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Spousal abuse and social workers : when private sphere goes public

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SPOUSAL ABUSE AND SOCIAL WORKERS:
WHEN PRIVATE SPHERE GOES PUBLIC

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LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

2011

SPOUSAL ABUSE AND SOCIAL WORKERS:
WHEN PRIVATE SPHERE GOES PUBLIC

by

SHEK King Fan Veronica

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy in Social Sciences
(Sociology)

Lingnan University

2011

ABSTRACT

Spousal Abuse and Social Workers: When Private Sphere Goes Public

by

SHEK King Fan Veronica

Master of Philosophy

This study uses the concept of public and private spheres to analyze how Hong Kong's social workers manage spousal abuse cases. Victims of spousal abuse in Hong Kong generally see their experiences as "family shame" - something that belongs to the private domain - and are therefore reluctant to disclose them to third parties. However, there is a public conviction that social workers are appropriate agents to handle spousal abuses. This study examines the roles and responsibilities of social workers and their service recipients in spousal abuse cases. The analysis is based on eleven semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with social workers affiliated to local welfare agencies that handle spousal abuse.

I found that counseling services enable clients as well as professionals in spousal abuse cases to rethink their roles and responsibilities. Social workers tend to reaffirm the necessity and usefulness of their interventions, but often complain about the conflicting attitude of their clients who expect effective services but are reluctant to compromise. More importantly, whether clients will proactively seek public resources that will help their situation depends on, as explained by social workers, whether they can successfully enter the private domain of their recipients.

This finding echoes academic discourses on the private sphere. Individuals may set a soft, spongy, rigid or flexible boundary when communicating with external parties and their selection of such boundaries reveal their self-perception and their readiness to be empowered by service professionals during crisis situations. Strategic intervention from well-trained professionals may facilitate service recipients in spousal abuse cases to let down their self-imposed barriers.

These findings contribute to our understanding of two key issues in spousal abuse intervention in Hong Kong. Firstly, they explain clients' accusations of the "unprofessional and useless services" provided by the social workers. Secondly, it brings in a valuable reference point for policy makers to re-examine the prevailing management of spousal abuse cases, and provides a platform for further academic debates on public and private boundaries.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

Shek King Fan
Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

SPOUSAL ABUSE AND SOCIAL WORKERS:
WHEN PRIVATE SPHERE GOES PUBLIC

by

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Master of Philosophy

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ABBREVIATION

CFSC Christian Family Service Centre

FCUSU Family and Child Protective Services Unit

IFSC Integrated Family Service Centers

SWD Social Welfare Department

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter discusses the background, rationale, objectives and significances of the present study.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Spousal abuse in Hong Kong

Domestic violence is largely a hidden crime that occurs behind closed doors. It is a crime that violates personhood both physically and psychologically. It is a universal, extremely diffuse and complex phenomenon which is strongly influenced by contemporary culture, social setting and societal value (The Women's Commission Report, 2006). It causes multiple and long-lasting traumatic effects to the victims as well as the abuser. However, it is only in recent years that this phenomenon gains public attention, in spite of its serious nature and far-reaching consequences.

In Hong Kong, there has been a sharp increase in reports of spousal abuse cases. Records from the Social Welfare Department of Hong Kong, which are captured by the Child Protection Registry (CPR) and the Central Information System on Battered Spouse Cases and Sexual Violence Cases (CISBSSV) respectively, showed that there has been a consistent increase of newly reported spouse battering cases from 2004-2010, save for a drop in 2007 and 2008. Below is a summary of newly reported cases between 2004 and 2010:

Table 1: The trend of reported battered spouse cases from 2004-2010

<u>Types of Abuse</u> <u>No. of Case %</u>	2010 (Jan-Sep)	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004
Physical abuse	2008 (84.4%)	3880 (80.7%)	4142 (60.5%)	4399 (68.7%)	3602 (81.4%)	3023 (84.0%)	2714 (80.5%)
Sexual abuse	9 (0.4%)	12 (0.2%)	16 (0.2%)	10 (0.2%)	11 (0.2%)	8 (0.2%)	4 (0.1%)
Psychological abuse	214 (9.0%)	662 (13.8%)	2509 (36.7%)	1737 (27.1%)	609 (13.8%)	351 (9.8%)	348 (1.3%)
Multiple abuse	148 (6.2%)	253 (5.3%)	176 (2.6%)	258 (4.0%)	202 (4.6%)	216 (6.0%)	305 (9.0%)
Total	2379 (100%)	4807 (100%)	6843 (100%)	6404 (100%)	4424 (100%)	3598 (100%)	3371 (100%)

Sex of Victims from 2004-2010

Sex of victims	2010 (Jan-Sep)	<u>2009</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2004</u>
Female	1992 (83.7%)	4012 (83.5%)	5575 (81.5%)	5169 (80.7%)	3749 (84.7%)	3153 (87.6%)	2990 (88.7%)
Male	387 (16.3%)	795 (16.5%)	1268 (18.5%)	1235 (19.3%)	675 (15.3%)	445 (12.4%)	381 (11.3%)
Total	2379 (100%)	4807 (100%)	6843 (100%)	6404 (100%)	4424 (100%)	3598 (100%)	3371 (100%)

(Source: Social Welfare Department)

According to records, the percentage of victims who are female ranges from 80.7% to 88.7% between 2004 and 2010, while in the same period, males only accounted for 11.3% to 19.3% of the total.

Rising number of reported cases arouses public attention

Spousal abuse began to gain widespread public attention only after the Tin Shui Wai Tragedy in 2004 and the resulting public inquiry. The incident involved a 45-year-old man murdering his 31-year-old wife and their twin daughters before fatally injuring himself (The Women's Commission Report, 2006). According to police report and the Women's Commission Report in 2006, the murdered wife had tried to seek help from the police station eight hours before she was killed, reporting to the police that she was abused by her husband several times. The wife had also sought help and assistance from social workers and some shelters beforehand. But it could not avert the tragedy:

Tin Shui Wai (TSW) tragedy, 2004

—The Tin Shui Wai (TSW) tragedy in April 2004 aroused a great deal of public attention to the issues of availability and effectiveness of resources to protect families at risk. This incident involved a triple murder in a family living in the new town of Tin Shui Wai, wherein the father killed his wife and twin daughters before fatally injuring himself. The mother had contacted social workers previously and the Police the same day but this did not avert the tragedy from taking place, prompting questions as to why the system had failed. After the Tin Shui Wai tragedy, the community called for the Government to take stronger actions to address domestic violence.” (The Women's Commission Report, 2006)

The TSW tragedy caused widespread shock and discontent amongst the public in Hong Kong. The great impact brought to society had aroused the public's awareness and led the mass media to highlight the problem of spousal abuse, resulting in the topic becoming a social issue worthy of concern. The public not only sympathize with the victims of the tragedy, but also expressed anger towards various government departments in how the case was handled. The government was blamed for not having clear instructions and guidelines for social

workers or the police to handle spousal abuses crisis. The social workers were also accused of not offering proper and immediate assistance to the deceased woman, as her case was simply treated as family dispute. The failure to fulfill their professional roles, lack of sensitivity to detect the severity of domestic violence, inadequate support to the battered woman, weak coordination among various departments, and the inadequacy of existing legal protection, social policy and risk management mechanism were all sources of resentment for the public towards the government and social workers. (The Civic Party, 2006, p.11)

The years following the TSW tragedy saw increasing reports of domestic violence, which further aroused public concern and raised criticisms from experts, resulting in continued complaints from the general public, mass media as well as recipients of public assistance. The government was criticized for failing to address domestic violence as a serious issue, and social workers for being unable to detect the seriousness of the tragedy, low sensitivity, incomprehensive cooperation practice and lack of clarity in terms of their roles.

Traditional values and attitudes regarding family affairs

In Hong Kong, the prevailing cultural values in most Chinese families are to “protect” family affairs from being publicized. Most families refuse to seek help from outsiders even when needed or faced with life-threatening crisis at home as they believe their family problems can be solved through negotiation, or arbitrated by the head of family. Spousal relationship is private and domestic in nature. Family violence, once occurred, would unavoidably be regarded as a family shame. Thus, families will tend to keep silent, trying to shield off public intervention and unwilling to report even though they might be at risk. Under-reporting is common due to the public’s lack of awareness in abusive behavior and its impact to society. (Chan, Chun, & Chung, 2008).

The intervention of social workers in Hong Kong

Since the 1970s, social work has been gaining popularity as a profession in Hong Kong. In day-to-day work, social workers are perceived as knowledgeable, skillful, and fully supporting their clients. According to LeCroy & Stinson (2004), social workers are regarded as guardians who have an exemplified value to care for those less fortunate. In their report on the public's current perception of the social work profession in 2004, LeCroy & Stinson pointed out that the majority of respondents from a random sample felt that social workers were important to address social problems (79.9 percent of the total 386 respondents). The value of social workers is more obvious, however, when they have *not* practiced their proper standard as a professional, as it would be easier for the public to blame social workers for their insensitive response, lack of supervision, training and resources provided to their clients. (Davies, 2008)

1.1.2 Insights from the literature

How is social worker standing out as professional closely associated with domestic violence?

Social workers offer services in a broad range of circumstances, especially in spousal abuse cases. Amongst the various professionals whom abused victims could turn to for help, social workers are most frequently contacted. The reason for this is that they are perceived to be more reliable and most commonly identified as helpful in spousal abuse cases, as discussed by Hamilton & Coates:

—Among all professionals, for example, Police force, psychologist or psychiatrist, social workers are the most frequently contacted by battered victims for all problems, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse” (Hamilton & Coates, 1993).

Although in most societies, the approach to solve domestic violence is through the cooperation of different agencies, social workers are identified as the key element in the coordination process. Golden & Frank (1994) also mentioned that “[W]hat social workers don’t know about domestic violence could endanger their clients”. This shows how central the roles of social workers are in handling domestic violence.

Compared to the police, social workers have different practices in their work when handling domestic violence. The police are an executive authority in Hong Kong. According to the Family and Child Welfare Branch, the Hong Kong police have legitimate use of force, but should not mediate when handling domestic violence incidents. They are not professionally trained in handling domestic violence as social workers are (SWD, 2004). In Hong Kong, the public has high expectation for social workers. They are expected to be multi-functional and can also be the expert in all social problems and provide case following,

counseling, emotional support or emergency help for clients, whereas the police are only responsible for executing authority and power at the first sight.

Social workers are therefore seen as the liaison point between abusers and victims in spousal abuse intervention, even though they are mostly contacted by victims rather than abusers. In Hong Kong as is elsewhere, social workers are supposed to be professionals who are able to tackle different kinds of social problems. Since the year 2004, there has been growing public discontent with the performance of social workers. They have been accused of having a low sensitivity towards potential risky cases, lacking comprehensive risk assessment tools/ policies to address domestic violence, discriminating clients who were new immigrants. Also, the public not only noted a mismatch between prevention measures and the government's "zero-tolerance" policy, but also accused social workers of neglecting the safety of battered women (e.g. social workers witnessed the battering but lacked follow up procedures for clients with psychological disorders). In addition, the cooperation between different local NGOs was found to be (Appendix D (ii)). Social workers are accused severely in the eyes of public. But are social workers really like so? What are the difficulties social workers facing at work and how importance their intervention strategies when intervening on spousal abuse?

1.2 Aims of the study

The perception on whether spousal abuse is a private matter in the family or a public crime has long been a hot topic of debate. How do social workers, as public agents who are working with private matters through cases intervention, deal with Chinese families' traditional ethics and what do they think of these traditional doctrines? In addition, boundaries exist that separate people from one and another. How social workers react and what factors affect their boundaries in their intervention in spousal abuse cases are interesting topics to explore. Therefore, the aims of this study are:

- 1) To examine how the boundary between public and private spheres in spousal abuse cases is managed by social workers; and,
- 2) To examine how management of this boundary affects the effectiveness of social workers' intervention in spousal abuse cases

Within the context of the above research aims, three key research questions are formulated:

- Q1. How is the boundary between public and private sphere managed in spousal abuse work?
- Q2. What is the negotiation between social workers and clients in spousal abuse cases?
- Q3. What is the gap between clients' expectation and social workers' performance?

1.3 Significance of the study

Earlier in this introduction, the tendency of the general public and the mass media to complain about social workers in their handling of spousal abuse cases has been described. Academic research tends to focus more on the causes, consequence or the resolution of spousal abuse cases, but seldom explore why such cases are difficult to be detected, or remain difficult to be resolved even if a case file is opened by social workers. In our general understanding and public conviction, social workers are appropriate agents to handle spousal abuses, even though victims or abusers of spousal abuse in Hong Kong generally view their experiences as a kind of “family shame”, i.e. something that belongs to the private domain. Thus, this study will focus on how the boundary between public and private spheres in spousal abuse cases is managed by social workers, and how this will affect the effectiveness of social workers in case handling.

This study will contribute to the understanding of two key issues in spousal abuse intervention in Hong Kong. Firstly, it seeks to explain why clients often accuse social workers of their “unprofessional and useless services”. Secondly, it attempts to bring in a valuable reference point for policymakers to re-examine the prevailing management of spousal abuse cases, and hopefully to provide a platform for further academic debates on how boundaries between public and private spheres can be managed in other forms of intervention.

This study uses the concept of public and private spheres to analyze how social workers manage spousal abuse cases in Hong Kong. Due to the influence of Chinese traditional ethics, people tend to see domestic violence or spousal abuse as “family shame” and belonging to the private sphere which others should not intervene. However, social workers are publicly convinced as the most appropriate professionals to deal with spousal abuse. The roles and responsibilities of social workers have to be re-affirmed under the

current management of spousal abuse. In academic discourses, the shifting boundaries between social workers and sufferers (abusers and victims) of spousal abuse can be examined within the context of “when private sphere goes public”. Hopefully, this study can provide a platform for policy-makers and social workers to evaluate their work for spousal abuse sufferers in Hong Kong.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Boundary, Public and Private Sphere

In social sciences, research on “boundaries” or “border” is becoming a hot topic at the center of influential research agenda crossing different fields in the recent years (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). The drawing of boundaries across social context, types of groups, cultural and structural levels are leading to the development in the conceptualization of boundaries. This chapter first presents an overview of what is meant by boundaries, public and private spheres, and then a discussion on how public and private spheres are linked to social workers and spousal abuse cases. Later, the significance of how boundaries between public and private spheres are managed by social workers will be discussed.

2.1.1 Conceptualization of Boundary

From our general understanding, a boundary can be the territorial separation on maps or within countries, or a line demarcating the interior of a sphere from its exterior. However, a boundary here is also conceived of as one of the concerns in defining the distinction between public and private. There are several types of boundaries that people draw between themselves and others, such as symbolic boundaries, social boundaries, socioeconomic boundaries cultural boundaries and moral boundaries. Boundary work can act as tools for us to rationalize our 1) social and collective identity, 2) class, ethnic/racial and gender/sexual inequality; 3) profession, sciences and knowledge; and 4) communities, national identities, and spatial boundaries. According to Lamont and Molnar (2002), symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools which individuals and groups struggle over and through them, come to agree upon definitions of reality. They also separate people into groups and

generate feelings of similarity and group membership (Epstein 1992, p.232). Boundaries reflect our self-schemas and shape our actions towards others. For example, people who belong to the same profession might draw a line between themselves and other occupation, e.g. doctor with patients and social workers with clients. Lamont and Molnar also explained that social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities. According to Lamont (Chan, 1998, p.10), socioeconomic boundaries are those which are drawn on the basis of judgments of people's social position as by wealth, power, or professional success. Cultural boundaries are those which are drawn on the basis of education, intelligence, manners, tastes, command of high culture. Moral boundaries those which are drawn on the basis of moral character, centered on honesty, work ethic, personal integrity, and consideration for others. The above types of boundaries provide a valuable source to classify similarities and differences with others.

Boundaries can be shifted, crossed, weaken, strengthened, relocated, territorialized under the classification of boundary and the boundary objects. For a better understanding of the discussion covered in the following chapters, I am only going to concentrate on the types of boundaries discussed by Brown (2006). According to Brown (2006), boundaries are guidelines, rules or limits that people create to identify for themselves what are reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave around them and how they will respond when someone steps outside those limits. Individuals might be bounded by their family, gender, race, nationality or birth and death, all of which could lead them to draw a personal boundary for themselves. Individuals with different backgrounds draw personal boundaries, separating them into different groups, consisting of people with similar backgrounds. For example, personal boundaries are drawn due to the difference of male and female, or similar nationalities within a country. Boundaries are not firmly fixed, and are changeable if the

factors that are used for bounding are redrawn or shifted. In this sense, boundaries are socially constructed, and play an important role in regulating social interactions as those internal and unconscious demarcation points or lines that define where “I” begins and “others” ends, or vice versa.

To find out where the boundary between public and private sphere is, personal space is one way of perceiving boundaries between one another. The internal nature of boundaries determines and enables an individual to become aware of when boundaries have been violated or invaded by others. In general, people change their own boundaries in different dimensions, for example, from poor to rich, sick to healthy, from close to open or detach to attach. Boundaries separate one from others, when someone is getting their feeling hurt and they want to escape from the present situation, he or she might draw a boundary in order to prevent further harm; this is an example of an invasion of a person’s personal boundaries.

Brown (2006) suggested two categories and four types of boundaries. Physical and psychological are the two categories of boundaries, while the four types of boundaries include soft, spongy, rigid, and flexible boundaries. The four types of boundaries are closely related to the present research and will be discussed in greater detail. Someone who maintains a **Soft boundary** is easily manipulated and merged with others’ boundaries and greatly susceptible to emotional contagion. People with **Rigid boundaries** are so closed or walled off that no one can connect or get close to them, either physically or psychologically. This is often the case when one has been physically, psychologically, or emotionally abused. This boundary can be selective depending on time, place or circumstances and is usually based on a bad previous experience in a similar situation. **Spongy boundaries** are a combination of soft and rigid, much like the surface of a sponge. A person with this boundary permits more emotional contagion opportunities than do rigid boundaries, but less so than soft ones do. They are unsure of what to let in and what to keep out. The last boundary, **Flexible boundary**, is an

ideal type similar to selective rigid boundaries, except that the person has more control. The person can decide what to let in and what to keep out, and is resistant to emotional contagion, manipulation and therefore difficult to exploit. All four are essential boundaries that are present among people and demonstrate how a person's personal boundaries are constructed and developed. The boundaries above are not only applicable to individuals, as they can also be used by a group of people who share the same core value, thoughts, or experienced the same incidents. As explained above, people may change their boundaries under different social contexts, time, place or circumstances. For example, people originally holding a rigid boundary physically and psychologically are hard to be approached or assessed by any means. However, their boundary could change into soft, spongy or flexible once over time.

2.1.2 Public and Private Spheres

In sociological studies, there has been considerable debate over the meanings and applications of the public and private distinction. However, little discussion and research have been given to the ways in which social workers tackle spousal abuse by constructing their roles and responsibilities around this distinction.

Public and private spheres are conceptually distinct spheres dividing the social world into two zones. Historically, the cognition of these two spheres varied in its inclusion of content. Public and private spheres have multiple meanings in varied contexts. For better understanding of the concept of public and private spheres in relation to social workers and spousal abuse, these two spheres will be discussed in more detail below.

Public sphere

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “sphere” is defined as a province or domain in which one's activities or faculties find scope or exercise, or within which they are naturally confined; range or compass of action or study. It also means a place, position, or station in society; an aggregate of persons of a certain rank or standing. “Public” means, in general, the opposite of private. Something that is public is open to general observation, view, or knowledge, without concealment from the general public, so that all may see or hear. From another point of view, that which is public can also mean a place that is open or available to all members of a community, or all who are legally or properly qualified (as by payment), and not restricted to the private use of a particular person or group, for example, a service or an amenity provided by local or central government for the community and supported by rates or taxes, or someone serving the public in a professional capacity, for instance, employed by local or central government.

Therefore, the term “public sphere” can be understood as a station, range or domain in which an event, occasion or a place is naturally confined to and is carried out without concealment, so that all may see or hear. In addition, “public sphere is also the stereotypically masculine world of politics and paid employment” (Dictionary of Sociology, 2000).

Private Sphere

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “private” can be found only after the middle of the sixteenth century. It means something is restricted to one person or a few persons as opposed to the wider community; it is not opened to the public. It can also mean “not holding public office or official position”. Private also designates the exclusion from the sphere of the state apparatus (Oxford English Dictionary, p.11). Furthermore, private sphere is the stereotypically feminine world of household, family and unpaid domestic labor (Dictionary of Sociology, 2000). The private involves self and intimacy relations, their development having inseparable relevance to the public sphere. Habermas (1989, p.28) explained that private has an ancient meaning: it appears from the inner parts of the region of the private sphere, from the home, together with the exertion and relations of dependence involved in social labor. Private therefore is understood as belonging to home, the inner part of the private sphere.

The distinction between public and private spheres

In existing literature, there is no clear-cut distinction and permanent boundary between public and private spheres due to their changeable meaning and understanding under different

social contexts. In addition, this distinction is a social construction often treated in relation to political and gender perspectives (Acklesberg, 2010).

Historically, these two terms are often generated and framed as much as confusion since different people can employ these two concepts with different things or mean several things at once (Weintraub & Kumar, 1997). Under these conditions, , public and private are different in nature as “public” is related to executing the human rationality, while “private” is generally associated with domestic work and women. The divide between public and private can be traced back to classical Greek philosophy. “Public sphere”, also known as *polis* (politics), was the center of freedom and equality. Considered to be superior, it is the sphere of rationality, moral choice, culture, and of intellectual endeavour. Alternatively, “private sphere”, also known as *oikos*, was the sphere of nature, nurture, and the non-rational, and was regarded as the subordinated realm of necessity (Baker & Doorne-Huiskes, 1999, p.5). From a gender perspective, public sphere is dominated by men, the masculine worlds of politics and paid employment; while the private sphere is exercised by women, the feminine world of household, family and unpaid domestic labor (Allan, 2000; Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1995).

Following the development of ancient Greek philosophy in these two concepts, Arendt (1958) studied these public and private realms with respect to society since ancient times in Greece. The author mentioned that society is divided into three realms, namely, public, private, and an in-between realm known as the social realm, a relatively new concept that appeared due to the rise of the modern age. For Arendt, the public realm is a political arena and a realm for freedom, initiation and glory. Citizens in this realm would debate on issues and public affairs beyond their personal lives. The private realm is a realm for necessity, and is a place located in the household. According to Arendt, violence in the public realm is not allowed since glory comes from one’s success. In contrast, violence is the tool that

strengthened the power of the head over a household. Social realm indicates an alliance between people for a specific purpose, such as when men organize themselves in order to rule over others or to commit crime.

Similar to Arendt, Habermas (1989) defined "public sphere" as a forum where public opinion is shaped and the traditional sciences of "politics" are formally reflected. Habermas described the public sphere as a place where people are socially integrated and rational, critical discourse can take place about state and economy. In this sphere, every individual could participate by communicating and debating political issue, the authority of the state and market place in the society. Similar to Habermas, Aristotle said that the public sphere is the place where all people can exchange their ideas and opinions to exercise control over state. In contrast, the private sphere is the household.

On the other hand, public sphere has a different meaning for Fraser (1999). The most vocal spokesperson for a post-modern conception of the public sphere, she argued that public means "something is state-related, accessible to everyone, of concern to everyone and pertaining to a common good or shared interest". From this viewpoint, the definition of public is shifted more to the government and universal access. However, Fraser's definition of private sphere, "something pertaining to private property in a market economy and to intimate domestic or personal life, including sexual life", is roughly the same as previous studies. As opposed to public, private emphasizes more on relationship and the space outside government or state, and is mainly a sphere in the market place or within home. For Fraser, the following is the typical conceptions of public and private spheres,

"Public," for example, can mean (1) state-related, (2) accessible to everyone, (3) of concern to everyone, and (4) pertaining to a common good or shared interest. Each of these corresponds to a contrasting sense of "private." In addition, there are two other senses of "private" hovering just below the surface here: (5) pertaining to private property

in a market economy and (6) pertaining to intimate domestic or personal life, including sexual life. (Fraser, 1999, p.128)

According to Behanbib (1999), when private issues are made into public issues, lines between public and private are under negotiation. It is of major concern how these private issues, for instance, child abuse, domestic violence, or private sexual life, are managed in public. Similar to Arendt, for Fraser (1989), the social refers to how people's needs are played out and discussed in the society or the state (Fraser, 1989, pp. 156-157).

Previous studies revealed the distinction between the public and private spheres from a more political and feminist perspective. However, after Arendt and Habermas, the expanding literature on "public sphere" addresses this distinction quite differently from the mentioned political realm in that citizens are seen as gathering together to debate issues and public affairs beyond one's personal life. In addition, different from earlier literature that men solely dominated the public sphere and women were not allowed to enter, the definition has shifted more to a realm where people are socially integrated and rational, more towards the government and universal access without concealment, and work for the public interest and public good in a place open or available to all members of a community. As opposed to the public sphere, which is now defined in a broader view, the definition of the private sphere, though not having changed a lot, has included enriched content and items. This sphere focuses more on the household, intimate relationship, family abuse, privacy or space outside government and state. As Weintraub & Kumar (1997) suggested, public and private spheres are distinct by contrasting, firstly, the hidden/withdrawn to what is open, revealed or accessible; and secondly, individual versus the collective.

