1 Petition and joint applications	In Hong Kong, there are two routes to file a divorce case, either by joint application or petition. A joint application requires the married couple to agree to file the divorce together. Petition application is filed by either one of the couple.
Section 2.4.1 Child custody	Child custody describes the legal relationship between a parent and the child. The parent(s) who obtain custody of the child is responsible for care-taking and making important decisions for the child.

## Chapter 3

Households	This term in this report refers to any households with children aged 18 or below, that contains at least one family nucleus.
Section 3.1.1 Economically inactive population	“Economically inactive population” comprise of persons who do not have a job and have not been at work for the past 7 days before the census moment (excluding those who are unemployed or on holiday). This often includes home-makers, retired persons, and all those aged under 15.
Section 3.1.2.1 Type of housing	Government low cost/ HKHA Rental – 公屋 HA & HS Subsidized Sale Flats – 居屋
Section 3.5 General Household Survey	General Household Survey is conducted every quarter to collect information on the labour force, unemployment and underemployment.

## Chapter 4-6

NVivo	NVivo is computer software for analysing qualitative data.
Ecological model	Ecological model (also known as socioecological model) is a framework to systematically understand the external influences to an individual. For instance, it includes the family system, school system, community system and the societal system.
Section 4.3.1 Extended Family	Extended Family refers to the family members beyond your nuclear family. In this context, it often refers to the in-laws of the couple.
Section 6.1 Legal reference system	Legal reference system is an online database that contains the judgments of selected court cases. The judgment rationale is clearly stated in each document.
Section 6.5.4 Prenuptial agreement	Prenuptial agreement is a contract agreed by the couple prior to entering their marriage. The content varies widely but it often include their agreement regarding the division of property should they get divorce.
Section 6.5.5 Mediation	Instead of taking unresolved matters to court, mediation provides an alternative way of conflict resolution among divorcing couples. It is a process that involves an impartial third-party, usually the mediator, to assist the couple in reaching mutual agreements. In Hong Kong, mediation is conducted by trained mediators.

## Selected References

- Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: Inc.
- Amato, P. R. (2001). Children of divorce in the 1990s: An update of the Amato and Keith (1991) meta-analysis. *Journal of family psychology, 15*(3), 355.
- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72*(3), 650-666.
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and the well-being of children: A meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin, 110*(1), 26.
- Anderson, E. R., & Wolchik, S. (2001). Divorce and Children's Social Development. In J. S. Editors-in-Chief: Neil & B. B. Paul (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 3807-3810). Oxford: Pergamon.
- Biblarz, T. J., & Gottainer, G. (2000). Family Structure and Children's Success: A Comparison of Widowed and Divorced Single-Mother Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(2), 533-548.
- Booth, A., & Amato, P. (1991). Divorce and psychological stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 396-407*.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1997). Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the development of children, 37-43*.
- Clarke, L., & Berrington, A. (1999). Socio-demographic predictors of divorce. *High divorce rates: The state of the evidence on reasons and remedies, 1, 1-3*.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*: Sage.
- Dunn, J., & Deater-Deckard, K. (2001). Children's views of their changing families.
- Espenshade, T. J. (1979). The Economic Consequences of Divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 41*(3), 615-625.
- Geasler, M. J., & Blaisure, K. R. (1998). A review of divorce education program materials. *Family Relations, 167-175*.
- Gove, W. R., & Shin, H. C. (1989). The psychological well-being of divorced and widowed men and women an empirical analysis. *Journal of Family Issues, 10*(1), 122-144.
- Kalmijn, M. (2010). Country differences in the effects of divorce on well-being: The role of norms, support, and selectivity. *European Sociological Review, 26*(4), 475-490.
- Kaslow, F. W. (1980). Stages of divorce: A psychological perspective. *Vill. L. Rev., 25, 718*.
- Kessler, S. (1975). *The American way of divorce: prescription for change*. Chicago: Nelson Hall.
- Kitson, G. C., & Sussman, M. B. (1982). Marital complaints, demographic characteristics, and symptoms of mental distress in divorce. *Journal of Marriage and*

- the Family*, 87-101.
- Kposowa, A. J. (2000). Marital status and suicide in the National Longitudinal Mortality Study. *Journal of epidemiology and community health*, 54(4), 254-261.
- O'CONNOR, T. G., Dunn, J., Jenkins, J. M., Pickering, K., & Rasbash, J. (2001). Family settings and children's adjustment: Differential adjustment within and across families. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 179(2), 110-115.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*: SAGE Publications, inc.
- Rogers, S. (2011). Divorce rates data, 1858 to now: why are divorces going up? Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/jan/28/divorce-rates-marriage-ons>
- Sandler, I. N., Tein, J. Y., & West, S. G. (1994). Coping, Stress, and the Psychological Symptoms of Children of Divorce: A Cross-sectional and Longitudinal Study. *Child development*, 65(6), 1744-1763.
- Schramm, D. G. (2006). Individual and social costs of divorce in Utah. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 27(1), 133-151.
- Sigal, A., Sandler, I., Wolchik, S., & Braver, S. (2011). Do parent education programs promote healthy postdivorce parenting? Critical distinctions and a review of the evidence. *Family Court Review*, 49(1), 120-139.
- Soderman, A. K., Ellard, M. J., & Eveland, T. S. (1996). Prevention of conflict in divorcing families: SMILE. *Info: Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library*, 2(1).
- Sullivan, P. L. (2005). Culture, divorce, and family mediation in Hong Kong. *Family Court Review*, 43(1), 109-123.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American journal of evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246.
- Wolchik, S. A., Sandler, I. N., Millsap, R. E., Plummer, B. A., Greene, S. M., Anderson, E. R., . . . Haine, R. A. (2002). Six-year follow-up of preventive interventions for children of divorce. *JAMA: the journal of the American Medical Association*, 288(15), 1874.
- Yip, P. S. F., Chen, Y. Y., Yousuf, S., Lee, C. K. M., Kawano, K., Routley, V., . . . Clapperton, A. (2012). Towards a reassessment of the role of divorce in suicide outcomes: Evidence from five pacific rim populations. *Social Science & Medicine*.