The distinction between public and private spheres is important for defining the sphere in which social workers and spousal abuse belongs. The application of boundary and spheres

can facilitate the linkage of social workers and spousal abuse cases and reflection on how effective case management is in intervention processes. As Silver in Weintraub & Kumar's book (1997) emphasized, "Personal is private, impersonal is public", a clear reflection of how personal and impersonal are widely understood as. Personal is preserving of valuable moral qualities, for instance, trust, intimacy, family, affection, marriage or erotic relations in the modern society, whereas public sphere is dominated by public policy, political debates, political community and citizenship.

2.2 Social Workers and Public Sphere|

2.2.1 Understanding of Social Workers

The Social Work Dictionary (Barker, 1995, s.v. "social work") defines social work as "the professional activity of helping individuals, families, groups, or communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and for creating societal conditions favorable to that goal" (Sheafor, Horejsi, & Horejsi, 2000, pp.4). Basically, social worker is defined as a person who is licensed as a social worker and has either an undergraduate or graduate degree in social work from an accredited social work education program" (Danis, 2003 pp.177-191). The National Association of Social Workers of the United States also gave a summary of what qualities of social workers are expected to have:

"Social work is the profession activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and to create societal conditions favorable to their goals.

"Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain tangible services; providing counseling and psychotherapy for individuals, families, and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services; and participating in relevant legislative processes." (The National Association of Social Workers, 2009)

Social workers are generally expected to have recognized education in the required knowledge, ethics and competencies. They are also sanctioned by society to provide specific services by helping the vulnerable minority or repressed people in efforts to change themselves, the people around them, or social institution. Last but not least, social workers also have the purpose or obligation to help others to meet social needs or to eliminate difficulties by making use of their abilities and knowledge. The objectives of social work are to help individuals and social systems improve their social functioning and to change social

conditions to prevent those individuals and systems from experiencing difficulties without any kind of supports from the society. (Sheafor, Horejsi, Horejsi, 2000, pp.1-4)

2.2.2 The Mission of Social Workers

Packman et al. (1986, pp. 11-12) considered social worker an important profession in our increasingly complex and ever-changing society. They have their mission and goals to achieve their social functions to the individuals, families, social groups and society in advanced, just like a ‘street-level bureaucrat’. They maintain social harmony and cure the dysfunction family, for example, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency etc. They are a bridge, which provide a way for the two parties to communicate. With their formal license, they also have an international definition, which is a profession that,

“... promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.” (International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers, 2000)

Social workers have a strong mission to promote social change, solve social problems and empower their clients in order to enhance their well-being. They are working under the principle of human rights and social justice. Thus, they are the agents who are responsible for solving social problems and improving human relationship. On the one hand, social workers have to maintain a professional role with their own obligation and mission. On the other hand, they are agents of the state who aim at maintaining social stability, social justice and human rights. Though these two roles are not mutually exclusive, they affect how social workers manage their roles on the work of spousal abuse cases.

2.2.3. Clients in Social Work

As opposed to social workers, who play the role of helpers, clients are the service receivers. Davies (2008) referred specifically to the client in social work practice, which he defined as someone who makes an explicit agreement with a social worker about the purpose of their work together.” Under this definition, clients are the service receivers, whether they are spousal abuse victims or abusers. In this study, clients are the most frequently used words, thus, it needs to be clarified and defined. In the helper-clients exchanges, these two parties are influenced by their task environment, such as the management practices in an agency and public policies in helpers’ working practices. The others factors that influence the services and their working relationship include the beliefs, goals, and expectation of both parties (Gambrill, 2006).

Social workers and clients influence each other in the helping process as they have varied goals. In general, the goals of social workers are establishing, maintaining, and using expertise, demonstrating competence, and helping clients, while clients’ goals include obtaining help with problems, preserving self-respect, limiting invasion of privacy or perhaps seeking assurance. During the helping process, clients’ goals and beliefs are crucial in deciding what services will be offered and what results are likely. Clients assume they have a certain degree of responsibility for causing their problems, thus some of them may approach the social workers, who are outsiders of their family, to ask for help. Once the clients have not fulfilled their need for material resources, they may feel depressed and hopeless. Clients and social workers are interrelated since the clients’ goals and expectations are the factors according to which social workers decide the services they can offer to their clients. To know what the clients’ nature is would be beneficial for the social workers when managing the cases.

2.2.4 Social Workers in Hong Kong

Social workers in Hong Kong will be discussed in this section. This is of importance because social workers are employed and administered by the government and registered with Social Workers Registration Board and so their work corresponds to what would fall within the public sphere. In order to have a clear procedural guide for social workers to follow when handling spousal abuse cases, Hong Kong Government and Social Welfare Department (SWD) have adopted a cross-sectoral approach, launching a series of multi-disciplinary policies and services involving the cooperation of a range of social, legal, financial and health resources to address the spousal abuse problem in Hong Kong. Related helping professionals work together to provide different levels of effective prevention, intervention and treatment for better intervention procedures. Three procedural guidelines for handling spousal battering, child abuse and adult sexual violence cases currently exist in Hong Kong. They are:

- Procedural Guide for Handling Child Abuse Cases (Revised 2007)
- Procedural Guidelines for Handling Battered Spouse Cases (2004)
- Procedural Guidelines for Handling Adult Sexual Violence Cases (revised 2007)(have commenced with effect from 26 March 2007)

In this study, the “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Battered Spouse Cases (2004)” (SWD, 2004) is used for the further understanding of how social workers handle the spousal abuse cases under the instruction of Social Welfare Department.

Identification of spouse battering

It is important for social workers to identify spousal abuse from clues and according to guidelines. The procedural guidelines listed some characteristics describing some symptoms or reactions of victims and batterers, who have been living under violence and have been exhibiting aggressive behavioural traits at home respectively. For example, for victims, whether there is a substantial delay between injury and presentation for treatment, whether they are avoiding eye contact while explaining the cause(s) of injury, or whether they are

isolated and have lost contact with their family or friends. For the batterers, whether they have uninvited visits or calls, or whether they are following the spouse around, checking the spouse, or embarrassing the spouse in the public. Though the above characteristics cannot fully indicate the occurrence of spouse battering, they provide guidance for social workers to know their roles and how to work with spousal abuse cases.

Risk assessment

When the victims seek help from the relevant agencies, an individual interview is necessary for a more in-depth understanding of their cases in order to assess any risk in the current situation. Thus, the victims or batterers would be asked directly to check whether they have been injured by their partner. For reference, the procedure guidelines would ask different questions to assess the situation of the victims in categories such as the circumstances, under which they were abused, previous record of abuse, children at risk, coping mechanism and discharge arrangement. Questions may include whether they are afraid to go home, or where they can go (SWD, 2004). Whether it is dangerous for the victims to return home would be judged by social workers and other helping professionals. It is generally understood that social workers should be alert to what situations the victims are under, and whether there is a possibility of minimization of risk by the victims after they have been abused, as most of the victims would normalize their abusive relationship and attitude to the batterers.

Social Service Units for handling spousal abuse cases

In Hong Kong, there are several social services units that approach and support victims and their families directly and in-directly. These units include the Social Welfare Department and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both of which are important bodies that handle

spousal abuse and family issues, and provide different forms of assistance and services. The victims may approach them by themselves or through the referral of family member(s), the police, medical professionals, hotline services, government departments, other welfare agencies, schools or the general public (SWD, 2004). Several specific family service units are responsible for providing prevention, a range of support service and crisis intervention to the abused families and victims. Below are three types of service units related to the social workers being interviewed in the fieldwork section of the current study:

Table 2: Social Service Units for handling spousal abuse in Hong Kong

Social Service Units for handling spousal abuse	Functions
Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A specialized service unit under the Social Welfare Department ● Mainly handles spouse battering, child abuse and child custody cases in every district. ● Provide a coordinated package of services, like outreaching, escorting the victim to hospital for examination and treatment, arrangement of admission to refuge centre, counselling, group work and referral for other services. (SWD, 2004)
Family Services Centres or Integrated Family Service Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Operated by the Social Welfare Department and subvented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) ● Aim at providing comprehensive, holistic and one-stop services to meet the multifarious needs of individuals and families in the community ● Services include family life education, parent-child activities, enquiry service, volunteer training, outreaching service, mutual support groups, counseling and referral service for individuals and families in need, with extended hour services.
Refuge Centres for Women (Shelters) -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are four refuge centres for the women (Wai On Home for Women operated by SWD and Harmony House, Serene Court and Sunrise Court operated by NGOs) ● Aim at providing a safe place where the female victims will be helped to regain self-confidence, and to find the strength and resources to continue leading a normal life free from the threat of violence or abuse. ● Protecting the victims and preventing further abuse from the abusers, the address of the refuges are kept confidential from all persons except the victims and the social workers who are working with the case.

In addition to the family services agencies above that are mainly responsible spousal abuses, the Clinical Psychological Service established by the Social Welfare Department can also provide assessment and treatment services for victims or abusers in child abuse, child sexual abuse, domestic and other sexual violence cases, who have presented various symptoms of psychopathology. Apart from family services and clinical psychological services, there is the Domestic Violence Ordinance, Cap 189 (DVO), which is widely used in courts of law to protect victims of domestic violence. This ordinance was first established in 1986 and was amended in 2009, in an attempt to make social workers more aware of the illegal action of spousal abuse, more focused in handling domestic violence, and help them regulate their handling method and direction in resolving domestic violence.

2.2.5 Social Workers as a Helping profession that belongs to the public sphere

Social workers naturally belong to the public sphere, since in accordance to the Oxford English Dictionary, social workers generally perform and carry out their duties without concealment to the public or their clients in need (Dictionary of Sociology, 2000), and are not restricted to the private use of a particular person or group. In Hong Kong, their registration licenses are mainly responsible by the Social Workers Registration Board, which is a statutory body established under the Social Workers Registration Ordinance (the Ordinance). The qualification and quality are recognized by this board, which sets up and reviews the qualification standards for registration as a registered social worker and the related registration matters. Under the Ordinance, ~~a~~ person whose name does not appear on the Register of registered social workers shall not be entitled to use the title of ~~social worker~~ or its related descriptions” (Social Workers Registration Board, 1998). Social workers are also people who are licensed with either an undergraduate or graduate degree in social work from

some accredited social work education program (Danis, 2003, p. 181). Thus, social workers are legally and properly qualified by payment and academic qualification.

From Greek philosophy, social workers are individuals who gather at the center of freedom, equality and the sphere of rationality with moral choice. They have the freedom of choice whether or not to help the reprieved people. They stay in a sphere of rationality, in which they are guided by social work practice, with specific professional roles, guiding principles, intervention skills or effective case management in their work domain. Social workers have their own moral choices and training when intervening cases and communicating with their clients.

Furthermore, the nature and operation of social workers aim to help the general public and deprived groups, and as such, they are one of the many political agents that can potentially help to shape the sociopolitical environments that inform social policies (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1989). As Chi & Cheung (1996, pp.144) mentioned, “welfare is the best politics and social workers, who are the professional implementing social welfare programmes, are thus agents who can translate welfare into the arena of politics.” Social workers can be the agents who implement political policy indirectly and exchange their ideas and political views with their colleagues and the government to exercise their control as a professional in the society. For example, in Hong Kong, there are some social workers who are concurrently sitting in the Legislative Council as councilors or political officers. These social workers, under Arendt and Habermas’ conception of “public sphere”, can be classified as public agents who belong to this sphere.

According to Fraser (1999), social workers are definitely state-related, since they work in different governmental departments. In Hong Kong, people can approach them when they want to seek help from social workers, for example, the Integrated Family Service Centers

(IFSCs). Referring to the objectives of social workers, they are working for the good of individuals, families, groups or the state under the same purpose. Social workers can therefore be considered to be belonging to the public realm as people who are state-related, accessible to everyone and concern the common good of others.

In social work practice, social workers are public agents or professionals who work for the general public by providing direct services to individuals, families, groups, communities and the state. They deliver their services, express their values and carry out their social work practice in the physically-defined public. Gambrill (2006) mentioned that social work practice is carried out in the public by providing direct services to individuals, families, groups or communities, even for policy analysis. Social workers are even considered to be a public authority to protect citizens from harm and reaffirming standards of morality (Kristin, 2003, p. 3; Gambrill, 2006, p.7):

–Social work practice is carried out in public, nonprofit, and for profit agencies and includes direct services to individuals, families, groups, and communities, as well as supervision, management, and policy analysis.” (Gambrill, 2006, p.4)

To conclude, by evaluating and assessing the roles, professional obligations and the nature and operation of social workers, several similarities can be found when comparing the views of different scholars on the public sphere. Social workers, through a working group, serve crucial roles and functions related to “public sphere”, and this conception will serve to facilitate and justify the findings and discussion of this study. Besides, increasingly behaviors in the private sphere are regarded as legitimately subject to state intervention, such as domestic violence or divorce. Social workers, as helping professionals are caught between traditional norms that see spousal abuse as a private matter and progressive social policies treat spousal abuse as a matter that should be rightfully subject to state regulation and

intervention. Whether spousal abuse is a private or public issues are subject to what roles the social workers are representing and how the state are portrayed to intervene the matter in the so-called private sphere.

2.3 Spousal Abuse and Private Sphere

2.3.1 Domestic Violence and Spousal Abuse

The definition of domestic violence and spousal abuse, to be discussed in this section, will be helpful in understanding the relationship between household and privacy, and between private sphere and spousal abuse.

Understanding of domestic violence

The definition of domestic violence typically involves a pattern of physical, psychological and sexual abuse that can be understood as the misuse of power and exercise of control by other intimate partners, children or other family members.

–A pattern of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and intimidation... It can be understood as the misuse of power and exercise of control by one partner over the other in an intimate relationship, usually by a man over a woman, occasionally by a woman over a man (though without the same pattern of social collusion) and also occurring amongst same sex couples. It has profound consequences in the lives of individuals, families and communities.” (Mullender & Humphreys, 1998, p. 6)

In an intimate relationship, it is more likely that women are reported to be abused by men, though sometimes it may be the other way round. The occurring of domestic violence does bring a great and profound impact to the lives of individuals, their families, communities and the society. It is an awful matter that should not be occurring in our society. As mentioned before, domestic violence has several distinct sub-groupings, such as spousal abuse, child physical and sexual abuse, and elderly abuse. This study mainly focuses on spousal abuse, which means using of violence or the threat of violence physically, psychologically and

sexually to other members of the family in order to establish control by one individual over another. (Family and Child Welfare Branch, 2000).

Understanding of spousal abuse

According to the Social Welfare Department, spousal battering has similar meaning as spousal abuse, that is, a kind of violence or the threat of violence, which can be through physical, psychological or sexual harm, including physical attack and sexual violation, for instance, slapping, pushing and hitting, and is consistent and repeated. It is clearly defined by the Social Welfare Department and used formally in formal documents.

–Spouse battering is a kind of domestic violence...It covers incidents of physical attack, when it may take the form of physical and sexual violations, such as slapping, pushing, pinching, spitting, kicking, hitting, punching, choking, burning, clubbing, stabbing, throwing boiling water or acid and setting on fire as well as spouse being forced to be involved in sex or undesirable sexual acts. It also includes psychological abuse, which can consist of repeated verbal abuse, harassment, confinement and deprivation of physical, financial, personal resources and social activities, etc.”

(Social Welfare Department, 2009)

Furthermore, such abusive behavior occurs between two partners who can be married couples, co-habitees, or separated partners.

2.3.2 Cultural Support for Spousal Abuse: Patriarchy and Family Privacy

After defining spousal abuse, the question to ask is, why has this become such a serious social problem in Hong Kong and other societies? In this section, how patriarchy and family privacy intensified the spousal abuse problem will be discussed.

Patriarchy system

Some feminists argue that patriarchy is the main driving force that causes spousal abuse (Cheung & Choi, 2010, p. 38). Along with spousal abuse, patriarchy exists in varying degrees in all cultures, no matter western or non-western, and people are generally accepting it as part of their life (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Gardiner, 1996). In most families and countries, men still believe that they have the dominant power and right to control their family members, especially their wives. They can “sanction” them if they violate or break the “rules” they have set and consider necessary to be obeyed. In addition, the traditional gender role attitude enhanced the male dominance and female subordination in a family and also in the whole society (Cheung & Choi, 2010).

Chinese culture also emphasizes tradition and harmony in a family, and thus preserves the virtues of persevering even when suffering from bitter difficulties. This would discourage women to speak up and fight against their abusive partners (Sun, Wu, Button, Li, & Su, 2011). For men, since they have a perceived dominant role and controlling power over a family, once they are abused physically, psychologically or sexually, they are likely to feel ashamed to disclose and seek help from outsiders. In short, patriarchal ideology and unequal power relationship threatens the consciousness of victims or abusers to protect themselves and their rights through legal ways.

Family privacy

“Privacy of family” has been heavily debated in domestic violence and family studies (Pagelow, 1984). At one end, there are arguments that families have their own privacy and would resist intrusion from the outside forces. At the other end, this idea raises the flag of those who are righteousness holders to intrude others’ family privacy.

There are different degrees of privacy, which has been varying according to historical context. Pagelow (1984, p.13) mentioned how family privacy is maintained based on the ~~historical~~ establishment of patriarchal marriage and common law rights and privileges". Dobash & Dobash (1979) also raised a point that some women do not report being violently treated at home by their intimate partners, as they believe that violence at home will cease automatically without intervention from outsiders. They want to maintain the image of family as ~~a~~ "heaven in a heartless world" or ~~a~~ "place with love, caring and security", and this ~~lovely~~ "heaven" cannot be dominated by violence. Coupled with the influence of patriarchal ideologies, therefore, most of the victims are anti-disclosure to their own family problems and hopes to remain a non-intervened family.

People who are opposed to this argument thought that the distinction between private and public is artificial and serves the interest of those with power (Gardner, 1996). In their interpretation, the distinction between ~~public~~" and ~~private~~" represents male and female roles in society. There is an understanding that men in their public sphere could dominate the public activity and exert influence on the private sphere, where female and household belongs. Thus, men in the family are more dominant and women are subordinates to their husband. The sense of anti-family is strong so that outsiders dare not intervene, and the public sphere, in this argument, serves the interests of those with power. Such family privacy is still the prevailing culture contributing to the reluctance to disclose and seek help once family problems occur (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

According to Gardiner (1996), there are three notions that prevent intervention from outsiders or other helping professionals. The first one is the ~~idealized~~" notion of the home as a haven from the outside world and a place of security and happiness; the second notion is all things occurring in the home is private in nature and, therefore, are none of others' business

and others do not have the right to intervene; the last notion is that individuals are self-determining and have the ability to empower themselves.

As a result, the tendency to reveal family problems to the public or outsiders is low. Under-reporting is made even worse by traditional Chinese doctrines or beliefs, which prescribe spousal abuse as a kind of ashamed private matter that should not be disclosed to outsiders (Chan, Chun, & Chung, 2008; Sun, Wu, Button, Li, & Su, 2011). For most victims, they still believed that their husbands or the abusers will change eventually (Coalition on Equal Opportunity for Women in Hong Kong, 2006).

2.3.3 Family Shame: Self-imposed Barriers

In recent years, family problems in Hong Kong have become more complex. The number of cases involving domestic violence has been on the rise, and the happening of the “big matters”- spousal abuse tragedies, have aroused public concerns and have been widely reported by the mass media in Hong Kong. However, many cases are not reported and potentially high risk cases are hard to detect by any single party. The traditional Chinese beliefs that outsiders have no right to intervene in other people’s family matters, and that people should not disclose their family’s shameful things to outsiders, only made the situation worse. Most importantly, the lack of consistent understanding of spousal abuse added to people’s reluctance to reveal their own family problems, have made the public reluctant to report their abusive cases. As a result, under-reporting of family abuse is regarded as somewhat inevitable (Chan, Chun, & Chung, 2008).

In this study, spousal abuse is my main focal point. Regardless of the role of the wife or husband, one of the two parties involved in a spousal relationship will be the victim and the other the abuser. Deep-rooted ideas about family privacy concerns and the idea of family

shame hindered a family's intention to disclose abusive relationships and to seek help proactively from the related helping professionals. Chinese male batterers seldom seek help and reveal their abusive relationship to the public, because of feelings of shamefulness and their concern about face (Li, 1999). According to Chan (2005), losing face in male batterers results in anger and shame, and thus leads to violence. Both the victims and batterers are afraid to be looked down on by others who know about their current condition. They would like to keep their private information, the public-perceived "family shame" in their perspective, from others.

This shamefulness-concealing mindset has strengthened the private sphere the abused families are staying in and getting protection from. When the private sphere is strengthened and rigid, no one can enter this domain, not even the intervention of social workers. The abusers and victims are shamed of telling others and seeking help from social workers. Thus, if the clients can lower their own perception of shamefulness due to spousal abuse in their family, social workers can manage their intervention effectively and stabilize clients' current condition. Self-imposed barriers can then be removed gradually and the boundary between private and public spheres will be shifted and re-mapped.

In summary, with lesser family shame and weaker boundaries defining the private sphere, the boundary between public and private sphere would be changed and shifted, and the abusers and victims will be more willing to remove their self-imposed barriers and seek help actively from the social workers, making it easier for the social workers to enter the private sphere.

2.3.4 Spousal Abuse in the Private Sphere

Spousal abuse has been attracting substantial attention among scholars, service providers, and policy-makers in most Chinese societies in debating and classifying their public and private nature (Tam & Tang, 2005). However, there is still some confusion on whether domestic violence (including spousal abuse) is a public or a private matter.

Spousal abuse happens in an intimate relationship with highly private emotions involving a multitude of tangled or subtle meanings (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010). As Gardiner (1996) described, the emotions between spouses is intimate in nature and located in the private sphere. In addition, private sphere is the stereotypically feminine world of household, family and unpaid domestic labor (Dictionary of Sociology, 2000). The private involves self and intimacy relations, their development have inseparable relevance to public sphere. According to Barner (1998), “Violence between intimates is difficult to measure; it often occurs in private, and victims are often reluctant to report incidents to anyone because of shame or fear of reprisal... Female are more likely than males to be victims of violence by intimates.” Compared to the public, the private emphasizes more on relationship and the space outside government or state, and is mainly a sphere in the market place or within home. It has long been accepted that family violence be viewed as a private matter not under the control of a state, government, or the sanction of jurisdiction of ordinary law. In the Chinese context and understanding, spousal abuse is equated to family shame, and public disclosure of this shame will attract penalty.

In conclusion, the concepts of boundaries, public and private spheres are well linked to social workers and spousal abuse. The four types of boundaries demonstrate how one’s boundaries can change and shift due to the changing nature of public and private spheres. Social workers, who work to resolve family problems, belong to public sphere, but spousal

abuse is a private matter that needs the intervention of social workers. Both spheres have their own concerns and constraints, but their boundaries could change with time under different conditions. In the private sphere, clients of spousal abuse are manipulated by traditional culture, for example, patriarchy and family privacy. Thus, they often set a self-imposed barrier to strengthen their boundaries and block others from entering, since they generally agree that spousal abuse is a kind of family shame. Social workers in the public sphere are open and rational, and perform their duties without concealment to the public or their clients in need. Understanding the boundary shift and the nature of public and private spheres are important for the analysis later in this study.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study adopts a qualitative approach and an inductive research strategy to explore how social workers in Hong Kong manage spousal abuse cases. Qualitative data refers to empirical data in the form of words, sentences, and paragraphs rather than numbers, statistics or hypotheses (Neuman, 1991). According to Strauss & Corbin (1998, p.89), qualitative research means

—..any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations.”

Conceptually, this study employs the concepts of public and private spheres to structure the interviews and the analysis of the data, and focuses on social workers' functioning, their interaction with their service clients, their case handling experiences, their personal views toward their roles and responsibilities, and their perception of their relationship with clients. These data cannot be easily quantified, and will need to be analyzed through concepts and their relationships in the form of narration and in-depth interviewing.

An inductive strategy is adopted to answer the research questions, starting with the collection of data and proceeding to derive generalization by an inductive logic (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Inductive reasoning is particularly suited for answering the how' question set out in this study.

3.2 Study design and sample

As mentioned earlier, this research has adopted a qualitative approach to examine how social workers working in family service handle spousal abuse cases and their management of the boundary between their role as professionals in the public sector and their need to get close to the private domestic lives of their clients. Face-to-face interview is one of the main data collection methods in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Open-ended in-depth interviews with eleven social workers were conducted from March 2010 to October 2010.

Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter of this study, victims/abusers were hard to contact. Also, interviewing victims/abusers may arouse their traumatic experiences and therefore requires greater scrutiny in terms of research ethics. Nevertheless, it is important to gain a wider perspective and so twelve key informants were also interviewed before and during the setting of interview questions. They include:

- 1) Eight university professors who are experts in Sociology, Criminology, Social Policy, Gender Studies, Psychology and Political Science;
- 2) Three social workers who provide new immigrants' services and youth development in Hong Kong;
- 3) One counselor who is a registered social worker in Canada specializing in domestic violence cases

These key informants are crucial in providing a broader perspective when evaluating the validity and appropriateness of the interview questions and offered valuable opinions on the practical ways of collecting data.

Hong Kong Newspaper Analysis (Appendix D (i) and (ii))

A small scale content analysis of local news reports on public reaction towards social workers' intervention of domestic violence was also conducted. It provides a comprehensive understanding of what social workers and the government departments are accused of by the mass media during the period of 1st January 2002 to 1 April 2011.

Utilizing the search engine "WiseneWS" with the key words: "Social workers" and "Domestic violence" (in Chinese: "社工", "家暴"). A total of one thousand and seventy-four news reports were found, of which five to seven news articles per year were purposively selected. The criteria I used when selecting the five to seven articles are: those words and sentences used to blame or accuse the social workers and governmental departments in handling spousal abuse cases. In addition, stories on maltreated domestic violence cases by social workers were shorted listed. Articles are originally in Chinese (Appendix D (i)) are translated into English by the author (Appendix D (ii)).

The number of news articles found using the above mentioned key words varies significantly over the years. In 2002 and 2003, no news article was found using the key words at all. In 2004, there were twelve articles; in 2005, one hundred and forty-seven articles; in 2006, two hundred and forty-eight articles; in 2007, the same as 2006, two hundred and forty-eight articles; in 2008, there were one hundred and four articles; one hundred and eighty articles in 2009; and in 2010, one hundred and twenty articles and finally, fifteen articles were found from January to April of 2011.

The following table summarizes this information:

Table 3: Number of news articles Hong Kong Newspaper Analysis (2002-2011)

Years	Number of news articles	Years	Number of news articles
2002	0	2007	248
2003	0	2008	140
2004	12	2009	180
2005	147	2010	120
2006	248	2011	15

In-depth face-to-face interview

Different types of interviews suit different situations (Punch, 2005, P. 170), and in this study the in-depth interview was employed to study the personal views of the social workers and their subjective case handling experience. Since the interviews were held in confidence, the respondents were more willing to share their personal and specific points of view on when they intervened the family matters of others. The length of each interview was at least one hour and most of them lasted for two hours. Apart from the guided interview questions, some additional and usefully relevant questions were asked for facilitating the analysis of the data in the later part.

Sampling

Purposive sampling is a deliberate sampling method focusing on a specific target population (Punch, 2005; Neuman, 1998). Interviewees were mainly identified through the author's personal network and referrals. At the end of each interview, the respondents were asked to suggest another social worker who also handles spousal abuse cases. The referred prospective interviewees would then be approached by email with an explanation of the research objectives and interview questions for their reference. These methods are known as

purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The total number of interviewees is eleven practicing social workers who work in local welfare agencies and are responsible for front-line family services. Most of them have worked for two or more years in the spousal abuse field.

Demographic characteristics

The selection of interviewees was in accordance with a set of criteria, including the agencies they are working in, years of service, districts of service and sex. All respondents were social workers currently working in or had resigned from local family service agencies. Among the eleven respondents, three were from Christian Family Service Centre (CFSC), four from the Integrated Family Service Centre(s), three from shelters and one from Social Welfare Department. The districts they were working in include Kwun Tong, Chai Wan, Shatin, Kwai Fong, Tsing Yi, Tuen Mun, Tin Shui Wai. Of these, Kwun Tong, Kwai Fong and Chai Wan are previously industrial towns ; Shatin and Tuen Mun are new towns established in the 80s, and Tin Shui Wai is a new town in which most of the population are new immigrants from mainland China, also the areas where the high profile tragedy described in the introduction chapter occurred..

The following tables describe the demographic characteristics of the interviewees:

1. Sex

Sex	Number of Respondents
Male	2
Female	9
Total	11

2. Educational level

Educational level	Number of Respondents
Master degree	5
Bachelor degree	6
Total	11

3. Years working as social worker

Years	Number of Respondents
Less than one	1
2-4	6
4 or above	4
Total	11

4. Affiliated organization

Affiliated organization	Number of Respondents
Christian Family Service Centre (CFSC)	3
Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSCs)	4
Shelters	3
Social Welfare Department	1
Total	11

5. Districts of service

The respondents have been working in several districts in Hong Kong, mainly in the New Territories, including Kwun Tong, Chai Wan, Shatin, Kwai Fong, Tsing Yi, Tuen Mun and Tin Shui Wai.

6. Marital status

A majority of social workers--eight were single and three were married.

Marital Status	Number of Respondents
Married	3
Single	8
Total	11

Setting of the interview guide

Based on the two objectives described in Chapter 1, and after consultation with key informants, an interview guide was drafted. All questions were open-ended and aimed to tap into the following areas:

- 1) The boundary between public and private spheres;
- 2) The relationship between social workers and the service recipients, and
- 3) The gap between clients' expectation and social workers' performances.

All respondents were asked the same set of questions, in the same order and delivered in a standardized manner (Punch, 2005, P.170). Since the interviews were semi-structured, the interview flow could be managed by probing the interviewees through asking more in-depth and relevant questions when necessary and appropriate, allowing for more open exchange of feelings and opinions. In addition to surprising opinions, new topics were also introduced by the respondents on their own accord, which benefited the analysis tremendously. The emotional tone of the respondents also consisted of a wide range of affections, including anger, joy and sadness.

Pilot interview

After reviewing the academic literature, two pilot interviews were conducted on 20 March 2010 and 22 Apr 2010 respectively. These two interviewees were front-line social workers who were working in Integrated Family Service Center (IFSCs) and Family Service Centers in different districts in Hong Kong. One had been working for three to five years in the family field, while the other had resigned from the family services field for one year. Both of them were specifically selected through personal network and friends' referral.

The pilot interviews were exploratory in nature and aimed to pave a platform for testing the interview questions and adjusting the questions by observing the response of the respondents. The two respondents were requested to share how they managed the boundary between private and public spheres and to illustrate with evidence and examples. From their sharing, they showed a clear understanding of their roles in handling spousal abuse cases. For example, they listed sets of roles they were involved in when taking up case intervention. They also faced a lot of difficulties when dealing the clients' emotions and needs. For example, they described how some clients refused to be helped when they did not trust the social workers. They also suggested that a good working relationship could boost the effectiveness of case handling. More importantly, from these pilot interviews, I found that social workers seldom mention the boundary between private and public sphere.

Therefore, these two respondents greatly helped me to adjust the previous interview questions by making it more comprehensive and in-depth. Their opinions were helpful and provided guidance in the subsequent redesigning of a more thorough set of interview questions.

3.3 Data Analysis and Data Processing

The interview was audio recorded with full verbatim transcripts. A comprehensive microanalysis method was used to analyse the collected data. According to Strauss & Corbin (1998, p.36),

—..detailed line-by-line analysis necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationship among categories; a combination of open and axial coding.”

This analysis method involved open and axial coding, and made use of step-by-step varied analytical techniques on the data collected from social workers. The interview transcripts were carefully read and then divided into categories according to the guided questions. The full verbatim transcripts of the interviews provided great accuracy of wording and gesturing to the interviews. This was followed by coding – a step to analyze the categorized interview transcript. All data were named, labeled, and tagged according to their properties. The coding system used in the data analysis process involves two stages: open and axial coding, the details of which are described below.

Open coding

In the current study, the first stage of open coding is the categorization of the mass raw data. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the respondents were required to answer the guided questions from the first question the last. Respondents not only provided answers according to the questions, but also gave more insightful and inspiring answers, which would also be counted. Thus, the raw data had to be organized into conceptual categories according to the interview questions. All these categorized sources were then used for further assessment.

The second stage was to break the data down into categories and sub-categories by highlighting possible themes, ideas, events, names, or concepts that link the interview transcripts and the research questions in the study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990: p. 63), open coding is,

—..taking apart an observation, a sentence, a paragraph, and giving each discrete incident, idea, or event, a name, something that stands for or represents a phenomenon”.

After completing the microanalysis of the data through open coding, I re-organized, regrouped memos and analysis through a systematic procedure: Axial coding.

Axial coding

Axial coding is the second stage to identify relationships between categories and sub-categories. Data are then put back into the new file and elaborated in a new way (Strauss, 2001). New themes emerge after the interview transcripts are categorized into different categories and sub-categories and labeled. Each research question was then further categorized and discussed.

The following is an example for the coding process:

1) The management of private and public boundary was:

A) When Private goes Public: Social Workers' changing perception in the Public Sphere:

- i) Spousal abuse is merely a private matter
 - A private matter
 - Both were family matter and public matter
 - Not a private matter, but public matter
- ii) The feeling as an outsiders
 - Agree with its existence
 - Disagree with such feeling between social workers and clients
 - Partly agree the existence
 - This feeling was changeable through the meeting time
- iii) The difficulties that encountered in the dealing process
 - Social workers' own roles constraints and working nature (e.g. authorities, power, training, workload)
 - The cooperation with other helping professionals
 - Clients' motivation of change (e.g. background, personality & culture)

2) The relationship between social workers and service recipients

A) The perceived relationship

- i) Equal and trustworthy relationship
- ii) Interactive relationship
- iii) Working relationship
- iv) Not a friendship

- v) Partnership
- vi) The relationship is controversial
- vii) Mutual trust relationship and keep everything confidential with respect

B) Social workers' working attitudes toward the clients

- i) Sympathizing their situation and experiencing
- ii) Understand how harsh the process were
- iii) ~~Helping People to Help Themselves~~"
- iv) Empower the clients

C) The importance of social workers in spousal abuse intervention

Important:

- i) Avoid the unpleasant incidents happened
- ii) Monitoring the risky cases
- iii) Observe people's needs all-rounded

Unimportant:

- i) One of the helping professionals

3) The gap between clients' expectation and social workers' performance

A) Service recipients' expectation to social workers and their needs

- i) Transforming
- ii) Victims' expectation
- iii) Abusers' expectation

B) The feeling of helpless from social workers

- i) Victims refused to face the abusive relationship
- ii) Role constrains as a social worker
- iii) Time constraints

The researcher collected the data and grouped, categorized, examined and found the relationship between these categories and sub-categories. In the interviews, respondents were given opportunity to comment and share what they know. It makes the data richer and more informative which can help to make sure that I have interpreted the data on specific topics properly.

CHAPTER 4 THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

4.1 The Boundary between Public and Private Spheres

This chapter presents the first of the three parts of findings in this research. The negotiation of social workers will be presented in Chapter 5 and the clients and the gap between clients' expectation and social workers' performance in Chapter 6.

The boundary between public and private spheres is the main concept examined in this chapter. By studying the intervention strategies used by social workers in handling spousal abuse and their changing perception of the traditional Chinese culture, their method of managing boundaries between themselves and clients is examined. I will also describe the limitations and dilemma they face when private sphere goes public and when a public person like a social worker enters the private domain. The relationship among these findings will be shown and elaborated with support from the respondents' interviews.

4.1.1. Intervention Strategies for Spousal Abuse in Hong Kong

Intervention strategies are important techniques that facilitate the intervention and the effectiveness of case management by social workers. In general, social workers are working with two procedural guidelines from Social Welfare Department (SWD) when handling spousal abuse cases. The two guidelines are:

- 1) *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Battered Spouse Cases (2004) and*
- 2) *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Adult Sexual Violence Cases (revised 2007/ commenced with effect from 26 March 2007)*

However, during the interviews, no respondent mentioned using these guidelines to help them tackle spousal abuse at all. Rather, they reported using their own intervention procedures for handling clients and spousal abuse. Though they are aware of these guidelines, they do not follow them in detail. Thus, it is important to closely examine social workers' own intervention procedures which is more practical than the SWD's, in order to study how social workers manage their boundaries when they handle spousal abuse.

Since there are two procedures mentioned by the respondents, in the following section, the respondents will be separated into two groups, one from IFSC/FSC, and the other is from shelters.

The procedures for handling spousal abuse cases by FSC/ IFSCs

When social workers become aware of a spousal abuse case, they would give clients a call to understand their situation first. If the clients come directly to their centers, then a call becomes unnecessary, and face-to-face talk is carried out instead. In general, victims come often; however, if abusers come along, social workers will talk to them individually in order to know what had happened and what their needs are.

Risk assessment

When cases are received, social workers will first conduct a risk assessment. They will talk to the victims and ask them questions about abusive patterns and conditions, for example, the frequency of hitting or the reasons for resorting to violence. If possible, the social workers would meet the batterers and try to do some counseling work. If the cases involve children, joint-interview is inappropriate since children might be scared by their parents. After ensuring that there are no risks of further abuse between the victims and the abusers, it may be decided that it is unnecessary for social workers to refer the victims to the shelter, but the victims would stay in the centers for further case following. The next step will largely depend

on the case and the clients. A respondent commented on how she handles cases following her own procedure, for instance, in the arranging of joint-interview for their clients,

“...once we meet, we will talk to each other first in order to understand what have happened to them. If they want further action, e.g. repair their relationship, we will arrange some joint-interview for them... you have to evaluate what current situation they are staying...after they reported the case to the police, the abusers might continue to stay at home, the victims might move to the shelter...their children are also frightened...it is unsuitable for us to meet them together. We will get to know them through telephone...it really depends on different cases...” (R2, F, IFSCs)

Social workers have to evaluate the current situation of their clients and make suitable arrangement accordingly. They do not strictly follow what governmental protocols. During interviews, they revealed that when they handle cases concerning new immigrants, they will adjust their working. For instance, new immigrants who they do not have the right of abode or have not lived in Hong Kong for at least seven years cannot apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). Sometimes new immigrants can apply for CSSA due to their poor living conditions as assessed by social workers.

Needs assessment

All respondents indicated that after finishing the risk assessment, social workers would conduct a needs assessment for their clients. Social workers would ask clients what they are looking for next in their relationship, family and living arrangements, and tell them what social workers can do for them. For example,

- i) If the clients have children, social workers will need to assess whether economic support is needed for supporting their life.

- ii) If the couples want to end their relationship, social workers would help them by teaching them how to help themselves, to be confident in their lives and some play safe advices.
- iii) If they want to restore their relationship, marital counseling, emotional support and some safety plans might be needed. According to the respondents, emotional support is needed and important for the service recipients. For example, the batterers might need more sympathy and understanding in their relationship. As for safety plans, the respondents would try to advise the victims to follow a play safe plan, for example, by trying not to violate the fluctuating emotion of the abusers at home, or keeping the mobile phone and keys with themselves all the time in order to prevent the locking of doors by the abusers.
- iv) For victims who wish to return home, the social workers would advise the victims to call the police when necessary. If the victims need a shelter for temporary living, social workers would make referral. If the clients do not want to move into shelters, the respondents would advice them to live with their relatives or friends for temporary protection. Safety precaution during the assessment is the first priority.

The procedure for handling spousal abuse cases by shelters

According to the respondents working in shelters, most cases are received through referral by the police or IFSCs/FSCs. In shelters, there is generally a maximum period of time that the victims can stay; usually one to two weeks. If by then the cases are still considered to be of high risk, the clients will need to apply for extra staying time from the social workers. The social workers would try to guarantee that their clients will get enough and comprehensive social support no matter in the shelter or after leaving the shelter.

Preliminary Risk Assessment

In the shelters, safety is a main concern. Before the clients move in, social workers would give the clients a preliminary risk assessment lasting around 15-30 minutes over the phone. During the phone conversation, some basic information on the abusive pattern will be asked. For example, when was the last abuse? Was it life-threatening? Do the abusers suffer from mental illness? All these information would be used to assess whether the victims are suitable to stay in the shelter. After finishing the telephone preliminary risk assessment, social workers would arrange for victims to move into the shelter as soon as possible.

—we have to conduct a simple telephone assessment...around 15-30 minutes...we will ask their personal information, the abusive record, the frequency...any weapons used...any witness...and ask whether the abusers have some psychological disorders...whether the victims have social support...”(R7, F, Shelter)

Risk Assessment

When the clients have moved in and settled, the social workers would open a case file for them in order to monitor counseling progress and follow-up work. Then they will meet with the clients within 7 to 18 hours and conduct another detailed risk assessment, asking about for example the level of abuse (psychologically, physical or sexual) and the frequency of violence.

Remedy work in the shelter

When the clients move in, social workers would first tackle the remedy work, such as the employment of the victims and the schooling of their children. Social workers in the shelter have to assist victims in planning future life, providing post-trauma counseling, marital counseling or safety advice.

No “proper procedures” in the case intervention

Some respondents from IFSCs expressed that there is no formal procedure when handling the spousal abuse cases. How a case is dealt with is highly dependent on the working practice of social workers, the relationship between social workers and clients, and the motivation of each family.

–I think...we don't have a particular set of procedures...however, we have a guideline to follow when we follow the cases, e.g. the guideline for handling family abuse, child abuse, and elderly abuse...how to work with the police and Social Welfare Department or hospital..." (R5, F, IFSCs)

So, another respondent from the shelter mentioned that they seldom use the word "procedure" in their intervention, but they do what their working organization want them to. What they do for their clients is highly dependent on the working style of the social workers, and could not be standardized.

–We seldom use procedures...if you really want me to tell, then is what the organizations want us to do...it is hard to give a standardized procedures as it is really depends on the handling skills of every social workers." (R6, F, Shelter)

Obviously the respondents viewed the "proper procedure" in handling spousal abuse differently. To conclude, social workers, regardless of whether they are working in IFSCs or shelters, have their own ways of working to handle spousal abuse.

Section summary of the intervention strategies for spousal abuse in Hong Kong

Firstly, it is found that social workers do not follow a formal or rigid procedural guideline tightly. They have their own way of working for their cases according to their working experiences and the interaction with their clients, and only use the guideline when necessary. That means, they are not too rigid in holding their role as a public agent when doing intervention. They would adjust or tune their intervention technique by addressing the needs of the clients in cases they are following.

Secondly, the findings show that there is a gap between the governmental protocols and the reality, where social workers work with the clients. Even though the social work system for handling spousal abuse cases is quite comprehensive and supportive, some of the social

workers do not know that there are procedural guidelines provided by the government. This big gap shows that such procedural guidelines failed to provide “guidance” to the social workers and exist in name only. The social workers only consider what they have to do according to their experience, clients and the organization they are working for.

By assessing social workers’ intervention strategies, it can be concluded that social workers are flexible, adaptive, and spontaneous in handling spousal abuse. Though they are public professionals, they maintain their individual styles and procedures flexibly and handle different cases differently, rather than wholly sticking to their roles as professionals. The boundary for these social workers as individuals who work in the public sphere is not as rigid as previously thought . Rather, the boundary is quite flexible in that social workers can decide what to let in and to keep out, and it is resistant to emotional contagion or manipulation by the fixed governmental procedure. It can be seen that there is room for social workers to shift the defining boundaries of their work towards their own and their clients’ private sphere.

4.2 When Public goes Private: Social Workers in the Public Sphere

When the sufferers of spousal abuse seek help from social workers, I describe this as when “the private sphere goes public”. Social workers, who are the public professional, have to deal with cases using their own strategies. Here, Chinese tradition culture exerts influence on the boundaries of both public and private spheres. Respondents shared how social workers, by managing these traditional ethics and thus changing the boundary of the private sphere, for example, from rigid to flexible or soft to rigid, can make the intervention more successful. The following sub-sections describe how social workers view and respond to three traditional Chinese cultural ethics, which might have an effect on the effectiveness of their boundary management. The three traditional Chinese notions include:

- I) Spousal abuse is merely a private matter
- II) The feeling as an outsider
- III) Family shame should stay behind family doors

How the respondents viewed are shown below with explanation.

4.2.1 Social workers: Spousal abuse is merely a private matter?

When asked about social workers’ views on spousal abuse cases as a private matter in Hong Kong society, the respondents provided different points of view regarding the nature of spousal abuse. Most of them thought that spousal abuse is a private matter. However, once a life-threatening situation to someone in spousal relationship arises, it becomes a crime that would arouse public concern and thus attract intervention. The views of the respondents can be grouped into three types. The first one is that spousal abuse is merely a private matter; the second is that spousal abuse is both a private and a public matter; and the last view is that spousal abuse is not a private matter, but a public one. The following sections will explain their views in more detail.

Firstly, one respondent agreed that spousal abuse is merely a private matter, as the abuse took place in the victim's family. The respondent agreed that when she handles spousal abuse cases occurring in one's family, no one can intervene too much.

— I think when come up to family abuser, it should be a family matter for sure...as a social worker, we cannot intervene so much in it..." (R1, F, CFSC)

Secondly, some respondents thought that spousal abuse is a family matter and most families tend to agree with this statement. However, if violence is involved, the abuse should no longer be considered a family matter solely. Intervention from other professionals, not only social workers, but also the police, should be sought. In their understanding, spousal abuse is both a family and a public matter, and this is largely influenced by culture.

— I think it is definitely a family matter, but, if the cases involve violence, it should not be a family matter anymore...maybe it needs some professional to handle it ...the professional I mean is not only strictly social workers...the police force contributes a lot in the recent years..." (R8, M, IFSCs)

— It is related to the whole society and the cultural matter...if you ask whether it is a family matter or social affairs, both." (R5, F, IFSCs)

Some respondents also emphasized that if the abusive behavior of the couples affects the development of the next generation, involves another family or the whole society, and makes a great impact to someone physically and psychologically, it should be considered a public matter. As suggested by the following respondent, the traditional concepts should be changed.

— For me, when I handled these cases, I quite disagree that spousal abuse is a family matter. To certain extent, spouse disputes, little violence...it would not hurt so much to others, so they do not welcome the intervention of other parties...for us, if the violence bring a great impact to someone psychologically and physically, I

think we need to make changes to their traditional concept...”
(R11, F, SWD)

Spousal disputes with little violence are acceptable to social workers generally. However, once it becomes violent and causes great impact to others, they think that social workers should not just keep their arms crossed without assisting.

The third view is that some social workers think that spousal abuse is not a private matter, but is a public matter. Since spousal conflicts inevitably affect the relationship of their family members, the neighborhood, and the work performance of the spouse:

–Spousal abuse is not a family matter, it is a matter related to our society...it involves more social resources to intervene...it definitely affect the neighborhood relationship, children or the work performance of the spouse...” (R3, F, Shelter)

Some respondents also agreed that it should belong more to the public sphere since the legislation of Domestic Violence Ordinance (DVO) in Hong Kong is a signal that domestic violence is unlawful. Respondent 7 raised an interesting point regarding the DVO as an anti-family abuse ordinance,

–I think it belongs to public affairs more. It is because in a traditional spouse relationship, there must have some conflict. However, these conflicts some will solve it through verbal attack, some will resort to hitting physically...nowadays, and we can refer more to some family violence ordinance which illegalized the spousal abuse in a family.” (R7,F,Shelter)

The views of the respondents are in general quite different from the notion that “spousal abuse is merely a private matter”. From their opinions, it seems there is a trend that social workers are agreeing more that spousal abuse is a public matter though the general public might think otherwise. Social workers, who belong to public sphere, are more aware of the nature of spousal abuse and most of them reject its private nature when the case brings a great

impact to the society. It can be seen that the private nature of spousal abuse is no longer matched to the traditional views in the eyes of social workers.

4.2.2 The feeling as an outsider in dealing with couple's affairs

The second traditional notion is the feeling of being an outsider when dealing with couples' affairs. Due to the concern of family privacy, the general public tends to handle their own matters behind closed doors without inviting intervention from outsiders. If a family's boundary is rigid, the feeling of being an outsider will be strong, which makes it hard for social workers to intervene. Asking social workers for their justification of their point of view on their own feeling as an outsider can facilitate them to handle their roles easier and spousal abuse cases more effectively. The respondents in this study provided quite diversified answers.

Firstly, some respondents thought that not only social workers, but the clients' relatives or friends also have the feeling of being outsiders, and this feeling can exist for any kind of abuse. Respondents think that his kind of feeling is unavoidable and is hard to get rid of no matter how hard they try when handling cases. The respondent below shared that this outsider feeling is inevitable when working with a family:

—..not only social worker, even their relatives, this kind of feeling is inevitable. Even they are willing to voice out and disclose their personal affairs; they are still the sufferer under spousal abuse. No matter how hard we help them to handle the case, counseling, or find a shelter for them, they have to tackle it themselves. The feeling of outsider existed no matter how hard we work to.” (R8, M, IFSCs)

One respondent said that the feeling of outsider is quite strong since they have not established a close relationship with their clients. In the beginning, both parties know nothing about each other, and thus it is normal for the clients to consider social workers as outsiders. However, these feelings will gradually disappear when the clients start to trust that the respondents will offer help to them. However, even though the feeling as an outsider diminishes over time, it consistently exists as social workers could never be one of their family members. Respondent 11 revealed, for example, that even though the feeling as an

outsider can be rid of when clients trust them. Social workers cannot be their family members, which she thought is acceptable since the responsibility of professional social workers is to resolve clients' conflict at home:

–I agree. You will have such feeling at the first beginning...because you have not established a relationship with them (clients) and none of them know you...when you stand out and tell them you are going to help...they will resist you and treat you as an outsider inevitably...However, this kind of feeling disappeared when you know them well gradually. Clients trusted you and knew that you are the one to help them; they will take the feeling of outsider out. To be frankly, it is true that you won't be their family members no matter how trustworthy you are. However, I think it is unnecessary to link us as their family member since we are a professional social worker. We have to build up a mutual trust and professional relationship with distance that can facilitate the work of us that is really enough.” (R11, F, SWD)

Some respondents agreed that they are definitely outsiders, because they could not become the clients' family members suddenly. Respondent 6 thought that their responsibility is to work with the spouses and they are to leave the family when everything has been settled:

–We are the outsider for sure...we cannot be their family member. I think we have to know how to work with the cases before and after...you tell more and we react more, this interactive way can help us to work the cases successfully...after that, you have to leave. So, we are always the outsider in this working relationship.” (R6, F, Shelter)

It can be concluded that the feeling of being an outsider is inevitable, as social workers can never be the clients' family members. They are the professionals who work with the cases and help the clients resolve spousal abuse. It is normal that a person cannot suddenly become a member of the family suddenly when doing case work.

Secondly, some respondents disagreed that the feeling as an outsider exists between them and the clients. It is because when the cases involve “life and death” matters, there could be no separation between insiders and outsiders. Respondent 4 thought that he does not have the concept of insider or outsider when handling cases. Similarly, Respondent 5 suggested that

she would stand together with her clients once she takes up the cases. For these two respondents, no such kind of feeling exists between them and their clients, and once they pick up their duty to tackle spousal abuse cases, they are expected to be the clients' working partner:

–I agree that we are professional social workers, however, not an outsider. When we contact the cases...which might related to life-and-death matter, in fact, there are no any concept about insider or outsider.” (R4, M, IFSCs)

–For me, in my working experience, once you pick up the cases, you have allied with them already...” (R5, F, IFSCs)

Thirdly, several respondents thought that this statement is partially correct. They might have such feelings on some occasions, but not all the time. Respondent Seven thought that what clients want is to seek help and find someone to rescue them from the bad situation. They would not care who are the insiders or outsiders:

–Sometimes, I think it is partially correct. I think they call you or seek help, most of them really hope that there is someone going to rescue them from the worst situation...” (R7, F, Shelter)

I found that the respondents hold a neutral stand to the feeling as an outsider with regard to their own interpretation. Most of them agreed that such kind of feeling exists inevitably at first. As mutual trust builds up in the relationship between social workers and the clients, this feeling will disappear or become diminished. When social workers offer help to the clients, listen to their stories and share their experience together, their relationship builds up. As the feeling of trust becomes stronger, social workers can intervene not as an outsider, but as a companion. The respondents thought that the feeling of outsiders is correlated with the co-working and trustworthy relationship with clients. Being trustworthy is the key factor that motivates the clients to redraw their boundaries with a more open attitude in order to accept assistance from the outsiders. In this sense, the social workers have removed the

barriers imposed by the clients through the essence of trustworthiness, making the intervention more effective.

4.2.3 Family shame should stay behind family doors (一家醜不出外傳”)

In most Asian countries, the deep-rooted belief in family privacy and the concerns of family shame have hindered the individual from disclosing spousal abuse to others and seeking help proactively from helping professionals. This kind of mindset has strengthened clients' determination to draw rigid boundaries which becomes difficult for social workers to enter the private sphere of the clients. However, the domain is not vulnerable, but impossible to be violated by social workers. Thus, if the clients can overcome their self-imposed barriers of shamefulness and seek help proactively, social workers can manage their intervention effectively with soft or spongy boundaries. Several viewpoints can be categorized from the response of the respondents.,

One respondent said that they would not challenge this notion since she agreed with it as well. Respondent 6 explained that she understands her clients' concerns of shamefulness by having to disclose their private matters in front of others. Reasons for such thoughts from the respondents might be due to their general practice of concealing their own matters from others.

—..to this philosophy, I will not challenge them, for me, I do think so. Take an example, if my husband abuse me at home...I really don't know how to say, not to say find someone to help. Sometimes, it is really shameful to be known by others...I have a role, an identity...it does not match to the reality...” (R6, F, Shelter)

The respondents seemed to have the same feeling as their clients, hoping to conceal what they consider to be shameful from others. They would not say this is problematic, however. Rather, they thought it is reasonable. Respondents understood what their clients are concerned

about after disclosing their shameful matters to others. However, as Respondent 9 explained, with her understanding of the situation, the clients should disclose spousal abuse before it worsens. This would also serve as a kind of solution for their relationship and prevent their conflict from being revealed publicly. Apart from understanding, Respondent 6 added that she sympathizes with the clients' situation and is concerned with what they are suffering from.

–Due to my understanding to their situation, we should better encourage them... If they do not want to be known publicly, they have to minimize it and solve it before it becomes serious...it is also a kind of solution, and it can help them too...” (R9, F, CFSC)

–In response to this concept, I really empathize their situation...thus, I will not ask the reasons for having such assertion...I concern more to what they are worrying about...” (R6, F, Shelter)

Disclosing and seeking help proactively are important steps in the prevention of the occurrence of bigger problems. In general, the respondents understand this traditional notion well. They know every family has its own stories to tell. Thus, they will not challenge their clients for having such feelings. Rather, they understand and sympathize with their situation. One respondent raised the point that society is changing and people nowadays are more willing to share their family matters with others. From Respondent 8's informal observation, there is a difference between the older age group with the younger generation, with the former harder to disclose their abusive relationship, and the latter, for example, couples in their thirties, being more willing to disclose their abusive experience to others.

–I think the society is changing. However, whether the public want to disclose their ashamed family matters to others...for sure, they do not want it to be known by others...from my own working experience, most of the women or the man, they are more willing to disclose by sharing how they abuse their partner, or the reasons for resorting to violence...I think the older generation is harder to disclose, the couples from thirty to forty are more willing to tell us...” (R8, M, IFSCs)

The respondents considered this philosophy a result of shaping by traditional Chinese culture. Apart from this, they also noted that the clients are quite concerned about their social status and identity in their own social circles. Some of the clients are also worried that if their “shame” is revealed, others might look down on their children and themselves.

“Except worrying others how to view them, they are also afraid of others looking down on their children because of their abusive relationship with their partner...” (R10, F, CFSC)

In order to reduce clients’ worries, the respondents would try to persuade and encourage their clients to disclose their family problems and seek assistance from helping professionals. Respondents would also show their reliability in handling the cases and try to minimize the clients’ feeling of victimization to their own situation. They also support their clients by encouraging them to think positively and never to use violence as the final resort to solve their problems.

“I think we have to show how different we are when comparing to their friends...” (R10,F,CFSC)

“...some of them will think that there is a big matter in their life and afraid to tell to others...we have to let them know, spousal abuse is not serious as they think of and sure, quite normal. The aim for us is to make them relieve to what they are suffering.” (R9, F, CFSC)

As explained by the respondents, clients tend to victimize their unfortunate abusive experiences and refuse to reveal what has happened to them. Normalizing their misfortunes is one of the ways to relieve their worries.

Section summary of social workers' views and respond to three traditional Chinese cultural ethics

Most of the respondents understand the importance of privacy in the family. They respect their clients' need for maintaining a certain level of privacy for their comfort and convenience. To the respondents, every one of their clients must have something they want to conceal or disclose, and spousal abuse is no exception. Clients consider spousal abuse as a shameful matter and refrain from any disclosure to others. What the service recipients refuse to disclose or try to conceal is not a major concern for social workers. The most important thing for them is to discover what shameful matters they are concealing, and try to break the boundary guarding their private domains without disrespecting the clients' privacy. They also work on lessening clients' worries about the disclosure, brightening their future with choices and showing them reliability when handling their cases. All these are the intervention strategies that social workers adopt to reduce the barriers imposed by clients in order to soften their rigid boundaries. Again, the softer the boundary that demarcates the clients' private sphere, the easier it is for social workers to intervene spousal abuse cases.

4.3 Social Workers: Limitations and Dilemma

Social workers face a lot of difficulties in their intervention process, which also affects the management of boundaries between the public and private sphere. Social workers face two main difficulties when dealing spousal abuse cases. One is their role constraints and work nature, and the other is the difficulties on the side of clients. This is mostly in the form of hindrance in shifting the boundaries that demarcates the public and private spheres, which also makes the intervention from social workers less effective.

Social workers' role constraints and work nature from the views of respondents

1. Heavy workload and limited time

There is a lot of news or statistics showing how heavy the workload of social workers is. There are reports of a social worker having to work with sixty to eighty cases (The Women's Commission Reports, 2006). All respondents mentioned that they indeed have a heavy workload, which might be a hindrance on their working enthusiasm and devotion to their clients. Most of the respondents complained that they are responsible for plenty of administrative work and report writings, taking up a lot of time that could be used to meet their clients per day.

–What we are talking about is time, as we have to handle a lot of stuff, e.g. several cases have to be handled per day. When you intervene, you should take shift to look after them...you will finally realize that no more time is left...and what we handle are the high risk cases, when every one of them wants to commit suicide...what can we do with the limited time...?” (R2, F, IFSCs)

Social workers have to handle different tasks at the same time rather than solely concentrating on their work with clients. The limited meeting time with their clients has brought about frustration and a sense of guilt among social workers.

2. Lack of professional trainings

Another complaint that the respondents shared is the lack of depth of professional social work training in college. What they were taught are quite superficial and not really helpful when handling cases.

—we were taught when we were in the college, however, it was quite superficial , and you did not have a clear concept...we need to rely on what our supervisor taught us in the center, they provided more guidance...however, we have to search ourselves if the cases are related to some political policies or resources allocation...” ”
(R4, M, IFSCs)

Professional training is very important to social workers as they are one of the public professionals to help the needy. As revealed by Respondent 4, their skills in intervention was taught by their supervisors and gradually accumulated through working experience, and is quite insufficient for effective intervention management.

3. Non-standardized assessment of the severity

As mentioned in previous chapters, there are several bodies responsible for handling domestic violence in Hong Kong, such as the Family and Child Protective Services Unit (FCPSU) and the Integrated Family Center of Services (IFSCs). According to the respondents from IFSCs, sometimes they have different standards when determining the level of seriousness of the spousal abuse cases. Social workers might not know how to refer their clients to the proper organizations in order to help their clients in need:

—..sometime, it is hard for both the colleagues in FCPSU and IFSC to classify the nature of spousal abuse...or some colleagues even did not know how to refer the cases to FCPSU, maybe they were new and lack of experience...the division of labour is clear and organized, in fact, it cannot be virtualized in the reality...” (R4, M, IFSCs)

4. No authority

According to the respondents, unlike the police, they do not have the authority to arrest the abusers or force the victims to leave dangerous places, for example, their home, nor can they mandate the victims to live in the temporary shelters for more protection and counseling. In addition, most of the clients are adults who have the right to make their own decisions. Thus, social workers could do little apart from providing play safe advice. Even at the shelter, social workers are unable to restrict the clients from leaving. Respondent 8 even reported that some clients living in their shelters just leave a message and left the place.

—We can only give them advices, no any authority at all: if we told them to leave their home, at last, they decide to stay and tell us that they love their husband so much and must return home...we can do nothing...we do not have any authority to arrest the abusers, like the police force. —(R1, F, CFSC)

—Some clients who were living in our shelter, however, if the wanted to leave our shelter and went out, before they left, they just leave you a message. What you can do is just leave them a message asking them to beware of their safety at home. — (R8, M, IFSCs)

5. Roles of social workers are over-exaggerated

Some respondents said their roles are often exaggerated by the general public, who do not understand their profession. From what they indicated, some of their clients would expect them to change their partners' living styles and temper or change the life of their family members. Furthermore, they are also portrayed as useless and unhelpful professionals who maltreat their clients or the troublemaker. They and their roles are easily misunderstood by the

public and it is easy for them to attract blame from others and hard to get approval from society.

–The roles of social worker is to assist you to change, not making you change...having the police force doesn't mean that there is no theft in the society...it is unfair to just spot the dark side of some group of social workers in our society and exaggerate their faults ...I know there might be some minor group of people who wants to make troubles, or non-sense, however, it is not all of us.”
(R1, F, CFSC)

6. The immature division of labour of social workers in Hong Kong

Some respondents mentioned that division of labour of social workers in Hong Kong is different from that of western countries, which is much more mature and has a clear division of labour in their service system. The Hong Kong version of division of labour merges and is non-specific about the work of social workers, and as a result, hindering the effectiveness of case handling. Respondent 4 shared the difference between the division of labour in the United States and in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, social workers have to handle all the cases and provide assistance, whether tangible or intangible, to the clients. These include, for example, financial assistance and marital counseling. In the US, social workers are only responsible for providing counseling, such as marital counseling, leaving them with more time to meet their clients and they therefore could concentrate more on case intervention:

–Social work in Hong Kong and US is quite different. It would be more mature than Hong Kong. They have a clear division of labour, who will be the one to allocate money, who will responsible to the counseling, martial counseling...In Hong Kong, social workers have to handle all the stuff...and since counseling is quite a slow process in relieving the emotion of the clients, they look down on it, maybe, I guess, it doesn't match the speed pace of living mode in Hong Kong.” (R4, M, IFSCs)

Social workers in Hong Kong have to handle all the stuff related to their clients, and this may sometimes hinder their effectiveness in resolving the conflicts of spousal abuse.

7. Cooperation with others disciplines

Social workers are one of the helping professionals in the society. Apart from dealing with their clients, they also have to cooperate with other professional disciplines in different working fields. During the intervention, social workers may have to seek assistance from other parties when necessary due to their clients' needs. Some respondents mentioned that they have to compromise with professionals working in different service fields since all disciplines have their own working modules and procedures they have to follow. The cooperation with different disciplines is thus one of the difficulties that social workers have to face.

Clients' problems that hindered the intervention of social workers (from the views of respondents)

From what the respondents shared, the clients are not always cooperative even when facing life and death situations. Clients' incooperation and reluctance to seek help from the helping professionals is a kind of boundary closed to others' intervention no matter how much others want to help them. The rigid boundary that the clients are upholding is affecting the management of boundary by social workers. The following are the clients' reluctances to seek help from the view of the respondents:

1. Motivation to seek help

The motivation to seek help from the clients is one of the problems that social workers are facing. If the clients suffering from spousal abuse do not have the intention to seek help from social workers, no one could help them on time. As Respondent 1 mentioned, she could do nothing if the victims or the abuser lose the motivation to seek help from someone who might

be able to help them. Respondent Two indicated that if the clients approach them actively, it would be easier for social workers to provide sustained assistance and resources to the clients.

—As a social worker, what we can do is less than what we expected. The reasons are, the clients need to seek help from us, or maybe there are someone helping them to seek help...so that we can work and help them ...the action to seek help gives us a chance to get in touch with them...however, whether we can help them successfully, it is not what we can control...” (R1, F, CFSC)

—If they seek help actively, that means the push power for us to help them is stronger, then we can handle their cases, or provide them with resources and service easily.” (R2, F, IFSCs)

The motivation for seeking help is very important to the social workers in detecting the potential risky spousal abuse cases.

2. Clients' attitude in disclosing their privacy

Some respondents said that most of their clients tend to conceal their private information from others, and this has hindered the intervention of social workers. They have plenty of concerns and worries about their relationship or the consequences after disclosing their family shame. Sometimes, the clients would only talk selectively. Respondent 9 shared that sometimes her clients do not want to reveal too much about their personal affairs and think that it is unnecessary to tell her all their privacy.

—some service recipients do not want you know too much about their affairs...they will tell something they think that you should know, and conceal something from social workers...they may think that it is unnecessary to tell you all...”(R9, F, CFSC)

Some clients also tell the respondents that they wish to seek help from them, but they have no desire to leave their home or resort to law enforcement on the abusers. Respondent 11 told the story of her female client, who trusted her but, at the same time, was caught in a dilemma, since her client still wanted to tolerate the actions of her abusers.

-She would tell you that: miss, I told you because I trust you, however, I would not leave him...under this dilemma, even though I wanted to help them, it does not work..." (R11, F, SWD)

3. The concerns of the clients

The respondents said that the clients are worried that their family shame would be revealed publicly, and it might harm their reputation and affect their social status. The victims are also worried that the courts would hand down severe penalties to their partners, or even sending them to jail, something that they do not want to happen. The clients are also worried that their disclosure might threaten the future prosperity of the abusers, who are working in professional positions. Another concern of the clients is the effect of their abusive relationship on the psychological development of their children.

—...he might not welcome our intervention...or they only tell something minor to you as they do not wish to make their “shame” publicly known to others...they are worried that it will affect their reputation, social status, even their future prosperities...some legal sanction.” (R10, F, CFSC)

Traditional Chinese culture says that leaving is harder than staying. To leave their partners or end their relationship with a divorce is not an acceptable solution to some clients. Some of the victims also have false hopes that the abusers might change their abusive attitude in the future if they continue to tolerate.

4. The ignorance of the clients

Some respondents found that most of the clients, especially the victims, do not regard such an abusive relationship as a problem, but tend to think of it as just a minor family dispute that every couple faces. They believe that they could solve it through their own resources. Both victims and abusers also tend to think that the intervention of social workers is inappropriate and useless.

According to one respondent, some clients explained to them during the intervention that they think: “violence is equal to power” and “violence is the best way to solve family problems”. Most of the abusers, especially men, also agree to these concepts, meaning that in

their understanding, hitting, slapping, scolding or any kind of abuse are useful in helping them uphold their dominate role and status in the family. These concepts are deeply rooted in the abusers' minds, and they resort to using violence to make their wife obey to them, and most of them have got used to abusing their wife for grapping more power in their family and maintaining their dominated role.

–Some of the abusers might, especially the male abusers, think that their wives will not listen to them if they do not abuse them. So, they will use this concept to solve family problems...” (R9, F, CFSC)

Since most of the abusers are male dominator, they have a concept that their wives (victims) are a part of their property, so they could abuse them whenever they want to and it is none of others' business.

5. The background of the clients

The background of the clients is one of the difficulties that hinder the intervention of social workers. The respondents said they noticed that the clients' *education background* these families are the difficulties that they might encounter during their intervention. Respondent 8 mentioned that clients who have higher education level are more likely to seek help from the helping professionals. The reasons behind may be because people with higher education level tend to have a better job, which allows them to find another place to live more easily than those with lower education level. Clients with lower education level mostly rely on the abusers (usually husband) financially and do not have a job to support their living. They have few choices and cannot simply move out without any concerns.

–I think that ...ones with higher education level, comparatively, they have a more stable job; they can move out and rent a house, they can have more choices...but, the lower education level ones, or some families that are receiving CSSA (Comprehensive Social Security Assistance), they do not have so much choices...it is hard

for them to move out, they will rely more on their husband...” (R8, M, IFSCs)

Clients' personality is also a point considered by most of the respondents. If the clients are stubborn and introvert, it would be hard for them to share their abusive experience to social workers openly. Clients with a strong personality like to have more support from their friends or relatives, and from the opinion of the respondents, they are more willing to tell.

—We have to see whether the abusers are willing to share ...if they close the door and disclose nothing to us, and think that we are the third party who unnecessary to bother their own affairs...we can not work with them...” (R3, F, Shelter)

According to the response of social workers, there are some thoughts *different between* the clients in Hong Kong and mainland China. Those from mainland China thought that hitting or fighting is nothing special and is normal in a family, as it happens all the time in mainland and is not against the law. This is totally different from Hong Kong, where there are laws to punish the abusers.

6. Difference in expectation between social workers and the clients

The discrepancy of expectation between clients and social workers is a hindrance to the intervention as well. Most of the clients might expect that their family matters would not be revealed publicly to others since they just want the social workers to solve problem for them. On the other hand, social workers expect that they will handle the cases on a long-term basis and hope that other public professionals can help their clients effectively. This is why social workers would cooperate with other professionals, which unfortunately, might mislead the clients into believing that the social workers are trying to draw public attention to their family shame. Respondent Nine mentioned that

—some clients, their aims to be helped might totally different from us...they do not want their family matter disclose publicly...they expected social workers to solve the problems they are facing, but not digging more information or secret out from the deeper mind...they do not expect this result...” (R9, F, CFSC)

Summary of social workers' limitations

To sum up, social workers face a lot of limitations when handling spousal abuse cases, hindering the effectiveness of their intervention. Respondents mentioned clients' motivation to change, their attitudes towards seeking help, acknowledgement to spousal abuse, their family background, educational level, personality and social network as variables that could affect the effectiveness of the intervention of social workers. Since social workers do not have the authority to protect the sufferers under spousal abuse by arresting abusers or forcing the victims to seek help, they could do nothing but wait for a change of mind from their clients to seek help actively. Furthermore, social workers are also facing time limitations caused by their heavy workload. Clearly, social workers face a lot of limitations in their roles, functions, and abilities, and it is impractical to expect that they could do everything and fulfill all the

needs of their service recipients. In Hong Kong, people often have false or exaggerated expectation to the roles of social workers, which would result in complaints once they think the social workers fail to fulfill their needs.

We can see that according to the interviewees, the difficulties are mostly stemming the clients. All these difficulties are the pull factors for the clients to hold their private sphere tightly and refuse to be helped from the public professionals. Social workers are also occupied by their heavy workload and unbalanced working hours, thus, the boundary of private and public was rigidly maintained which might affect the effectiveness of social workers intervention.

Summary of the whole chapter

In this chapter, boundaries between public and private spheres were effectively utilized to analyze the relation between social workers and clients in spousal abuse. Findings suggest that the boundaries are not only shaped by effective intervention strategies from the social workers, the changing perception of traditional culture and the limitation of social workers to handle spousal abuse cases, but also by their interaction with the clients. All these factors facilitate the change of boundaries and affect how social workers manage their clients in spousal abuse as a public professional. Though social workers have a set of spousal abuse handling procedural guidelines to follow, they have their own working style and intervention techniques they learned from experience to tackle spousal abuse cases. This is evidence that social workers are more flexible, adaptive and spontaneous in handling spousal abuse and are not stuck to their professional roles rigidly. In short, social workers manage the boundaries between them and the clients with flexibility.

Apart from social workers' flexible intervention strategies, how clients perceive traditional culture is also likely to make a difference in boundaries drawing, since the old traditional culture affects how clients draw their boundaries in their own sphere. As explained by the respondents, clients strongly affected by traditional culture are more likely to draw rigid boundaries than those who are less affected. Thus, the latter are more willing to seek help than the former. Social workers tend to change their attitude towards these traditional cultures and manage it properly by not giving hard feelings to their clients when they enter their private sphere. Most respondents agree that spousal abuse is not merely a private matter, but are public affairs that need our attention and social workers' intervention. The respondents pointed out that the feeling of being an outsider is inevitable. However, this feeling would diminish after the establishment of a working relationship with mutual trust. The respondents also expressed that they understand the concerns of their clients when disclosing their family

shame” to others, as evidenced by their respect for the clients’ worries about the situation. However, concealing is not the best way to end the conflict. The respondents suggested that they have to break clients’ rigid boundaries by respecting their privacy and lessening their worries after disclosure.

The private sphere goes public when social workers start to take up the cases and during the intervention, but they often encounter a lot of limitations. These limitations are the stumbling stone for the social workers, and they could only enter the private sphere of the clients by offering effective intervention strategies. The boundaries between public and private spheres are clearly drawn due to different factors mentioned above. In this chapter, evidence is provided that support the assumption of social workers and clients as the main actors drawing the boundaries when managing spousal abuse cases in Hong Kong.

CHAPTER 5 THE NEGOTIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS AND CLIENTS IN SPOUSAL ABUSE INTERVENTION

This chapter presents the second part of the findings with a discussion of how social workers negotiate with their clients by assessing their relationship with clients, their attitude towards the clients and their self-perceived importance in spousal abuse intervention. Negotiation is important for the social workers to manage their roles and functions effectively, and can strengthen the effectiveness of boundary management between public and private spheres.

5.1. The relationship between social workers and clients

The objective in this part is to find out what relationship is maintained between social workers and their clients in spousal abuse intervention. In the interviews, respondents described their general practice in maintaining their relationships with their clients. In addition, the nature of their relationships is seen as a key factor affecting the boundary between the public and private spheres that represent the social worker's role and the clients' circumstances respectively. In general, the respondents thought that they have a supporting, interactive, working partnership with their clients, but not a friendship relationship. The respondents discussed the kind of relationship they are maintaining and what they expect to have in their relationship with their clients.

Working relationship

Most of the respondents said that their relationship with clients is a working relationship, aiming to provide a sense of security to the clients while trying not to give them the impression that they could over-rely on the social workers for never-ending support. Some

respondents said that they prefer to maintain a working relationship with an appropriate distance from their clients. According to their experience, some of their colleagues have a “wrong concept” that they were “heroes” who are there to help their clients forever. Both of the following respondents strongly emphasized that they are professional social workers no matter under what conditions:

“We called it a working relationship...first, the first aim of this relationship is safety...second, never let them depend on you for everything. Since sometimes, social workers might be caught in a role like “hero”. They want to help those in need; however, it might make the clients rely on you heavily. In fact, you can let them rely on you more if it is under the extreme condition of crisis.” (R5, F, IFSCs)

“No matter the abusers or the victims, we have to remember that we are a professional social worker. To know their family is to provide appropriate service to them.” (R11, F, SWD)

Respondents mentioned that social workers cannot give their clients a wrong perception that they can rely on them heavily in any circumstances. For them, whether they are dealing with abusers or victims, they have to maintain a professional role as social workers.

Supporting relationship

A supporting relationship provides the clients with information and offers social resources and services. Respondent stated that their relationship with the clients is not one between employers and employees, but one of supporting nature, as illustrated by the quote below:

“I think it is not a relationship of employers and employees, a supporter who can provide some resources or information to them in order to let them know there are some resources can offer to them, we are just like an agent.” (R2, F, IFSCs)

Most of the respondents expressed understanding in their clients' bitterness when doing counseling work. What they can do at that moment is to refer any possible service to their clients. Thus, the clients will be more willing to talk to them and establish a good relationship.

Partnership

Some respondents thought that their relationship with their clients is like a partnership. Respondents explained such relationship as two parties who would not interrupt too much in each other's life and privacy, but work together with respect. The relationship is quite passive to the respondents, since once the clients decided that they do not want any more help, the respondents can do nothing more to assist them. As Respondent Eight explained,

I think it is a partnership. If they don't want you to help them, then you can do nothing; if they want you to help, then you can... it is a relationship between partners. Since your partner will never force you to handle something they dislike...you have to cooperate with them." (R8, M, IFSCs)

Such kind of partnership is quite passive in that social workers controlled by their clients' desire to be helped. Both of them are inter-dependent and none of them can interfere with another's life without permission.

Not friendship

A point that is quite consistently agreed and emphasized by all the respondents is that social workers could not develop a friendship with their clients though the clients might easily fall into such confusion. There are three reasons for keeping a distance. Distance from friendship as explained by the respondents.

Firstly, the respondents said that they could not follow a case for a long period of time since a file will be closed after everything has been settled. There might be a dilemma that when social workers close a file, their clients' emotion might be affected, as it might be hard

for the clients to accept the fact that they could no longer be friends with their perceived “friends” anymore. Secondly, the respondents thought that they would have a hard time adjusting if their relationship were changed from a case worker relationship to friendship. Thirdly, some of the respondents worried that they might be caught in a dilemma if their clients ask them to disclose their own personal information, like mobile phone number, or if the clients ask to have dinner with them. It would be hard for the social workers if their “friends” want to establish a closer relationship with them.

Social workers are expected to provide assistance and resources to the needy. If they are confused about their relationships with their clients, it would really hinder the effectiveness of case intervention. For example, it will be hard for them to turn their clients down even though they are unqualified to receive assistance.

“...some clients or citizens would say: ‘social workers are our friends’. However, we should make it clear to them that we are not their friends” (R6, F, Shelter)

“...to be frank, as a social worker, we will leave them some day, however, friends never act like what we do. If they treat you as a friend in the intake, it would be a big trouble for us...when you close the cases, or shift to other organizations, they will have a great change in their emotion or get frustrated...it is sad...” (R4, M, IFSCs)

“To be a friend is not easy, e.g. if they ask your personal mobile number...or date you for dinner or hang out. Can you give them your mobile number? Or can you take them home when they are abused?” (R4, M, IFSCs)

Some clients will easily have a perception that they can be friends with their case workers gradually. However, social workers cannot act like a friend, for example, have dinner together or meet with their clients at home. The respondents said they should tell their clients that they would leave them when the file is closed, even though some clients would find it hard to accept when social workers end their helper-client relationship at the end of their cases.

Respondents also shared through their working experiences and their perception of a relationship what they thought are necessary in their relationship with their clients.

An equal and trustworthy relationship

The respondents thought that they have to maintain an equal and trustworthy relationship with their clients. This is because some clients think that social workers are just there to help them. But in fact, social workers are not merely helping them in a unilateral manner, but they also provide guidance for them and work together with them to solve their problems. This means that the relationship is more like a partnership than simply a relationship between a service provider and a recipient. What respondents wanted is to be able to assist the clients to “grow” and develop, as illustrated by this quote below:

“Sometimes, we worry that they might have confusion that social worker is the one going to help them only...in fact, it is not totally true. What we doing is to guide them and help them grow up...” (R3, F, Shelter)

Apart from an equal and trustworthy relationship, some of them also suggested the importance of an understanding, neutral and cooperative relationship when working with the cases.

Understanding, neutral and cooperative relationship

Some respondents said they would maintain an understanding, neutral and cooperative attitude in their relationship with their clients. They noted that they cannot take side with either the abusers or the victims, as they are supposed to be their companions in assisting them to tackle their family problems.

—understand them, we should maintain a neutral and cooperative attitude to them...the working process is very important.” (R5, F, IFSCs)

—think it is more like a companion relationship. At the beginning, we will state clear that we will not take side with any of them...” (R9, F, CFSC)

To sum up, the respondents mostly adopt a working relationship with their clients and prefer to use a neutral, equal and trustworthy attitude when dealing with spousal abuse cases. Other relationship orientations, like friendship, are considered inappropriate. To the respondents, it is very important to keep a good relationship with the clients since a good relationship could facilitate the effectiveness of case intervention. The following quotes reveal how the respondents cooperate with clients is largely dependent on how much the clients trust the social worker and whether they are willing to reveal their own affairs to the social worker

—The maintaining of good relationship can help us to solve problems, it is very important...” (R6, F, Shelter)

—it should depend on how much trust they have in you...if they cannot tell you all their stuff due to their personal reasons...we cannot control, thus, we can only do what we can...”(R9, F, CFSC)

Furthermore, all respondents have a clear concept on what relationship they have to maintain in order to facilitate their management of cases effectively. They also know what their positions are with their clients and how to balance clients' misunderstanding with their roles in spousal abuse intervention. This is a manifestation of the strength of the respondents in affirming their roles as social workers and in their self-identity as public professionals who frame the boundaries between public and private spheres. The above findings suggest that social workers stand firm in their obligation and responsibilities in their own public sphere. In addition, the clear and well-established trustworthy and neutral working relationship can

soften the rigid boundaries of the private sphere and bridge the boundaries between public and private.

5.2. Social workers' attitudes toward the clients

The attitude the social workers hold towards their clients and their job are important factors affecting how they evaluate their work practices. The respondents mentioned that they have different attitudes towards their job and their clients.

Some respondents expressed sympathy towards the clients' current situations and they understand how harsh their clients' lives are. They thought that handling spousal abuse cases is like personally experiencing their clients' life stories one by one. Due to this empathetic attitude, these respondents agreed that social workers are able to empower the victims and let their self-confidence and problem solving capacity grow so that they can overcome their challenges. As illustrated by Respondent Two,

—In fact, we understand them...we know they are sad and painful in the process...once they find that there is support for them, they are more willing to tell...it makes our efforts worked better...” (R2, F, IFSCs)

Understanding the pains of their clients is important for social workers to handle cases effectively, as the clients will be more willing to tell what have happened to them. The respondents pointed out that they understand that all parties, including the abusers, have their own stories. So, it is very important for the social workers to find out the causes for the violence, as explained by Respondent Nine below,

—Actually, they all live a painful life, even for the abusers, the reasons to hit their partners should be well known...they will not feel comfortable or happy after they abused their husband or wives. They will live with misery...they are the victims as well...both of

them are...that's why we have to focus more on their causes and reasons behind..." (R9, F, CFSC)

The respondents pointed out that everyone has their own misery, and some people might resort to using violence to make themselves feel better emotionally. Abusers may not be as bad as we thought, and they might share the same bitterness as the victims in a spousal relationship. Thus, understanding the reasons for using violence is important for solving their problems. Some respondents also said that there is a lot of discrimination targeted at new immigrants from the general public. However, as social workers, they would not discriminate new immigrants by categorizing their clients into new immigrants and permanent residents:

—think Hong Kong people may discriminate against the new immigrants from mainland China. They think that these new immigrant come to Hong Kong and have spousal abuse at once...then request for money or housing...it is not difficult that there is such a discrimination against them...when you work for more years, you will understand them more and know where their difficulties come from...you will have varied point of views on them..."(R3, F, Shelter)

—They are normal people as we meet. There is no specific framework to classify who they are or where they come from, e.g. new immigrants...just use a general perspective to view them..." (R8, M, IFSCs)

Service providers have to distinct public and private by their professional knowledge while following their own practice and code of ethics. Some respondents said that they not only help the service recipients in solving their problems, but also try to understand the relationship between abusers and victims, such as their marital relationship and their communication skills, and factors that might have caused the abuse. Spousal abuse is not treated as a one-off case, and respondents said that they would try to evaluate the underlying causes and to unravel the complicated emotion in the relationship:

—think we will try to help them and it is a meaningful job. I can learn a

lot from this job which is a valuable experience that most people never knew. Although it is not my own experience to be battered, for me, it is a kind of learning.” (R6, F, Shelter)

–Social workers should help others and help themselves. We want the clients to be able to solve their problems themselves...empowerment. If the role of us is too dominant, help them to complete their stuff...it is unhealthy...when you leave them, they will probably fail to handle their own problems.” (R7, F, Shelter)

Due to social workers’ professional roles, they need to maintain the attitude “helping people to help themselves” and to empower clients so that they can handle their own affairs. In short, the respondents believe that social workers need to control their dominant role as a strong helper for their clients. If social workers help their clients by finishing all their tasks for them, it would discourage or even hinder clients from handling their affairs by themselves.

Social workers’ intervention to spousal abuse cases is not necessarily needed since every family has its own ways to tackle their own problems. However, what social workers could do is to share case management experiences and up-to-date knowledge relevant to the clients’ family affairs with them:

–I think the intervention of social workers is not necessarily needed. Each family has their own system to tackle their own problems...social worker is not essentially needed for them...moreover, maybe the working experience and theories we used can facilitate them to link up more new ideas or understanding.(R4, M, IFSC)

Social workers also have their own points of view on their intervention to a family. Some of them might hold a perception that spousal abuse may be settled through the own efforts of the two sides involved. However, social workers are the facilitators and mediators that provide clients with related experience and theories.

In this part, the attitude social workers are holding towards their clients in spousal abuse intervention is shown. According to the findings, most of the respondents thought that they

have to treat their clients well by understanding their pains, difficulties and reasons for violence in their relationship, regardless of them being the victims or the abusers. They thought that handling spousal abuse cases is like experiencing the life stories of the clients one by one. Due to this empathetic attitude, the respondents agreed on the importance of empowering clients and letting them grow up, so that they can overcome their challenges, which is the aim of intervention. According to what they revealed, the attitude of social workers is quite humane and they act according to the needs of their clients, and not only sticking mechanically to the codes or guidelines provided by the official agencies. The boundaries in public sphere are drawn and accomplished by the social workers' humane and "helping people to help themselves" attitudes towards their clients. The work of the social workers has made the boundary more fluid, which facilitates the crossing of boundary from the public to private sphere.

How social workers manage their own emotion when they encounter a brutal case of violence and how can they not be affected by the negative experiences?

Though social workers try to maintain a sympathetic and empathic attitude towards their clients, they also have to keep a rational attitude when offering help to the clients at the same time. A question is therefore how social workers manage their own emotions when they encounter say a brutal case of violence? And how can they not be affected by the negative experience and sometimes very tragic experience of their clients?

In response to this, respondents said that they need to be sympathetic and empathic towards their clients'. They know what roles they have to maintain and what their responsibilities are. Respondents also expressed that they felt sorry and sad for both the victims and the abusers. Thus they will try to understand their stories and hope that they can

offer effective assistances to them. Social workers are not that tough and unmoved by their clients' plights. They have to manage their emotions by upholding their professionalism and offer help rationally by not only empowering clients, but by helping them to grow, and with confidants and problem solving capacities. It is evident that having to manage their own emotions by pretending not be affected by the tragic experience from their clients is not an easy task.

5.3 The self-imposed importance of social workers in spousal abuse intervention

In recent years, social workers are explicitly viewed by the general public as holding the important role of helping professionals in Hong Kong. Although the importance of their roles is always affirmed by others, less attention devoted to understanding how social workers perceive their own importance in spousal abuse intervention. Their self-identity when carrying out their roles in public sphere might affect how they draw their boundaries between them and clients, and more importantly, legitimize their entering to private sphere. In the following, the respondents describe their perception of their own importance.

Some respondents said that social workers play an important role in facilitating the management of spousal abuses intervention. From their point of view, firstly, they thought that they could prevent some unpleasant incidents from happening by monitoring the risky cases intensively. However, it is impossible for them to follow the cases 24 hours a day or detect all the potential risky cases. All they can do is “try their best”, as illustrated by the following quote,

—..sometimes, we can prevent something from happening...frankly, we cannot, let's say, follow them for 24 hours a day with their family...it is no doubt that we will follow the risky cases closely...we can only try. (R2, F, IFSCs)

Secondly, they thought that social workers could make an all-rounded observation of clients' needs, but it is impractical to think that social workers could solve all of their problems. Clients have myriads of needs and wants, and social workers are not the only professional that could help solve their problems.

Thirdly, the respondents said that they could give advice to the clients on, for example, how to protect themselves, or how to maintain a good marital relationship. They could also

provide marital counseling to clients and try to help stop the cycle of violence in spousal abuse families, as one of respondents explained,

“I think social worker can evaluate a person’s needs as a whole. Social worker does not mean they are an agent who can solve all the problems. People have plenty of needs; one unit like social worker cannot solve it all...” (R9, F, CFSC)

Respondent Nine emphasized that although social workers are able to evaluate the clients’ needs, they face limitations when trying to fulfill these needs. One respondent thought that they are not so important since they are only one of the many units of helping professions responsible for handling spousal abuse. Their service is not as encompassing as perceived by others. Rather, they practiced what they normally practice as social workers. Even so, they are still the essential professional agent in the intervention process. As the following respondent shared,

“I think we are not as important as others think of...I think we are just one of the helping professionals only, thus, I will not treat myself as very important in handling cases. I do not think that there are any changes in our functions or impact to the society...we do what we generally do...however, we are someone who are essentially needed in handling spousal abuse.” (R11, F, SWD)

Respondent Eleven is the only one who downplayed her importance in handling spousal abuse case as a social worker. She thought that support from different professionals and disciplines are as important for handling spousal abuse cases.

Reasons for explaining their self-perceived importance by the respondents

The respondents gave several reasons to explain their perception of their importance. The first reason is their role and responsibilities as a helping professional. As Respondent Ten explained,

–The role of social workers ...you have certain abilities and roles as helping a professional, the system (family) works due to the intervention of social workers.” (R10, F, CFSC)

The working of family, as explained by the respondent, is largely due to the intervention of social workers in spousal abuse cases. Secondly, public education and mass media have had the public well-educated about seeking help from social workers and the Social Welfare Department, even though this might lead to the society over-emphasizing the importance of social workers in their social function and having a high expectation on them to influence the clients' family.

Thirdly, they thought that their importance is socially constructed. Social workers are people who bear others' problems and fulfill their needs. Thus, cultural values play a role in influencing people's decision to solicit the aid of a social worker in times of need. The general public has a concept that social workers are important as they can bear all the family problems in the society due to their division of labour and role function. Fifthly, social workers also thought that the emphasis on accountability in Hong Kong has enhanced the tendency of the public to find a scapegoat to bear all the faults. Social workers are a group of significant helping professionals in some, but not all, social problems, but the public tends to easily blame social workers for things that happen out of their expectation. Several respondents also complained about this, saying it is unethical to blame or shift the responsibility to others, for example, the social workers. They suggested that the proper solution is not blaming someone, but figuring out the triggers and solving them. The effect of public education and mass media on the self-perceived importance of social workers, and how the mass media portrayed social workers in front of the public are discussed by two respondents,

–I agree that public education is the most important part. Some educational advertisements made by the Social Welfare Department

stressed a public understanding to spousal abuse, e.g. the slogan like: is it worth if the fight is won but the family is lost? ” (R8, M, IFSCs)

—think the fact is distorted by the mass media. During these several years, the newspaper, accountabilities system...they just want to find someone to bear the faults or the unpleasant results...the mass media only want to incite the public to accuse others of making mistake carelessly. All are working in a strange direction...” (R11,F,SWD)

Lastly, some respondents felt that their roles and functions are taken advantage of by some politicians or interest groups as a political propaganda.

—Some political parties, some legislative councilors...they will use these accusations the public puts on social workers as a kind of propaganda...” (R10,F,CFSC)

To sum up, the respondents generally shared a common view that they are important in their roles. Only one of the eleven respondents disagreed about her importance, though she thought that social workers are essential for the intervention process in spousal abuse cases. They understood their importance as social workers, and presented ways to monitor the high risk cases and preventing unpleasant tragedies from happening. From their interpretation, the general public is influenced by the accountability culture, mass media, socially constructed environment, and exaggerated expectation on the social workers in spousal abuse intervention. One of the respondents complained that their roles and functions are taken advantage of by some political parties or legislative councilors as political propaganda. Social workers’ attitude towards their roles and their self-perceived importance are crucial in upholding their practice of professionalism and reaffirming their roles as helping professionals in the public sphere. The confidence and positivity shown by the respondents regarding their self-identity can facilitate and legitimize their entering into the private sphere when dealing with spousal abuse cases.

Summary of this chapter

To conclude, the negotiation between social workers and the clients in spousal abuse intervention was examined by studying the relationship of the respondents with their clients, their attitude towards the clients and the self-perceived importance of the respondents in spousal abuse cases, and it as an instrument in redrawing the boundaries of social workers' self-identities.

According to the findings, social workers maintain the relationship with their clients largely based on their working experience. In general, the respondents thought that they have a supporting, interactive, working partnership, but not a friendship relationship, with their clients. In addition, the respondents stressed the importance of maintaining an equal and trustworthy, understandable, neutral and cooperative relationship with their clients in order to facilitate the effectiveness of the intervention. The amount of trust the clients have on the social workers largely determines the way social workers cooperate with the clients.

The respondent considered the attitude of social workers towards their clients to be quite humane, and they do not merely mechanically follow to the codes or guidelines provided by official agencies. The boundaries in public sphere are drawn and accomplished by the social workers' humane and "helping people to help themselves" attitudes towards their clients, and these attitudes can make the boundary more fluid, which facilitates the crossing of boundary from the public to the private sphere.

Most of the respondents reaffirmed their importance as public helping professionals in treating spousal abuse cases. By preventing unpleasant tragedies from happening, they can monitor the high risk cases. Their self-identity and self-perceived importance can affect how

they draw and enforce their boundaries with their clients, and more importantly, legitimize their entering into the private sphere.

In this chapter, it can be seen that social workers are standing firm on their roles, obligation and responsibilities in their own public sphere. In addition, the clear and well-established trustworthy and neutral working relationship can soften the rigid boundaries in the private sphere and bridge the boundaries between public and private. Boundary crossing and shifting are central to the negotiation between public and private spheres - social workers and the clients - in spousal abuse cases.

CHAPTER 6 THE GAP BETWEEN CLIENTS' EXPECTATION AND SOCIAL WORKERS' PERFORMANCE

This chapter is the third part of findings in the current research. The gaps between clients' expectation and social workers' performance from the social workers' point of view are investigated, which would help discover how boundaries are drawn and crossed between the spheres. The clients' expectations and perception from the point of view of social workers is first explained, followed by a study of whether these expectations can be fulfilled by the social workers. Finally, the gaps between the clients' expectation and social workers' performance will be presented.

6.1 Clients' Expectation and Perception from the Views of Social Workers

As suggested by the respondents, in general, clients have expectations and perception on the helping professionals in the society. For example, they expect the police could rescue them from any dangers, or expect social workers could assist them in times of difficulty. Drawing on comments by the respondents, the patterns of expectation the clients have on the respondents when handling cases, the expectation of the victims and the abusers, and the public perception on social workers will be discussed in the following.

Patterns of the clients' expectation—a transformation of expectation

Clients' expectation would change or transform over time depending on the number of times they have met and the duration of the meetings with the social workers. At first, the clients might have some prejudice towards the social workers due to different reasons or concerns from themselves or the society, such as the influence of traditional thoughts or the stress on face-saving. After several meeting with the social workers, such prejudice might be

changed and removed as their relationship becomes established. The respondents observed that the clients would not show their expectation to the social workers at first, possibly due to their confusion or fluctuating emotion after the occurrence of abusive incidents. The clients' expectation on social workers depends on their willingness to change, which is quite personal and an individual choice. They would have their own ideas to deal with their lives after meeting with the social workers, as illustrated in the following:

“They do not have any special expectation...they are very confused about their situation when they come to see you...” (R3, F, Shelter)

“I think they do not have a great expectation on social workers...however, when you talk to them, they will know more about what they want and how it can be done. It really depends...” (R4, M, IFSCs)

When social workers engage their clients during counseling, the clients would gradually realize that the social workers are not only providing economic support, but also helping to mend their marital relationship and offering emotional support. As the respondent shared, their clients' expectation has been changing gradually due to increased understanding and knowledge of what they want after meeting the social workers. As explained in the following,

“... once they come, the most important thing is engaging them in counseling. They (clients) will finally realize that social workers are not only providing financial support, but can also solve their marital relationship.” (R4, M, IFSCs)

“...they do believe that once they talked to social workers, they will understand their needs and expectations more after consultation with the social workers.” (R7, F, Shelter)

As observed by the respondents, their clients do not have any or have little expectation on them before they come to ask for help. However, the expectation of the clients becomes more demanding with time.

Victims' expectation of social workers

The respondents also noted that abusers and victims have different needs and expectations on the social workers. In spousal abuse cases, though it is clear who the victims and abusers are, as explained by the respondents, the informal way to classify an abuser is the one who abused others first. Using this brief and informal classification, the terms "victims" and "abusers" can be defined in a simple way in the following discussion of their situation and expectations towards social workers. In general, victims are people suffering from a lot of sadness, pain, and misery in a spousal relationship. Their possibility to seek help from helping professionals is relatively higher than the abusers, and they are more willing to disclose their private matters to social workers when they could not tolerate the abusive behaviour or life-threatening actions from the abusers. Thus, the boundaries of the victims are quite flexible when dealing with social workers. On the other hand, the boundaries are quite soft when the victims are abused at home. This shifting of the boundary could be due to their urgent needs and risky situation. From their experience in handling cases, the respondents discovered three types of victims.

- i.) Victims who know well what they want from the helping professionals;
- ii.) Victims who do not know what they want at first, but realize later after having a deep talk with the social workers; and,
- iii.) Victims who refuse any assistance from the social workers. These victims just want to return home and wait for their abusers to change.

Most of the respondents said that the victims are always in a subordinate role when compared to the dominate role of the abusers. The respondents also mentioned that most of their clients are new immigrants from mainland China who need a place to live and economic support. For instance, they might want the social workers to help them to apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). However, they are not qualified to apply

since they are not permanent Hong Kong residents and do not have the right of abode in Hong Kong. Assistance like housing or economic support from the Government are only available to permanent resident, defined as “[a] Chinese citizen who has ordinarily resided in Hong Kong for a continuous period of not less than 7 years before or after the establishment of the HKSAR”(Immigration Department, 1997). Respondent Five discussed the expectations of new immigrants and their limitations in receiving assistance,

—..the new immigrants, what they expected are a place to live, economic assistance, public housing...apply for CSSA...in fact, maybe some of them are unqualified, e.g. not permanent residents of Hong Kong...or, he has unreasonable expectation, we can not fulfill them...” (R5, F, IFSCs)

Most of the victims lose direction and do not know what to do after being abused. Thus, they would expect social workers to be omnipotent professionals who could handle all their problems, answer all their enquiries, and solve their problems without difficulties. For example, changing the abusers into a new person, or even repairing the air-conditioner or sewage system. If the social workers could not meet their expectations, they would no doubt brand the social workers as useless professionals, as quoted from a respondent’s sharing,

—..two words (Chinese) can be concluded: omnipotent (clients to social worker)...you should know how to answer their questions, you can handle all their problems...the problems are supposed to be well-handled... “If you don’t help me, it is your problems!” (Quoted from the clients) ” (R9, F, CFSC)

Some respondents also mentioned that their clients would expect them to give them what they want according to their needs, such as housing arrangement, financial support, ways to leave the chaotic situation at home, or methods to get divorced from the abusers. As Respondent Five said,

—They hope they can get what they want from us, e.g. housing, financial support...such practical assistance; if they want you to teach them how to divorce. If you can help them to achieve these expectations, they will not have any requests from you...” (R5, F, IFSCs)

Compared to their counterparts in family service centers, social workers from shelters face lower expectation from their clients,

“I think they have little expectation on us in shelter...in contrast, clients want money and housing in the family centers.” (R6, F, Shelter)

Victims have a lot of worries and expectations on the social workers to be able to help them consistently. In this sense, the victims have a more flexible boundary concerning social workers' intervention of their family problems and request what they want with this boundary. They sense that they are different from others and have more control on what to let in and keep out from the social workers. For them, the boundary is imbalanced, as the victims only treat the social workers as a source to get tangible assistance. In order to assess what boundary the abusers are holding, the abusers' expectation on social workers will be discussed in the following part.

Abusers' expectation on social workers

According to the respondents, abusers are the group of clients who seldom seek help from social workers. Most of the abusers think that it is unnecessary to seek help from social workers since they hate intervention from third parties. There are two main reasons abusers could seek help from social workers. The first reason is they cannot control their abusive behaviour physically and psychologically, and the second is because the victims have reported to the police, and the abusers are either forced or referred to seek help from social workers. Respondents reported that the needs and expectations of the abusers are different from those of the victims. The attitude of the abusers is quite aggressive, and their needs simple and target-oriented. Most of the abusers do not want to divorce, thus, they will expect the social workers to take their wife/husband home for reunion or possibly further battering. Since in most of the spousal abuse cases, victims would leave their home and move to the shelter for temporary protection, some abusers would actually call the victims to threaten them or even

approach social workers and ask them to disclose the location of the victims. Apart from that, the abusers usually do not have any specific or extra expectations on the social workers.

Respondent Two shared her experience in dealing with the abusers' expectations,

—..once their wife leaves, they (victims) may go to the shelter for a while...they (abusers) expect us to find them out..." (R2, F, IFSCs)

—Some abusers felt regret to abuse their wife...most of the abuser are husband, the victims are the wife. They (abuser) know that they have done something wrong. So, they approached us and hoped that we can help them to find their wives back and let their home become harmony again." (R2,F,IFSCs)

Abusers have less intention to seek help from the social workers, so they are maintaining a rigid boundary. They are so closed that no one can their world, either physically or psychologically. Abusers have a higher motivation to hide their family problems from others, since some of them might know that their behaviour is illegal and not permitted in the moral society. However, abusers' boundary can be selectively rigid when they are asking for help from social workers to find the victims out for family reunion.

Social workers' response to their expectation

The respondents have different perception towards their clients' expectations.. Some of them thought that their clients' expectations are quite rational and reasonable, while others thought that some their clients have unhealthy, irrational, abnormal and amusing expectations, and they only wished to have them fulfilled. As illustrated by the following quotes,

—Nowadays, I don't know why some clients have increased their expectation on social workers. They might have a wrong impression that we can help them for everything. In fact, we cannot help too much. However, they request us to help them consistently...I think it is unhealthy." (R8, M, IFSCs)

—In fact, some legislative councillors also have expectation on us, not to say the local citizens. Some of them think that you (social

workers) can tackle all the problems and difficulties they are facing once the cases are referred to you. They add a lot of pressure on you...this phenomenon is very abnormal and amusing.” (R10, F, CFSC)

Clients have increasing demand on social workers, to a level that they expect social workers to provide them with everything they want. This concept is really wrong in nature. It is very unhealthy that clients are over-relying on and over-exaggerating the roles of social workers. To the respondents, sometimes the clients' expectations seem really weird and unacceptable.

How social workers manage the clients' expectation

According to the respondents, some of the clients do not understand a lot about social workers. So, in order to manage their clients' expectations, they will first explain clearly to the clients the roles of social workers and their function in case intervention,

—..we will state what roles we are in when handling their cases...and explain what the function of social workers are. You should tell them what you can do, how can you seek help...sometimes, they do not understand what social workers do...”(R6, F, Shelter)

They will also clearly explain to the clients that social workers are not there to fulfill all of their requests and expectations,

—Fo be frank, we cannot fulfill all their expectations and meet all their requests. The reasons are, first, we cannot do that; second, some expectations are irrational.” (R10, F, CFSC)

Obviously, clients who seek help from social workers after suffering from spousal abuse expect social workers to assist them in any difficulties. These expectations include housing arrangement, financial support or emotional support. However, not all expectations could be achieved since resources are scarce and social workers should allocate it according to the clients' needs. In Hong Kong, the expectations of clients are constantly changing, and could sometimes reach an intolerable level. The roles and functions of social workers are

over-exaggerated as clients believe that they could provide everything they want or expect. However, when their requests are turned down, they might feel disappointed at the social workers. Terms like unhealthy, irrational, abnormal, and amusing, have been used by the respondents to describe their clients' request. To deal with these, social workers have several ways through which they manage their clients' expectations. First, they have to explain clearly to the clients the role of social workers and their function in case intervention. To lower their exaggerated expectations, social workers also need to state clearly that they could never fulfill all of the clients' needs and expectations.

From the above, it can be seen that social workers are holding rational and flexible boundaries towards their clients, whether they are the abusers or the victims. However, they also face irrational, abnormal, or sometimes amusing expectations from their clients. To deal with these over-exaggerated expectations, social workers will need to state clearly what their roles are expected to be and their responsibilities in handling spousal abuse cases. Social workers stand firm and clarify their roles in the public sphere, when the boundary between public and private spheres are agitated by a lot of expectations.

6.2. Public Perceptions of Social Workers from the View of Respondents

The general public has always had some misconception on the roles and functions of social workers conducting intervention. According to most of the respondents, firstly, the general public thinks that all social workers are well-trained and have learnt cases handling skills and acquired related knowledge from universities and their work place. To them, social worker is a public professional who tackle family matters only and provide their clients with everything they want.

Secondly, clients also have the perception that social workers are not helpers, but trouble makers messing with their family affairs during intervention. They thought that social workers are trying to persuade them to end their relationship with divorce or teach their partners to leave home. For example, if social workers are escorting the victims (wives) to pick up their belongings from home, the abusers (husbands) would be irritated and think that social workers are bad people who take their wives away from them and teach their wives to leave them alone. As Respondent Nine put it,

—Social workers are useless. When social workers take the women (victims) home to pick up some of their belongings to the shelter, their husbands will think that social workers are coming to take their wife away...they will get angry easier...” (R9, F, CFSC)

The abusers also have a perception that social workers are allied with their wives (victims) to fight with them. Even though abusers have a concept that social workers are professional agents, they would still lay blame on them for making alliance with the victims.

—Maybe they will think that social workers are not going to help them, and I will not seek your help too...If the clients themselves think that they are unnecessarily to change...you do not have too much to say or help...and holding such thought is the abuser in general. —(R2, F, IFSCs)

In our general understanding, social workers are supposed to help both abusers and victims, and yet, they cannot take side with either one as they need to get trust from their clients so as to normalize their entering to the private sphere. However, many clients, especially the abusers, always think that social workers, rather than helping them, are trying to break up their family, and they blame them for joining forces with the victims and fighting for them. The abusers have a perception that social workers are taking side, so they will uphold their boundary and not let the social workers to enter their private sphere. Social workers

cannot manage spousal abuse cases effectively and successfully when they are perceived as people who favour the victims.

Thirdly, social workers are also the people who bear all the faults during the cases handling. They are treated as a scapegoat and have to take all the blame from the abusers. Some clients also treat them like “domestic assistants”, expecting the social workers to work for them, know their problems at once, solve the hardships in their lives, or even check their home’s sewage system and repair the water pumps or air-conditioners. Some even perceive them as gods who could make all their dreams come true,

“It is quite ironic. All of us know that when you want to trace the faults, social workers are supposed to be closer to the clients. And you are following their cases, the case-worker, and you are supposed to be the one who can call them every day; you are the one to know how to repair their broken sewage in their home...they just expect you to be like domestic workers who have to know what have happened, how to stop the incident from happening or know the whole picture of their stories.” (R9, F, CFSC)

“The whole community perceived us like a “god”, who can handle all the stuff and solve all the family problems...The perceived “god” is not a positive god to be gloried. We are the one to bear all their faults only, and get no respect from the general public.” (R10, F, CFSC)

The perception of social workers as being omnipotent hinders their work as public helping professionals in spousal abuse intervention. Clients belonging to the private sphere do not clearly know what social workers do in the public sphere, and the boundaries between them are quite blurry and a take-it-for-granted boundary is maintained. Sometimes, clients who perceive social workers’ image negatively would hold their sphere boundary tightly, hindering social workers from entering the private sphere.

Fourthly, some clients might misunderstand the function of social workers, holding the concept that in some dangerous circumstances, like when they are abused severely, social workers are the first one to call,

–Some clients have a misunderstanding that they have to find social worker at once when they are in an urgent situation. In fact, it is necessary for them to report to the police instead of calling social workers. –(R5, F, IFSCs)

The public misunderstanding that social workers are multi-tasked professionals could be the reason they believe they should first give a call to social workers when faced with any accident. Respondent Four also claimed that some clients have a tendency to be harsh on the social workers, hoping to push them to fight for more resources for themselves.

–They think that they should scold you fiercely in order to fight for more resources.” (R4, M, IFSCs)

To sum up, most of the clients have both positive and negative perceptions on the work and role of social workers as public helping professionals. The clients generally assume that social workers are the necessary agents to handle spousal abuse and provide all-rounded services to them. As respondents testified, some clients even think of social workers as gods, and expect them to fulfill all of their expectations, have good knowledge of what has happened in their family, to bear responsibility for all the faults, and take sides with either the victims or the abusers when doing intervention. All these are largely exaggerated and false perceptions the clients have on social workers. The boundary between public and private spheres is not stable and is imbalanced since clients have false and “unnatural” perception of what social workers do as public helping professionals. These things have increased the number and diversity of things social workers need to tackle apart from managing the

boundary between their clients and themselves, thus hindering the effectiveness of them entering to the private sphere.

6.3 Expectation Gaps: Realization of Expectation from social workers

As mentioned above, clients have expectations on social workers. However, whether social workers can live up to their clients' expectation is something that cannot be easily assessed. In reality, social workers have their own methods to check whether they can live up to their clients' expectation or not. According to the respondents, they would first set up some criteria to assess the needs and wants of the clients, making it easier for the social workers to evaluate the realization of expectations from their clients. Three criteria are set by social workers to check whether clients' expectations are met. Well-fulfilled expectations can help sharpen the drawing of boundaries between social workers and clients.

Needs" and Wants" of clients

One respondent working in the family service center stated that before evaluating whether they could live up to the clients' expectations or solve their problems, the "needs" and "wants" of the clients should be first defined. In social workers' general practice, "needs" could be seen as tangible service and emotional support provided to their clients. These are first assessed, and it is fine to provide them with these basic needs. However, while "needs" could be more easily solved, "wants" are unlimited, sometimes hard to achieve, or even irrational. Social worker could live up to clients' "needs", but "wants" are hard to satisfy.

"We have to give them a definition, I think we should know better whether the thing they expect of us is 'wants' or 'needs'. It is because 'wants' is unlimited and 'needs' is just a need, maybe more basic ...I think we can live up to them, especially on the financial level which is relatively easier for us to do...however, on the counseling level or relationship, it is 'needs'. For 'wants', frankly, it is hard to live up to." (R4, M, IFSCs)

According to the respondents, to live up clients' needs is easier than living up to their wants, especially on the financial level. However, some needs are not as easy to live up to, like counseling services for their relationship or emotional support. Thus, whether social workers could solve the clients' problems and live up to the clients' expectations is dependent on what clients ask of them. If the clients ask for some tangible services, like applying for the CSSA or housing arrangement, it could be more readily solved. However, their marital condition could not be solved easily since it really depends on the abusers' and victims' decisions and motivation to change. The effectiveness of social workers in solving problems also depends on how rational the requests of the clients are. If their requests are irrational and unreasonable, it would be hard for social workers to function and provide them with the respective services. No matter how much service is provided by the social workers, the clients have to know that social workers are only there to assist them to solve their problems. Clients themselves are the only people who could solve their own problems.

-Some clients may want to apply for something like CSSA or housing...all these can be solved... marital conditions, it should better trace back to their decisions and motivation." (R2, F, IFSCs)

-Most of their requests and expectations can be achieved...if their requests are rational ... we will assist them to solve their own problems."(R11,F,SWD)

What are the clients' goals?

The goals of victims, whether wives or husbands, should also be known first in order to assess whether the social workers could live up to clients' expectations. If the goal of the clients is to learn how to protect themselves from further abuse, then it could easily be achieved by social workers. However, something is hard to be controlled, for example, if clients want the abusers to be sanctioned by being sent to jail. This expectation could not be

easily fulfilled since it involves an outcome uncontrollable by the social workers. Under this condition, social workers could not live up to their expectations.

–Every case has their goals to be achieved, if they are sexual abuse cases, they (victims) have to learn some protection methods to protect themselves. When I set this goal for them, it can be lived up to like what you asked before.”(R7, F, Shelter)

To sum up, clients have a variety of expectations on the social workers. They expect the social workers to help them solve all their problems and fulfill all their needs and wants as well. As the respondents shared, different perspectives are used to evaluate whether their clients' problems are solved or not. The findings show that social workers understand well as to how their clients react and what they want after they suffered from spousal abuse. They know perception and expectations are different from person to person, thus, they have set their own standards or criteria to evaluate whether all their clients' expectations are lived up to. –Wants”, –needs”, and –goals” are the three criteria used for assessing the realization of expectation of the clients from the view of social workers. Gaps definitely exist when clients do not understand what the criteria are and how social workers work for them in solving their problems. The boundaries are drawn according to these three criteria between public and private spheres. Clients in the private sphere are more vulnerable, as when their expectations are rejected, it hinders their motivation to approach social workers. They would like to maintain a more rigid boundary so that no one can approach them or provide assistance to them even when they are in need. However, if the criteria are not set up, social workers' working procedures would become blurry and they could not provide sufficient and effective assistance to the people in need and utilize the scarce resources efficiently. Thus, the gaps between clients' expectations and social workers' realization which leading the boundary between public and private spheres become vulnerable and blurry. However, social workers would try to make it clear by clearing their clients' wrong expectation from them,.

Summary of this chapter

This chapter showed that gaps in fact exist between the expectations of clients and the performance of social workers. Clients have a lot of expectations including needs, wants, and goals, on social workers, who are generally perceived as professionals in helping people in need. Social workers are more focused on providing for their needs, though the clients still have different wants and goals in their working relationship. The respondents suggested that their clients' expectations would change over time, and are different before and after meeting them and are dependent on the duration of meeting with social workers during the cases intervention. Respondents agreed that some of their clients are quite rational and reasonable in their request for helping services. However, some of the clients' expectations are considered irrational, unhealthy, abnormal and amusing, and the social workers can never live up to these requests. Under these conditions, social workers are holding rational and flexible boundaries towards their clients, whether they are the abusers or the victims. In response to their clients' over-exaggerated expectations, social workers would state clearly their roles and responsibilities as social workers. They stand firm and clarify their roles in the public sphere when the boundary between private spheres are stirred by a lot of expectations.

Clients have positive and negative perceptions on the work and roles of social workers as public helping professionals. They perceive social workers as the necessary agents to handle spousal abuse and provide all-rounded services to them, like gods or omnipotent helping professionals who can do whatever they expect. It can be seen that the boundary between public and private spheres is not stable and is imbalanced, since clients have various false and "unnatural" perceptions on what social workers do as public helping professionals. Social workers have to manage this carefully, which might hinder their entering to the private sphere and their effectiveness in handling spousal abuse.

To assess whether the social workers can live up to all their clients' expectations and match with the clients' perceptions, they have established some informal criteria to evaluate the fulfillment of "wants", "needs", and "goals" to their clients. Gaps definitely exist when clients do not understand the roles and functions of social workers. Boundaries are drawn according to these three criteria between public and private spheres. Social workers' working procedures would be blurred such that they cannot provide sufficient and effective assistance to the people in need and utilize the scarce resources efficiently. In contrast, clients in the private sphere are more vulnerable when their expectations are rejected, and it hinders their motivation to approach social workers. They would like to maintain a more rigid boundary so that no one can approach them or provide assistance to them even when they are in need. It makes the entering into the private sphere from the public more difficult. Thus, their boundary between public and private spheres becomes vulnerable and blurry, in addition, the private boundary of clients are more rigid to be violated when expectations are rejected by social workers in public sphere.

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION

The conceptual tools of private and public spheres were applied in this study to analyze spousal abuse intervention by social workers and how the management of boundaries affects their work. Findings show how boundaries are managed play a key role in the success of intervention.

7.1 Shifting Boundary: The management of public and private sphere

When the private sphere goes public, the management of boundaries between these two spheres by the social workers is not only shaped by their professional roles, but also by the clients' reaction to social workers' intervention and their self-imposed barriers. The findings show that individuals may set a soft, spongy, rigid, or flexible boundary when communicating with social workers and their selection of such boundaries reveal their self-perception on social workers' intervention and their readiness to be empowered by service professionals during crisis situations. Thus, the management of the boundary between public and private spheres and the effect of the changes in boundaries on the effectiveness of case management of social workers are worth further investigation.

Firstly, the findings show that the boundaries between private and public spheres tend to blur and weaken when social workers handle spousal abuse cases. Social workers and clients are more or less equally constructing their own boundaries by strengthening social workers' roles as professionals in the public sphere and the private sphere respectively. Social workers strengthen their professional boundary between themselves and clients by upholding their roles, missions and their expectations for their clients in handling cases. Conversely, the clients who suffered from spousal abuse are constructing their private boundary by holding the traditional culture, family privacy or patriarchal ideology rigidly. When these two spheres

are tightly maintained, the boundaries are clear and rigid, and no invasion is allowed. Boundary is being redrawn and shaped due to the strategic negotiation during case intervention and the establishment of a trustworthy relationship between these two parties. The comments of the respondents showed that the influence of social workers in the public sphere is expanding and becoming dominant over private life and relations between individuals and families. In the private sphere, due to the changing societal trend in adopting a proactive attitude to solve spousal abuse and the gradual removal of self-imposed barriers, the sufferers who are staying in their rigid and closed boundaries are now reshaping and reconstructing. The respondents pointed out that clients are becoming more open and assertive to accept help from the public professionals. The change of boundaries from rigid to flexible thus results in the social workers managing the boundaries between public and private spheres more effectively.

The way to access public domain: when a “button” is pressed

Secondly, the breaking of rigid private sphere depends on clients' willingness to report abusive cases to the police, ability to access public resources, and desire to seek help from the public domains. The respondents showed their awareness in the importance of reporting cases to the police, which can help social workers detect abusive cases and might allow them to intervene more easily. Furthermore, the police can protect the clients, an authority social workers lack, in urgent situations. Police is also important as an indicator in spousal abuse intervention, as they are like a button that opens the door for the social workers to break the boundaries of clients and enter the private spheres formally. Thus, the close cooperation between these two public professionals is more likely to draw flexible boundaries between public and private spheres in spousal abuse.

The drawing of boundary in private sphere: traditional Chinese norms about family

Thirdly, it has long been the case that any kind of domestic violence, including spousal abuse, is undoubtedly treated as family shame. The importance of “face-saving” and the pressure to maintain the family’s pride are the clients’ concerns under traditional Chinese norms, meaning that they hope to maintain a good image and reputation in front of others (Chan, 1998; Chow, Hampton, & Glynn, 2009). The traditional Chinese norms also encouraged the victims under spousal abuse to remain silent for the sake of harmony even when battered seriously and consistently. Thus, they are more reluctant to seek help from third parties or helping professionals, for example, social workers or the police (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. 180). In short, traditional Chinese norms about family are likely a factor to draw clients’ personal boundaries from the public sphere. As explained in the findings, clients who are under a strong influence by the traditional norms are more likely to draw a rigid boundary preventing others from entering. However, social workers are trying to change their clients’ traditional views on disclosing spousal abuse as a family shame to one that is more positive and willing to accept help. Through their negotiation and strategies during intervention, some clients’ attitude really changed and the effects of these deep-rooted traditional norms are diminishing under the effort of social workers. They know how to manage clients’ thoughts and shamefulness by lessening their hard feeling when disclosing their private matters, which proves that the variation of attitude could affect the success of intervention.

7.2 The strengthening of boundaries: negotiation between social workers and clients

Negotiation between social workers and their clients is important for the social workers to manage their roles and functions effectively and their self-perception as important helping professionals can strengthen the boundaries between public and private spheres. They reaffirm their roles, obligation and responsibilities in the public sphere and maintain a harmonious, trustworthy and close working relationship with their clients. Thus, all their efforts can make the intervention more effective and lessen the self-imposed barriers from the clients in spousal abuse cases. Boundaries between public and private spheres are crossing and strengthening, and then are normalized and enforced under the working of social workers. Findings also suggest that in the view of social workers, most of their clients are likely to have different expectations on them in their roles and abilities to provide services.

At the same time, the boundary between public and private could be blurred by the gaps between the expectations of the clients and the realization of social workers, which is due to the exaggerated and false perceptions on social workers. However, the gaps can be filled in by social workers' strategic intervention. Their realization of expectations and performance can remap the boundaries and strengthen them, and then the intervention can be facilitated.

7.3 The unstable boundaries: public accusation to social workers

Last but not least, social workers have a long history of being blamed for their incapability in fulfilling their role capacities, functions, responsibilities and intervention strategies. The findings provide a clear picture of how the public perceives the work of social workers and how social workers, as targets of finger-pointing, respond to all these accusation.

Previous studies also blamed social workers for the lack of an appropriate and balanced focus on the macro-level factors of domestic violence and an adequate knowledge and skills, which lead to the risks of providing inappropriate or ineffective response to victims (Hawkins, 2007), failing to recognize abuse as a problem (Pagelow, 1981), and failing to make appropriate intervention and referrals (Bass & Rice, 1979; Davis, 1984; Ross & Glisson, 1991). Similar complaints or more severe accusation can also be found in local newspapers between 2002 and 2011. The Tin Shui Wai Tragedy of 2004 (the tragedy) can be seen as a turning point in the reporting of spousal abuse and the increasing of accusation from the public to social workers. Before 2004, there were no accusation reports about social workers in relation to spousal abuse intervention. Since 2004, accusation reports can consistently be found in different news sources. In short, after the tragedy, local social workers, the Social Welfare Department, and the Government were accused of the following: (see Appendix D)

- Low sense in detecting the potential risks among the families
- Lack of cooperation with other helping professionals
- Lack of comprehensive risk assessment tools
- Inadequate training for the professionals
- Hierarchy
- Taking sides
- Unprofessional and inadequately-trained social workers sent to mediate cases
- Inadequate amount of social services assistance

- Maltreatment of the clients, such as talking to them rudely. For example, some social workers were reported to have said “If you feel unhappy to be here, you can return to the mainland”
- Clients’ wounds taken advantage of verbally by social workers
- Clients verbally abused and their actual needs ignored. For example, some clients reported social workers to be uncaring about them and telling them, “We cannot help you apply these assistances since you were not hit so seriously that you lose your feet or hands...” and “If you cannot fall asleep at night, you can work night shifts.”
- Inadequate manpower, causing social workers to be shifted from their responsibility to take the cases

The validity of these accusations is out of the scope of the current study. However, regardless of the validity, these voices have urged the Government to make changes and improve the existing social welfare related to the spousal abuse cases. Starting from 2004, the number of news reports regarding public accusation is decreasing, and this might be explained by several reasons. First, news about spousal abuse is no longer valuable or attractive to the readers; Second, spousal abuse is not a serious problem in Hong Kong society, and people have got used to and normalized the severity of the cases and the predictable consequence. Third, social workers have improved their service and attitude when handling cases, and the comprehensive risk assessment, cases handling procedures, and law enforcement policy have all improved and re-structuralized. Regardless of the reasons contributing to the decrease in the number of reports, this study has provided a whole picture for understanding how public perception affects the relationship between social workers and clients. Misunderstanding by the public is the main cause of the public accusations to social workers. The news reports are unable to reflect the whole picture of their negotiation and interaction with clients. The respondents in this study pointed out that they face constraints in case intervention, which prohibited them from further intervention. Social workers feel helpless when clients rejected their help, and they could do nothing to help them escape from emergency. The concerns of

clients to seek help and some policy constraints might have hindered the intervention of social workers. In recent years, several policies and ordinance have been enacted, and some anti-spousal abuse measures have been instated. There are some social workers who devote themselves wholeheartedly to assisting their clients and resolving their conflicts. The public was shocked by the bloody tragedy in Tin Shui Wai in 2004, and thus they would expect their Government and the front-line helping professionals to help the victims directly and effectively. During the interaction and negotiation process, the way social workers deal with the clients can affect their entering into private sphere effectively. If the clients have an antagonistic attitude towards the social workers, they will hold the boundary to their private domains tightly and refuse to disclose anything to others, and social workers will not be able to enter and execute their roles as helping professionals successfully. The spousal abuse cases might not be resolved effectively and the boundaries will be fluctuating and floating unstably.

In conclusion, the public and private spheres are the terms used more often in the political and sociological field that declaimed the distinction between domestic from the traditional sciences of “politic” (Habermas, 1989). Through re-classification and redefining, the meaning and application of these two terms are necessarily different from their traditional meanings. By using the concepts of boundary between private and public spheres to explore how social workers manage spousal abuse cases in Hong Kong, the general public can hopefully understand more about the roles of social workers and the dilemma for failing to tackle the clients’ domestic problems. It is applicable to the Hong Kong situation and can be a useful tool for assessing the gap between the clients and the social workers in their relationship and expectations.

According to Arendt (1958), there is a position known as “Social” between Public and Private Spheres. Social workers are semi-professionals working for the public and resolving family problems with responsibility. Respondents in this study suggested that they are

misunderstood as agents who can serve the clients in every aspect, even helping them repair their air-conditioners. The findings in the research have revealed the dilemma and difficulties social workers are facing and how these are affecting their management of spousal abuse cases. As a result, such complaints or accusations are reported consistently in reviewing the helping roles and functions of social workers under the supervision of current system in Hong Kong. The gaps between the perception of social workers to the public and to the clients who suffered from spousal abuse are the reasons leading to some of the failings in handling domestic violence cases. Social workers in Hong Kong can work proactively in order to tear down the rigid boundaries between, and hopefully, the sufferers under spousal abuse can be better-educated to cultivate desirable attitudes towards official intervention from different helping professionals.

7.4 Implications

This study is a preliminary attempt to use the concepts of boundaries between public and private spheres to analyze how Hong Kong's social workers manage spousal abuse cases. The aim is to readdress the roles and responsibilities of social workers and the clients in spousal abuse intervention. Firstly, the boundary between private and public spheres shifts in two directions. When private sphere goes public, spousal abuse becomes more publicly concerned and will lead to intervention from different parties. Second, there is also an implication that individuals would set their own personal boundary to protect themselves and their family members from others' intrusion. Few empirical studies have applied the ideas of public and private spheres and boundary work to explain this changing sociological phenomenon in Hong Kong. Using these two concepts, by examining the changing boundary, relationship building and filling of expectation gaps, the study has illustrated that social workers' management of spousal abuse cases is important in facilitating the effectiveness of intervention.

Secondly, this study allows the public to have a better understanding of the expectations on social workers and how clients react when social workers could not live up to these expectations, for example, blaming or accusation directed at the social workers. Social workers' dilemma and difficulties in handling spousal abuse cases have been assessed by examining their relationship with the abusers or the victims and the expectation gap. As stakeholders in spousal abuse cases, social workers and service recipients are hopefully stimulated to rethink their positions, responsibilities, and roles in the interventions. Moreover, this research provides a new dimension for explaining the changing attitude in clients disclosing their "family shame" to others, including their self-determination and the social workers' working relationship with them. Because of these, the idea of "family shame" brought about by traditional culture norms is reassessed and reshaped by both social workers

and clients. This is important since traditional culture norms are sometimes reasons for the setting up of self-imposed barriers that hinder the intervention of third parties into families, which can also be viewed as the public domain entering the private domain in a conceptual framework.

Thirdly, this study provides an insightful and clear explanation for the general public's accusation and blaming on the helping professionals, for example, social workers, when they are handling spousal abuse cases and a platform for the reconciliation of the discontents between social workers, clients and the general public in a sensible way by investigating the cause of these discontents. There is always an expectation gap between the service providers and the service receivers in community service provision. The service receivers always have a lot of expectations, tangible or intangible, on their service providers. They seldom pay attention to whether they are qualified to receive those services, the limitations and difficulties the service providers face, or the policy constraints that hinder their receiving of services or support from the society. On the side of service providers, they encounter different kinds of restrictions and dilemma, such as time constraints, heavy workload, professional training, or policy constraints, when handling social problems in their own service fields. They also expect their clients to understand what are they doing and their constraints when handling their problems. The failure of either side to fulfill each others' expectations and misunderstanding in the working nature, roles, situation or attitudes of the social workers are probably the reasons for the accusation, blaming, and complaints..

Fourthly, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of collaboration among different governmental departments, community service centers, and strengthening of the provision of multi-dimensional policies to readdress the existing policy and law enforcement loopholes in handling spousal abuse in Hong Kong. These loopholes are present due to different limitations and constraints in the nature of this family problem and the deep-rooted

traditional culture that limit the extension of service provision and stronger law enforcement in Hong Kong. Thus, the study of social workers' limitation and dilemma in dealing with spousal abuse cases are important for the policy makers to reaffirm the roles and responsibilities of the state in intervening the private matters and privacy of a family.

Lastly, this study brings a valuable reference for policymakers to reexamine the prevailing method of management of spousal abuse cases. The intervention strategies and service provision should be improved not only by investing resources, providing financial assistance, or increasing the number of social workers, but also by a complete examination and overhaul of the whole service system, such that prevention and intervention to domestic violence can be effective. In this study, some social workers have shown their insight on improving or enhancing the quality of service provision in Hong Kong, which could serve as valuable sources or starting points for the policymakers to reexamine the prevailing spousal abuse management.

7.5 Limitations of the study

After discussing the implications of the findings, limitations associated with this study should be acknowledged. Firstly, since this study only focuses on the intervention management of social workers in spousal abuse cases, the respondents are limited to social workers who are or have been handling spousal abuse cases in Hong Kong. In addition, not all social workers from the family service centers or shelters are available for the interview. Further, the scope of social workers from different service background is relatively small and limited. To overcome this limitation, in-depth interviews with social workers were carried out. Relevant literature on the social workers' managing work, intervention strategies, working dilemma and the shifting boundaries between public and private spheres was also widely reviewed, along with systematical research on current news reports on social workers. These all work to provide a more comprehensive understanding to overcome this limitation. Further studies can involve more discussion on how doctors and the police handle domestic violence and how the management of boundary between public and private spheres affect their effectiveness in handling the cases within their own profession.

Methodological imperfection

This study also contains some methodological imperfection that may restrict the generalization of the present findings. Firstly, the sample size of this study is small and restricted - only eleven people have been invited for face-to-face in-depth interviews. Such a small sample size will not be sufficient for generalization of the findings into a complete picture regarding the relationship between social workers and service recipients, the spousal abuse intervention strategies, the social workers' points of view in handling and managing spousal abuse cases, and the gap between clients' perception and social workers' performance.

Sampling imperfection

All the respondents were drawn based on purposive sampling and snowball sampling through the researcher's own social network and referrals by interviewed respondents. In addition, all respondents are chosen from one of the following: Integrated Family Service Centers (IFSCs), Family Service Centers and the shelters. However, due to the referral sample drawing, there is no representative from the Family and Child Protective Services Unit (FCPSU), an important center dealing with relatively more serious domestic violence cases in Hong Kong. It remains unclear how well the present samples represent the whole population of social workers in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, all current respondents were sincerely selected and have experience of working in local service agencies in the field of family services. In addition, the length of each interview, which lasted from one to three hours, the full transcription of the interviews, the line-by-line coding of the transcripts with categorization, and the property-space analysis have generated results that are very deep and rich in data, and allows an in-depth investigation into the research objectives and questions, even though the sample is small and possibly skewed.

Gender Bias in the study

The majority of the respondents (nine out of eleven) in this research are female, thus there may be a risk for gender bias in their comments, which might affect the results and analysis. However, though the respondents are mainly female, the comments and opinions raised are applicable not only to female social workers. In fact, no significant gender difference could be seen in the analysis in terms of points of view, concepts, and the relationship the respondents have with their service recipients. Even so, the impact of gender on the results of this study should be carefully tested and evaluated by further studies to assess

the effect of gender bias on case handling, such as difference in attitude, points of view, thoughts, and handling objectives.

Social stereotypes about certain groups of clients

During the interviews, respondents were asked about the difficulties they encountered when handling case intervention, how they perceive their relationship with clients and what their expectations are. However, not all these views can be fully tapped or, especially on sensitive issues such as whether they are affected by stereotypes (e.g. new immigrants from mainland China). In addition, how do they manage their own biases so that they would not affect how they work with cases? Social stereotypes are also an important factor that may affect their management of boundary between public and private sphere.

To overcome limitations in the current research, two points should be noted. Firstly, the researcher is neither a professional social worker nor a social work student, and therefore, could explore topics in this field with different angles as an outsider, and hopefully can view things from a more objective perspective. Secondly, sources for the accusations made on social workers come not only from the respondents, but also from newspaper reports, that is, the mass media, in Hong Kong over the last ten years. This is useful in providing a more comprehensive understanding to the myth of accusation on social workers and the gaps between them and the public.

7.6 Recommendation for further studies and policies improvement

Some recommendation could be made to improve the limitations of this study in future studies.

Explore more on the boundary work in different fields

The current research suggests that boundary work is an obstacle to successful intervention. A large scale quantitative study might be needed to further test or validate this finding. Also, cross-cultural comparisons would be very useful to see if it is only in a Chinese context that the boundaries between public and private could make such a big difference in this type of intervention. In addition, these concepts could also be used to test the relationship between other social problems and the specific helping professionals.

More professional and public education are needed

In this study, we can see that the general public has a lot of misunderstanding regarding the helping professionals and the clients' right to enjoy services and social support from the society. The roles of social workers and their power to manage their clients' problems are often over-exaggerated. Professional and public education are crucial factors to enable the clients to be more realistic, and help develop a mutual understanding between the social workers and the clients on each others' limitations and dilemma, so the parties involved can rethink and reframe their roles and responsibilities. The working procedures and services provided by social workers can also be made more transparent to the general public through talks, advertisements, leaflets or some anonymous case sharing sessions. Schools can also join hands with the helping professionals in providing domestic violence case intervention studies in liberal studies education.

Relieve the misunderstanding of social workers by the general public

Since most of the spousal abuse cases are related to new immigrant families, the Government or social workers who are working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can hold some workshops or groups for the new immigrants' families, teaching them how to communicate with their intimate partners, giving advice on spousal relationship, telling them the ways to seek help or the importance of disclosure when they are facing family distress. Though the Government and some NGOs are already providing some of these services, there is never too much education. It is important to let people know about the importance of seeking help, and equally important is educating the public about the work of social workers and their roles in handling domestic violence. Education in this area should be emphasized and strengthened, so as to minimize the misunderstandings and accusations from the public. Rapport could then be maintained and the effectiveness of intervention by social workers could be facilitated.

Improve the current intervention management strategies

The intervention strategies are not comprehensive enough to support the people or families suffering from domestic violence. Since 2004, Hong Kong Government has launched and suggested a lot of ways and assistance to resolve domestic violence, such as spousal abuse and homicide. However, increased resources have not translated into increased effectiveness. As the respondents reported, their professional training during college was not enough for them to handle domestic violence cases, like spousal abuse, in proper ways. Social workers have to learn the different intervention skills and counseling techniques through hands-on work and self-socialization under the instruction of supervisors. However, it is still not enough for them to prepare themselves to handle spousal abuse cases effectively, and they need more time and practice in order to shape up. Effective settling of the abusive cases

involves both the clients and the social workers. Clients should be more cooperative and willing to disclose, seek help, and open more of their private sphere to the public. On the other hand, professional social workers should be provided with more professional training, cases workshops, and education in preventive tactics and potential crisis detection skills, so as to facilitate the intervention to the cases. The intervention strategies should also be improved and amended, so that effective assistance can be provided to the service recipients.

Enhance the cooperation between social workers and clients

Close and reliable cooperation could be formed between social workers and clients if the clients can overcome the private and self-imposed barriers. Findings from the current study suggest that the weaker the private sphere of clients, the less the barriers exist, and the higher the effectiveness of the case management by social workers. In addition, a close and well-established relationship between the social workers and clients is the key factors for facilitating service provision. Thus, a close working relationship and tight cooperation between the social workers and the clients should be maintained for better case intervention and problems management.

Conclusion

This study investigates social workers' intervention to spousal abuse cases in Hong Kong by using the concepts of public and private spheres. It is well known that spousal abuse is a global issue that arouses big concern throughout society. The impact of spousal abuse is on a broad level and considerable, as the safety, health, and social well-being of the victims, their family, and their friends could be hugely affected. Furthermore, it also causes a negative influence to social harmony and social capacities in building a strong community.

Social workers are helping professionals with the mission and obligation to involve and offer their helping hands on an extensive range of family and social problems, even though they are facing critiques and dilemma in executing their roles in the current society. Spousal abuse is originally and naturally treated as a private and family oriented matter that should not be intervened or known by others. This socially constructed "taboo" is set in the private sphere, which is rigidly maintained by the clients themselves. However, social workers, as public agents, are authorized to break the rigid boundary and enter this private sphere and by offering assistance to the clients and their beloved family. However, it is not that easy for someone with authority to enter someone else's private life. As revealed in this study, social workers have to face numerous difficulties and dilemmas that they need to deal with in order for intervention to be successful. As social workers, they would reaffirm their necessity and usefulness of their intervention, while at the same time, they do complain about the clients' reluctance to compromise and to seek help. The academic framework of boundary shifting has been applied to examine the shifting of the boundaries around the clients' private spheres among soft, spongy, rigid, and flexible according to their self-perception and readiness to be empowered by the social workers during their crisis situation.

In short, this study serves as an interesting and useful starting point for examining the boundary between public and private spheres and how this boundary is managed by social workers in order to facilitate the intervention effectiveness. It also explains why the clients always accuse social workers of providing “unprofessional and useless services”. In addition, this study brings in a valuable reference point for policy makers to reexamine the prevailing management of spousal abuse cases and hopefully can provide a platform for further academic debates on how boundaries between public and private spheres can be managed in other forms of intervention.

Appendix A

Questions for in-depth interview (2010-2011)

Date: _____ Time: _____ Venue: _____

Research topic:

1. Between public and private spheres: The role of social workers in spousal abuse intervention

2. Spousal abuse and Social Workers: When private sphere goes to public

Researcher: Veronica, SHEK king-fan (MPhil student, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Lingnan University)

Personal information:

性別 Sex:

教育程度 Highest Educational Qualification:

處理家暴年資 Years working experience:

處理家暴前的工作範圍 previous career:

工作機構 Working Organization :

工作地區 Districts of working:

服務範圍 Service Area:

婚姻狀況 Marital Status:

Research Questions:

Q1. With regard to spousal abuse work, how is the boundary between the role of a social worker as a state employee and a victim as a private citizen, managed?

1) 人說家暴是家事,作為一個處理家暴的人,你自己怎樣看?

1) It is said that spousal abuse is merely a private matter. As a mediator that deals with such abuse, what's your viewpoint on this assertion?

2.) 你覺不覺得相對於虐兒和虐老, 夫妻暴力會更難同人講? 為什麼?

2) Compared to child or elderly abuse, are cases of spousal abuse more difficult to disclose to others? Why/why not?

3.) 你作為一個專業社工, 你覺不覺得自己雖然在處理他們的事件, 但都會有一種局外人的感覺?

3) As a professional social worker, do you feel that you have the impartiality of a layman in dealing with a couple's affairs, even though you are actively managing those affairs?

- 你本住什麼信念去介入夫妻暴力?

What degree of intervention do you believe is necessary with regards to spousal abuse case intervention?

- 介入時,有困難嗎? 如有,你怎麼處理?

What difficulties have you encountered so far in dealing with spousal abuse cases? How do you deal with them?

4.) 處理家暴的正常程序?

4) What's the appropriate procedure for dealing with spousal abuse?

- 你是如何與其他部門合作的?.如: 警察, 其他社工, 或者 hospital...etc?

- How do you cooperate with other departments? E.g., policemen, other social workers or hospitals?

5.) 可能案主向你求救,你就會開檔案處理,但所謂”清官難審家庭事”,而且社工更加不是官,你覺得自己可以做些什麼?

5) It is natural to offer help when a victim seeks it, however there's a Chinese idiom that says "even the most learned scholar cannot understand the intricacy of one's family affairs". Given the complexity of domestic affairs, how is it possible to actually help those in need?

6) 很多案主亦都會覺得“家醜不出外傳”,你對此說法有什麼看法?
而面對這些案主時,你會如何處理?

6) With regards to domestic disputes, many victims would be ashamed of 'grassing' on their partners to others. What's your perception of this line of philosophy?

- 如果案主拒絕你的幫忙,又或者對暴力事件有所隱瞞,你會點做?

- If the victim declines your help, or tries to conceal the whole picture of spousal abuse, what actions do you take?

7.) 我都知道你已經做了一段時間,可否分享一些你處理個案的經驗?(較難處理?較深刻的?)

As you have been dealing with spousal abuse for a period of time, without compromising the privacy of those involved, could you share with me some details of some interesting/notable conflicts?

Q2. What is the relationship between social workers and clients in spousal abuse cases?

1.) 你覺得自己同案主(無論係受害者或施虐者)是一種怎樣的關係?可否解釋下?

1) What do you think of the relationship between yourself and clients? Please explain

2.) 你是用什麼心態去看案主?

2) What's your attitude towards your clients?

3.) 你覺得社工在家暴中所做得工作,有多重要? 爲什麼一有事,就會立即想到的社工?

3) What do you think of the importance of the role of a social worker in dealing with spousal abuse? Why would victims consider soliciting the aid of a social worker in their time of need?

Q3. What is the relationship between clients' expectation and social workers' performance?

1.) 就你處理過的事件中,你覺得他們對你的工作有什麼期望/要求?

1) Based on the cases you have dealt with so far, what do you think of clients' expectation of you?

2.) 對於案主的要求,你是如何處理的?

How do you deal with your clients' requests?

3.) 你覺得你能做到他們想要的東西嗎? 或者解決他們的問題?

3) Are you able to live up to your clients' expectations? Are you able to help them solve their problems?

4.) 當你做不到時, 你負責的案主有沒有投訴你,又或者鬧你? 通常他們點講?有咩反應?

4) When you could not live up to clients' expectations, have they lodged any complaints about you? What did they say? What's their complaint?

5.) 我知道你也接觸過很多不同的家暴 cases, 使你最感無力的是甚麼?

As you have dealt with different natures of spousal abuse cases, what makes you feel the most helpless?

5.) 你覺得社工對夫妻暴力事件的支援足夠嗎? 如, 情緒, 經濟, 或者住宿...

5) Do you think social workers provide enough support to different spousal abuse cases? E.g., emotional, financial or providing accommodation?

Q4. How do clients' expectations towards social workers and social workers' self-perceived role shape the social workers' role in spousal abuse cases?

1.) 在不同的個案中,你都可能需要扮演不同的角色, 你是如何找出自己既定位?

1) You might need to play different roles in different spousal abuse cases, how can you find an appropriate middle ground?

2.) 你爲什麼會選擇做社工? 在你來看, 社工係一份怎樣的工作? 對人和社會, 發揮了什麼功用?

2) Why did you choose to be a social worker? What is your perception of this job?

3.) 和其他專業比較, 社工可有不同之處?

3) Compared to other professions, what do you think of the difference between social workers and others?

4.) 對你來說, 什麼是有效的家暴干預?

4) What do you think is the most effective intervention for spousal abuse cases?

Appendix B

The trend of reported battered spouse cases from 2004-2010

Types of Abuse	2010 (January-September) / (No. of Case %)	2009 (No. of Case %)	2008 (No. of Case %)	2007 (No. of Case %)	2006 (No. of Case %)	2005 (No. of Case %)	2004 (No. of Case %)
Physical abuse	2008 (84.4%)	3880 (80.7%)	4142 (60.5%)	4399 (68.7%)	3602 (81.4%)	3023 (84.0%)	2714 (80.5%)
Sexual abuse	9 (0.4%)	12 (0.2%)	16 (0.2%)	10 (0.2%)	11 (0.2%)	8 (0.2%)	4 (0.1%)
Psychological abuse	214 (9.0%)	662 (13.8%)	2509 (36.7%)	1737 (27.1%)	609 (13.8%)	351 (9.8%)	348 (1.3%)
Multiple abuse	148 (6.2%)	253 (5.3%)	176 (2.6%)	258 (4.0%)	202 (4.6%)	216 (6.0%)	305 (9.0%)
Total	2379 (100%)	4807 (100%)	6843 (100%)	6404 (100%)	4424 (100%)	3598 (100%)	3371 (100%)

Sex of Victims from 2004-2010

Sex of victims	2010 (Jan-Sep) / (No. of Cases %)	2009 (No. of Cases %)	2008 (No. of Cases %)	2007 (No. of Cases %)	2006 (No. of Cases %)	2005 (No. of Cases %)	2004 (No. of Cases %)
Female	1992 (83.7%)	4012 (83.5%)	5575 (81.5%)	5169 (80.7%)	3749 (84.7%)	3153 (87.6%)	2990 (88.7%)
Male	387 (16.3%)	795 (16.5%)	1268 (18.5%)	1235 (19.3%)	675 (15.3%)	445 (12.4%)	381 (11.3%)
Total	2379 (100%)	4807 (100%)	6843 (100%)	6404 (100%)	4424 (100%)	3598 (100%)	3371 (100%)

(Source: Social Welfare Department)

Appendix C
Profile of Respondents

	<u>S</u> <u>ex</u>	<u>Educa-</u> <u>tional</u> <u>Level</u>	<u>Years</u> <u>of</u> <u>workin</u> <u>g</u>	<u>Previo</u> <u>-us</u> <u>career</u>	<u>Working</u> <u>Organization</u>	<u>Districts</u> <u>of</u> <u>working</u>	<u>Service</u> <u>Area</u>	<u>Marital</u> <u>Status</u>	<u>Dates of</u> <u>Interview</u>
<u>R</u> <u>1</u>	F	Master	2 years	Nil	Christian Family Service Centre (CFSC)	Kwun Tong	Family Service	Single	20 Mar 2010
<u>R</u> <u>2</u>	F	Master	5 years	Nil	Integrated Family Service Centre	Chai Wan/ Kwun Tong/ Tin Shui Wai	Family service	Single	22 Apr 2010
<u>R</u> <u>3</u>	F	Bachelor	9 months	Student	Shelter	Private	Family service (abused women/man)	Single	29 Jun 2010
<u>R</u> <u>4</u>	M	Master	3 years	Family	Integrated Family Service Centre	Shatin	Family	Married	26 Jul 2010
<u>R</u> <u>5</u>	F	Bachelor	3.5 years	Varied fields	Integrated Family Service Centre	Kwai Fong	Family	Single	30 Jul 2010
<u>R</u> <u>6</u>	F	Bachelor	6 years	student	Tung Wah Group of Hospitals CEASE Crisis Centre	Private	Family (shelter)	Single	16 Sep 2010
<u>R</u> <u>7</u>	F	Bachelor	2.5 years	Family and Youth	Tung Wah Group of Hospitals CEASE Crisis Centre	Private (shelter)	Family service	Single	16 Sep 2010
<u>R</u> <u>8</u>	M	Master	4 years 10 months	Youth development	Integrated Family Service Centre	Tsing Yi	Family	Single	30 Sep 2010
<u>R</u> <u>9</u>	F	Bachelor	2 years	Nil	Christian Family Service Centre (CFSC)	Kwun Tong	Teenage and family	Single	04 Oct 2010
<u>R</u> <u>10</u>	F	Bachelor	6 years	Family	Christian Family Service Centre (CFSC)	Kwun Tong	Family	Married	04 Oct 2010
<u>R</u> <u>11</u>	F	Master	4 years	School	Social Welfare Department	Tuen Mun	Family Service	Married	4 Oct 2010

**Appendix D (i): The News of Accusation towards Social Workers
(2002-2011)**

Source: Wisenews

Key words used in searching: “社工 家暴”

Period: 1st of January to 30th December, 2002-2011

Researcher would quote around five news in each year.

Total: 36 news cuttings

Year	No. of news	Heading of the News	Points to be Accused	Sources	Date
2002	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
2003	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
2004	12	1. “學者批評部門協調不足”	<p>天水圍慘劇中的女事主事前曾經向社區組織及警方求助...事件暴露服務機構之間協調不足，缺乏危機意識。</p> <p>案中的女死者曾向社工、警察和區議員等尋求協助，但因為服務之間欠缺協調合作，以致接手處理的單位對個案的危機程度欠缺即時及準確的評估，認為有關當局應改善地區服務協調。</p> <p>學者又指出，現時缺乏有效而客觀的危機評估工具，因此社工在評估暴力程度及準確預測暴力會否再次出現上有一定的困難。</p>	大公報 A08 港聞	2004-04-14
		2. “社工「重案組」憑何不接此案? 團體抨社署危機應變不足”	<p>天水圍倫常慘案，多個團體及學者猛烈批評社署處理家庭問題的機制存在問題，包括將家庭糾紛當作普通問題處理、轉介個案協調不足、前線人員缺乏敏感度等，導致多宗被跟進的個案，最終釀成慘劇。</p> <p>立法會福利事務委員會會議上...多個婦女團體均指摘社署的危機應變不足...她批評政府將家庭問題當作普通問題處理，沒有提升至嚴重的社會問題而釀成慘劇。</p> <p>香港大學社工及社會行政學系教授周永新稱，雖然社署有提供轉介服務，但服務之間欠缺協調合作，令接手處理的單位可能對個案的危機程度缺乏即時及準確的評估。</p>		

2004	<p>3.萌死求助職員認定想攞綜援新移民轟社署冷漠無情</p>	<p>新移民婦女向本報投訴，指社署職員漠視其真正需要，一廂情願認定新移民只想申請綜援，未有為有輕生念頭的人提供適當心理輔導。</p> <p>陳女士坦言，那時自己想法很單純，真的以為社署可以幫助她，豈料她遇到的是無情冷待。「我跟那位接見的小姐說，我很辛苦，不知怎算，但她聽完之後，就問我是否想申請綜援，我說只想找人傾偈，但她的神態告訴我：「我哪有時間聽你講」，之後她為我登記資料，就着我回家等電話。」</p> <p>婦女中心協會麗閣中心主任羅櫻子表示，天水圍的倫常慘劇，只反映了問題的冰山一角，有服務使用者曾向她透露，致電社署熱綫所遭到的對待：「該個案因婚姻問題求助，但熱綫人員得知她是新移民，就說『你嫁來香港之前，都應該預計了這些問題』。」事後，社署並沒轉介服務</p>	<p>星島日報 A19 每日雜誌</p>	<p>2004-04-14</p>
	<p>4.死者曾求協助,專家稱無暴力社署評估錯誤累三命</p>	<p>社署熱線無人接聽不過，元朗區議員陸頌雄指出，天水圍日前發生的倫常慘劇，反映區內社區支援嚴重不足，事件只是冰山一角，而社署的求助電話經常「打唔通」，只有留言服務，令居民求助無門。</p> <p>社署支援不足，令居民求助無門</p>	<p>新報 A02 港聞 倫常慘劇</p>	<p>2004-04-14</p>
	<p>5.警加派督察監視家庭暴力設虐偶資料庫,加強前線與社工聯繫減悲劇</p>	<p>立法會社福界議員張超雄批評，政府部門在處理家庭暴力問題時各自為政，到了問題時又沒有部門負責，同時又質疑當局至今仍沒有一套完整處理家庭暴力政策文件。</p>	<p>文匯報 A23 香港新聞</p>	<p>2004-12-09</p>
	<p>6.天水圍滅門慘劇調查報告,轟當局未因應社區轉變,社署認</p>	<p>周永新昨在立法會上指出，天水圍區人口急劇增長，至超過 20 萬人時仍未設立一間家庭服務中心，只盲目根據個案數字提供區內服務。他又稱，整個元朗區共有 377 名社工，但「割裂」及「各自為政」的情況很明顯，福利專員與各福利機構開會時，只是「交換意見，認識下就算」，沒有就實質問題作出回應，故建議須有專員</p>	<p>文匯報 A16 香港新聞</p>	<p>2004-11-23</p>

		錯亡羊補牢	負責資源調動工作。		
			小組提 25 項改善建議: 小組在整份報告中, 共提出 25 項建議, 包括加強各部門及跨界別的合作、加強對家暴問題的專業培訓、提高前線員工的敏感度、建立死亡及嚴重個案檢討機制及彈性使用地區資源等。報告又建議, 社署應賦予福利專員更大權力, 調動區內非政府機構資源, 以應付緊急需要。		
2005	147	1. 被虐婦女報警多不受理 團體斥政府家暴政策「99度容忍」	<p>聯席統籌員鍾婉儀說: 「現時政府的『零度容忍』家暴政策實為『九十九度容忍』, 鋤弱扶強。比較其他國家的家暴政策, 本港現存的措施及服務明顯相形見拙, 可謂『三無』——無力、無財、無人。」她續說, 現時政府制度傾向重視維護家庭完整, 多於保障婦女人身安全... 本港專業人員培訓不足, 欠缺性別角度, 忽視被虐婦女的特質, 亦沒有專責的執法及司法人員, 是為「無人」。</p> <p>平等機會婦女聯席早前訪問了三十位受虐婦女: 調查亦顯示, 多數被虐婦女認為社工對處理有關問題的幫助不大, 例如很少主動協助婦女解決離家後的急切需要, 三十名受訪者中, 只有五人認為遇到好社工。有受虐婦女甚至認為, 社工傾向調解, 強調家庭完整, 勸導婦女回家, 但對婦女情緒支援不足, 間接或直接把她們推回暴力環境中。</p>	大公報 A18 港聞	2005-11-25
		2. 受虐婦女轟社署警方卸責 社工: 警不受理 警方: 社工拒作供	<p>去年今日, 天水圍發生轟動全港的家庭慘劇, 一家四口全成刀下亡魂, 政府事後承諾嚴謹處理家庭暴力個案。一年過去, 責難聲仍然不絕; 一名婦人哭訴, 於社會福利署辦事處遭丈夫虐打, 目睹事件的社工事後沒作供指證, 警方又稱證據不足, 勸喻她息事寧人, 令她要繼續在恐懼中度日。社署稱會認真跟進事件, 警方則表示事件已列作毆打案處理, 仍在調查。</p> <p>群福婦女權益會過去一年接獲 52 宗受虐婦女求助個案, 當中有受虐者投訴社工及警方處理不當, 包括勸喻她們息事寧人, 甚至怪責她們沒默默忍受丈夫的虐打. 她指摘</p>	香港經濟日報 A32 港聞	2005-04-11

		天水圍事件後，社署和警方處理家庭暴力問題時，仍是「傳統官僚」、「冥頑不靈」，又批評一年來，相關部門處理失當的情況愈來愈嚴重。		
	3.天水圍慘劇後，增防家暴意識	今日是天水圍天恒邨慘劇一周年，慘劇發生後，公眾及警方對家庭暴力個案意識均有所提高。 社署總社工主任蘇黃慧兒指，不少舉報個案性質不嚴重，如輕微碰撞已舉報，該署會列作高危個案處理。	東方日報 A17 港聞	2005-04-10
	4.團體抨當局處理家暴不當	群福婦女權益會指出，該會過去一年處理了 52 宗家庭暴力案，其中 25 宗個案被發現是因社工及警方處理不當所致，最嚴重的甚至有被虐婦女在與社署社工會面時，當眾遭丈夫毆打。 該會批評警方及社署至今仍未有汲取去年慘劇的教訓...「唔好成日各自為政，溝通問題多多，令受害人得唔到應有嘅保護。」	成報 A09 港聞	2005-04-11
2005	5.團體：社署處理家庭暴力無能	支援受虐婦女的團體指出，慘劇後 1 年內，共收到 52 宗來自全港、有關社工或警方涉嫌處理家庭暴力失當的個案，包括社工過早安排夫婦聯合輔導，警察勸退報警的受虐婦等。有婦女更聲稱在社署辦公室內被丈夫虐待而得不到協助。 群福婦女權益會主席廖銀鳳表示，慘劇事發後至今共處理過 52 宗來自全港，有關受虐婦女不滿當局處理手法的投訴，大部分不滿得不到住屋(48 宗)及領取綜援安排(23 宗)。 有 9 名婦女表示，在社署的維安中心內沒有日用品及食物供應。 另有 18 宗投訴是指社工的處理手法不恰當，其中 3 人在社工安排下與施虐者一同面談，有社工質疑這做法，指若在輔導初期便開始安排聯合面談，婦女未必會在施虐者面前講出真實情況，又或會激起施虐者的怒火，令婦女的處境更加危險。 廖銀鳳謂，各支援服務未有在水圍慘劇後改善，仍維持傳統的想法，希望保存家庭完整，未有考慮婦女安全。她批評社署署長「很無能」，無法推動其他部門一起對抗家庭暴力...	明報 A13 港聞 天水圍慘劇一周年	2005-04-11

2006	248	1. 漠視家暴教訓社署捱批	<p>樂富康強苑一對離婚夫婦因同居一室而釀成滅門慘劇，事件仍未能令社會福利署吸取教訓。單親母親面對婚變，囿於經濟與照顧孩子的壓力，無法解決住屋問題而向社署求助，社工竟建議求助者與分居丈夫同住。壓力團體直斥有關建議不合情理，無視求助者所需，擔心或令悲劇重演。</p> <p>三十三歲的林女士自小患有癲癇症，每日需服藥及定期覆診。年初與丈夫分居後，與五歲兒子暫住娘家。母子在成功申領綜援後即租住套房，惟新居地方狹小，林向社署社工求助恩恤安置，但社工上門家訪後認為沒有需要，更建議林搬返已分居丈夫住處居住。「明知我哋分咗居，仲叫我搬返去，有冇搞錯！」她坦言因病情需要，希望申請搬往較大的地方居住，不滿社工遲遲未有為其申請醫療評估。</p> <p>香港社區組織協會幹事施麗珊...批評社署經常未能為求助者提供適切協助... 社署應盡量向求助人提供協助，體恤申請人的困境，不應存在「懶懶閒」的態度，令原可解決的家庭問題最終演變成悲劇。</p>	東方日報 G01 投訴	2006-12-22
		2. 社署被轟「要見血才安置受虐婦」	<p>社會福利署以「有條件租約」計劃協助家暴受害人，遭多個社福機構批評過份「手緊」，平均每百名被虐申請人，只有4人獲批暫住公屋，並狠批社署「係咪要見血先肯幫人？」</p>	蘋果日報 A19 港聞	2006-11-29
2006		3. 求住臨居逾9成受虐婦遭拒	<p>社會福利署目前的「有條件租約計劃」，可協助正在辦理離婚的受虐婦女遷入臨時居所。惟有團體指出，不少受虐婦女被社署以無理的原因拒絕申請，包括證件留在家無法在申請時提供、沒有子女、已自行租屋等，有部分社工更要求受虐婦女先看精神科醫生，再由醫生推薦申請。團體認為，該些做法嚴重扭曲政策的本質。(P.S. 「有條件租約計劃」是讓正等候離婚判令、但無安身之所，又要撫養子女的人士，在短期內獲得臨時居所，即使沒有子女的家庭暴力受害人也可申請。)</p> <p>群福婦女權益會主席廖銀鳳表示，該會由2004年4月至今年11月，處理113宗被虐婦女申請「有條件租約計劃」個案，當中有108宗（逾九成半）被拒。</p>	文匯報 A19 香 港新聞	2006-11-28

	<p>4.申請綜援或公屋被多番阻撓,家暴受害人:社工幫倒忙</p> <p>預防家庭暴力事件固然重要,但為家暴受害人提供支援更加重要。雖然政府有關部門表示會跟進工作,協助家暴受害人,可是三位分別被丈夫遺棄和毆打的婦女,均指得不到應有的保障,連番向社工要求申請綜援或公屋時,卻被他們用沒有醫生證明、住址證明及來港不足七年的理由拒絕。</p> <p>社工通常是自己判斷受害人是否有資格申請《有條件租約計劃》,對於要求受害人要有精神科醫生證明,她認為十分荒謬。</p>	成報 A10 港聞	2006-11-28
	<p>5.多次更換社工報告錯漏百出家暴苦主轟社署警方</p> <p>樂富三屍案言猶在耳,再有問題家庭當事人,挺身指摘警方及社會福利署處理家庭個案時馬虎草率,常以家庭糾紛為由拒絕落口供,而處理個案的社工如車輪轉地更換五次,撰寫報告時又錯漏百出。</p> <p>張女士(假名)與結婚十四年的丈夫及一對年幼子女居沙田一個公務員宿舍,四年前因第三者介入令關係破裂。期間張女士不斷受情敵滋擾及丈夫的精神虐待,她至少四次報警求助,但警員並無為她尋求社工協助,更聽信其夫一面之詞,一度把她送往醫院精神科,但經診斷後證實她無精神病。...由〇二年至今,社署先後有五名社工跟進張女士個案。...負責撰寫社會福利調查報告的社工更連張女士的個人資料也寫錯,結果她要以三張紙羅列錯處再呈法庭,最後法官否決其夫的禁制令申請。</p> <p>群福婦女權益會主席廖銀鳳批評警員不應就家庭暴力案件充當判官,而社署社工也未必全都有能力處理家庭問題,應由特定的專業團隊集中處理有關個案。</p>	太陽報 A04 港聞	2006-11-22
2006	<p>6.鄧國威:社工不能24小時跟住,團體轟涼薄促檢討機制</p> <p>社會福利署長鄧國威表示,非常關注昨日發生的家庭慘劇,指即使有社工跟進個案,社工「不可能24小時跟住」。有團體批評鄧國威的說法涼薄,並認為社署要檢討現行處理家庭暴力個案的機制,防範慘劇再發生。</p>	明報 A04 港聞	2006-07-26
	<p>7.婦團怒轟疏忽職守殺妻慘</p> <p>群福婦女權益會發言人廖銀鳳指,自前年天水圍發生倫常慘劇後,社署處理家暴問題時仍欠缺危機評估。</p> <p>前線社工以至署長均缺乏處理家暴問題的</p>	太陽報 A06 港聞	2006-06-13

		劇三部門九宗罪	<p>意識。</p> <p>受丈夫虐待多年的阿群，忍無可忍下於○四年搬離公屋往庇護中心暫住，並去信房屋總署要求考慮其特殊情況與丈夫分戶，房署職員要求她叫社工寫推薦信，便會考慮其申請及加快輪候時間，但其社工卻指她未與丈夫申請離婚，未符合申請分戶條件而拒絕幫她寫推薦信。</p>		
2007	248	1. 社工欠專業訓練唔識幫, 抑鬱重症只知死路	<p>精神科專家批評現時本港的社工質素參差，形容為「樣樣訓練啲，但專門處理精神科案件就未有足夠評估能力」，建議當局提升社工的質素、擴大社區外展服務，避免同類事件再發生。現時醫管局的臨床心理學家及本港的社工，質素十分參差，人手亦缺乏，故建議增加數倍人手及再培訓，並容許公立醫院專科門診專責處理重性精神病患者，而輕度病者則交由私家醫生診所負責，達致分流作用。</p>	太陽報 A02 要聞	2007-10-15
		2. 屍案家庭 3 社工乏溝通 精神病患者主疑拒服藥無社工跟進	<p>D56 天水圍前日爆發母親掙子女落樓後再跳樓自殺的 3 屍慘案，揭出肇事家庭一家四口，但有 3 名社工分別跟進男、女戶主及一對子女，但疑社工之間溝通不足，負責患癌男戶主個案的醫務社工，對其妻患精神病竟不知情；女戶主一直抗拒服藥，出院後無社工家訪跟進，她亦拒絕親友協助，最終釀成無法挽回的悲劇。</p> <p>社福界立法會議員張超雄指出，慘劇反映現行機制有問題，提供個別服務的社福單位不清楚個案的家庭成員是否有接受其他支援服務，令個案不能得到全面幫助。</p>	明報 A06 港聞	2007-10-16
		3. 社工人手不足致悲劇重演	<p>元朗區議員張賢登表示，不同福利機構的社工，往往協調不足，導致未能及時支援部分受助者，而社署、房屋署、醫管局不協調的情況嚴重，導致服務拖延。</p> <p>立法會議員張超雄表示，自從○四年天水圍家庭慘劇發生後，當局在該區協助家庭的措施，仍未有明顯改善。</p>	星島日報 A06 要聞	2007-10-15
2007		4. 一家四口三社工跟進毫無溝通, 支援不足天水圍報	<p>今次慘劇中的一家四口，分別由三個部門的社工跟進，但仍然無法扭轉悲劇。</p> <p>消息人士批評，天水圍問題並非天意，滅門慘案檢討報告出籠三年後的今天，港府仍未吸取教訓，部門協調繼續欠佳，資源整合仍然欠奉，多項措施只是「蜻蜓點水」，結果是「瓣瓣都有人拈，但係瓣瓣</p>	蘋果日報 A02 要聞	2007-10-15

告措施 淪為空 談	都唔掂。」		
5.熱線周 日休息 支援不 足捱批	<p>自從 2004 年天水圍天恆邨發生 4 人死亡的滅門倫常慘劇後，區內 3 間綜合家庭服務中心設立了求助熱線；但記者嘗試致電時，發現只得一條熱線有人接聽，其餘均以非辦公時間為由轉駁至留言信箱，連 24 小時向晴熱線亦「線路非常繁忙」。</p> <p>華員會社會工作主任職系分會議主席梁建雄指出，今次事件顯示現行社署跟進個案服務出現「割裂」，例如處理綜援個案員工意識不足，未轉介個案；當個案離院後，醫務社工亦未有跟進；顯示有需要改善，加強處理個案的程序。</p> <p>除個案跟進問題外，天水圍 3 間綜合家庭服務中心的求助熱線嫌不足，例如周日休息，平日的深夜及凌晨亦停止服務</p> <p>立法會議員張超雄批評，事件再次反映社會服務資源不足，每個社工要處理 80 至 90 宗個案，無力深入輔導有需要家庭。</p>	明報 A03 港 聞 天 水圍慘 劇	
6.病發跳 樓者家 屬控訴 社工， 「如果 社工跟 足啲， 或者察 覺我個 仔唔 妥」	<p>又是精神病患者，又是有自殺前科，又是天水圍公屋... 慨嘆社工支援不足，以至兒子有自殺念頭也無人跟進制止。</p> <p>三屍慘案中，三名社工都無法制止悲劇。王父也有留意這宗新聞，更感同身受，他說：「你一講社工我就激氣。以前有個姑娘（醫務社工）跟進我個仔，但係個仔今年 6 月喺青山醫院出院後，就轉介咗畀另一個姑娘。接手嗰個姑娘同我講，仲未睇過我個仔嘅資料，就算有跟都做唔到啲乜。」</p> <p>「社工受過專業訓練，如果社工肯用心跟足啲，或者會察覺到我個仔唔妥，最少可以安慰吓佢。我覺得精神病患者好講彩數，好似個仔咁，曾經遇到個好社工，成日打電話同佢傾偈。但係其餘大多數都係循例，一個月上來家訪一次，問佢有冇食藥，唔夠 5 分鐘就走。」政府不是不緊張，而是死了人才緊張：「我個仔出咗事之後，民政處好緊張，打電話來問我有冇需要幫手。個孫女睇住阿爸跳樓，所以幼稚園安排咗個社工跟進。」王父說，做社</p>	蘋果日 報 A02 要聞	2007- 10-17

			會服務的人，應該付出多點愛心。		
2007		7. 社工須 改按章 辦事文 化	<p>有學者認為，今次悲劇除了反映支援精神病患者的資源不足外，也顯示出社工「按章辦事」、「唔見血唔急」的文化需作改善。</p> <p>浸會大學社工系講師邵家臻指出，除了資源不足外，也應留意社工有否陷於「按章辦事」文化。曾在水圍服務的他指出，區內問題家庭較多，社工工作壓力沉重之餘，易出現「拋波文化」，「好容易將人當做個案，將個案當做一個 file，只要未爆煲就好少理」。</p>	蘋果日報 A02 要聞	2007-10-17
2008	104	1. 綜合家 庭服務 中心預 防家暴 有心無 力	天水圍去年 10 月發生三母女墮樓慘劇，將近 1 年後，區內綜合家庭服務中心接獲的家暴求助個案有增無減，引起社福界關注全港 61 間中心現時側重個案輔導工作，致未能發揮預防家暴的功能，有違該類中心 3 年前成立的原意。	明報 A11 港聞特稿	2008-08-27
		2. 家暴受 虐婦投 訴社工 拒協助	<p>「好失望，沒有信心再求助。」現年 30 多歲的阿美（假名）06 年因家暴與丈夫分居，遂向西屯門綜合家庭服務中心的社工要求申請專為家暴受害人而設的「有條件租約計劃」，但以未正式離婚為由遭拒；及後阿美得悉自己合資格，只欠社工推薦... 受到前夫騷擾，阿美曾提出搬離原區，但社工堅持同區安置。</p> <p>阿美懷疑對方曾向前夫透露搬遷意願，以致前夫致電責罵她。該名社工亦曾表示，由於阿美未有報警，故對其家暴遭遇存疑：「她帶給我很大精神壓力，我怕她將我的事轉告前夫。」</p> <p>群福婦女權益會主席廖銀鳳批評，事件反映前綫社工缺乏家暴意識，無保障受虐婦女：「因沒報警而不當家暴，簡直是一個笑話。」</p>	香港經濟日報 A15 社會要聞	2008-04-04
		3. 家庭暴 力受害 人控 訴社署	有家庭暴力受害人昨日向申訴專員公署投訴社會福利署職員三宗罪，包括漠視受害人安全，擅自向其前夫透露她的去向、誤指受害人不合資格申請體恤安置及署方職	東方日報 A12 港聞	2008-04-04

		三宗罪	員以種種理由拒絕她申請子女交通津貼等。		
			目前入住庇護中心的她，向社署申請子女的交通津貼，卻又被職員以種種理由阻撓。她表明：「對社工好失望，有信心求助，見佢哋精神壓力好大，好驚。」		
2008		4. 四年前滅門案團體追究社工遭阻撓 社工註冊局被轟官官相衛	天水圍婦女金淑英滅門慘案事隔近四年，群福婦女權益會一直為死者投訴跟進其個案的社工失職。但該會昨炮轟處理投訴的社會工作者註冊局官官相衛，對投訴人諸多阻撓，包括要求她們負擔部份法律費用、聆訊被拖兩年，該會憤而放棄投訴以示抗議。有被虐婦女稱，悲劇過後，社工仍以「唔開心咪返大陸」等口脛「輔導」家暴受害人。 基層投訴人想獲法律協助障礙重重，但兩名被投訴違反專業操守的社工，卻獲兩名政府律師全程跟進。廖銀鳳狠批社工註冊局黑箱作業，「自己人保自己人嘅程度，重黑暗過投訴警察課」。 被虐婦女黎女士昨控訴社工依然麻木。她稱社署保護家庭及兒童服務課（俗稱重案組）社工只懂重複說：「唔開心咪返大陸囉」、「冇錢咪叫鄉下親戚寄落嚟接濟你啦」。她直斥社工無視家暴受害人需要，如在傷口上灑鹽。	蘋果日報 A16 港聞	2008-01-07
		5. 社工註冊局被指刁難 申訴人	求助人投訴社工，非罕見事情，重點是投訴時是否得到公平對待，避免「護短」情況出現。現年 30 歲，曾受家暴問題困擾的黎女士亦曾不滿負責其案件的社工，卻投訴無門。她表示，05 年因家暴問題向社工求助時，對方竟第一時間着她回鄉，不要回來，又曾向她說：「妳要投訴我便儘管投訴吧，我過往十多年都是這樣辦事的，但不要忘记妳正在爭取撫養權，而社工報告(對爭取撫養權)非常重要的。」	文匯報 A12 香港新聞	2008-01-07
2009	180	1. 接受社工輔導 攤牌後 無寧日 婚變爆 大鑊 湊仔公鎚	屯門湖景邨前晚發生的鐵鎚殺妻案，疑兇是街坊眼中疼錫兒子的「湊仔公」。 關注婦女權利的群福婦女權益會主席廖銀鳳直指這是一宗令人惋惜的家庭慘劇，雖然女死者及疑兇事前都有主動向社署求助，但仍以悲劇收場，值得當局認真檢討。	蘋果日報 A06 港聞	2009-12-16

	殺妻子	廖銀鳳解釋社署現時單靠社工面見，去評估家暴危機的做法不足。她指婦女提出離婚後仍與丈夫同住十分危險，建議當局增撥資源提供臨時住所，讓婦女暫時入住。她批評現行機制下，志願機構只會為曾被暴力對待婦女提供短暫住宿，非家暴個案婦女往往求助無門。		
2009	2. 家暴受害婦責社工懶理	<p>當日一句「我願意」換來一段終日遭拳打腳踢的惶恐婚姻，求助社工，社工卻處處推搪，「我幫唔到你」、「佢情緒好正常吖」，令家暴受害者求助無門。有婦女團體批評部份社工工作欠認真，導致因精神病引發的家庭慘劇不斷發生。</p> <p>39歲的阿芬01年從內地來港，未幾婚姻失敗返回內地，展開另一段婚姻，怎料丈夫好賭，輸光錢便對她拳打腳踢...她又向社工透露有自殺念頭，社工繼續懶理，只叫她簽一份「君子協議書」，承諾日後一旦想自殺，要馬上致電輔導熱線求助。群福婦女權益會主席廖銀鳳表示，部份社工處理家暴個案欠認真，即使求助者有明顯精神或情緒問題，該些社工更不會主動提供轉介。</p>	蘋果日報 A12 港聞	2009-06-24
	3. 社署涼薄拒助受虐婦孺	<p>本港近年發生多宗倫常慘劇，當局每在事後呼籲有需要人士尋求援助，但關注家暴受害婦女互助組織批評，社署社工跟進工作輕率，根本無助阻止慘劇發生。有個案身上只餘七十八元兼有自殺傾向，卻只被要求簽署承諾自殺會求助的「君子協定」就被打發離開；有高危家庭個案竟由實習社工單獨處理，專業知識及避免觸及受虐者心靈創傷的敏感度均有不足，隨時愈幫愈忙。</p> <p>不過，阿寶的個案卻由一名實習社工單獨處理，實習社工經常一問三不知，竟稱阿寶未離婚不能申請公屋分戶，不知道有條件租約的酌情處理安排，言語間又不時傷害到阿寶，如說她「都未被打到斷手斷腳」不能申請某些援助；與她到勞工處找工作時，知她嚴重失眠，竟稱「你都翻唔到覺，返日班夜班無問題啦」，加重她的情緒壓力。</p>	東方日報 A07 港聞	2009-11-02

		<p>4.家服社 工欠經 驗 家暴 倡交社 署重案</p>	<p>群福婦女權益會指出，過去 5 年有 5 宗家庭命案的事主曾求助於綜合家庭服務中心的社工，反映中心的社工在評估家庭暴力個案時經驗不足，令受害人得不到適當協助，有事主被當人球，有人則被社工誤導而放棄了公屋戶籍，會方要求改由社署「重案組」處理所有家暴個案。</p> <p>阿 Wing 受丈夫虐待，2007 年決定離婚，並由九龍搬到新界居住，她向新界的社署家庭服務中心要求社工協助，但社工指沒有個案紀錄，推說不能跟進；九龍中心的社工卻指她已搬到新界，應找新社工處理問題。最令阿 Wing 愕然的是，前夫要求社工安排與阿 Wing 見面，社工竟然游說她與前夫會面。她氣憤說：「前夫在過去數年毆打我不下 20 次，連警察也叫我不要再見他，社工是否判斷有問題？」</p> <p>廖銀鳳表示，這些個案顯示家服中心社工缺乏經驗，最終只會造成另一宗慘劇，她建議改由社署「重案組」（保護及家庭兒童服務課）處理所有家暴個案，更全面幫助有需要婦女。</p>	<p>明報 A10 港聞 特稿</p>	<p>2009- 05-11</p>
2010	120	<p>1. 家暴常 客殺妻 社署失 職</p>	<p>將軍澳丈夫涉嫌亂刀斬死妻子的倫常血案，涉案家庭曾兩度發生家暴，然而社署跟進後卻認為無嚴重暴力而結案，詎料一年後終演變成謀殺案。立法會議員批評社署的社區支援不足，致令本可避免的悲劇接連發生。</p>	<p>東方日 報 A22 港聞</p>	<p>2010- 07-13</p>
2011 (Till April)	15	<p>1. 逐漸變 質求助 個案險 「爆 鑊」 群福會 已非受 虐婦女 防線</p>	<p>經常狠批社工失職、懶理家暴受害人的群福婦女權益會，本是求助無門被虐婦女最後防線，近日卻出現內訌。前主席廖銀鳳去年「淡出」後，該會被指逐漸變質。有家暴受害人投訴，新上任的社工多次斥罵姊妹，曾直言「我呢個社工廢啲喎」，又試過就假日上班爭拗揚言「要告上勞工處」。</p> <p>阿萍向記者說：「我上群福都係想搵人開解吓，點知呢度個社工仲衰過社署。」</p>	<p>蘋果日 報 A15 港聞</p>	<p>2011- 04-04</p>

Appendix D (ii) – Public Accusation to social workers (2002-2011)
(English translated version)

2002 No news mentioned social workers

2003 No news mentioned social workers

2004

- Low sense in detecting the potential risks among the families
- Lack of cooperation with other helping professionals and governmental department
- Lack of a comprehensive risk assessment tools / policies/document to address Domestic violence
- Failing to recognize Domestic violence as a normal family disputes
- Lack of sensibility to alert the crisis in the society
- Social Welfare Department staff ignored the clients' actual needs
- Discriminate the clients who were new immigrants and subjectively regarded their motivation to seek help was to apply Comprehensive Social Security Allowance (CSSA)
- Social workers maltreated the victims
- No referral services were provided
- Community support was not enough
- Fragmentation and worked without connection among social workers, even within a district

2005

- Prevention measures was mismatch to governmental policies for “Zero-tolerance”
- Inadequate training for the professionals
- Only in shake of family unity, but not the safety of the abused women
- Neglected the gender-based matter in spousal abuse crisis
- Social workers tended to mediate, emphasize the importance of family unity and encourage the battered wife to return home
- Social workers and police were shirking their responsibility to tackle the battered women
- Social workers blamed their clients for their intolerance
- Hierarchy
- Social worker neglected the safety of the battered women, e.g. social workers witnessed the battering process by the abusers, however, they denied for nothing happened.

2006

- Social Welfare Department was unable to handle family abuse, e.g. social workers arranged the co-interview with the abusive couples which had not

assess well to the current situation/ lack of food supply and daily necessities to the victims in shelters

- Neglect the safety of the battered women
- Irrational arrangement: suggested the divorced couple to live together
- Inertial to help the clients for applying public estates, denied the date to apply medical assessment which was urgent for housing arrangement.
- Wrong document record to the clients
- Take side
- Lack of risk assessment
- Social Welfare Department and the front-line social workers lack of the sense on treating domestic violence

2007

- Social workers were unprofessional and lack of training to mediate cases
- Social workers were lacking of communication with their clients which leading to another tragedy happened
- No follow up provided for the clients who were detected with psychological disorder
- The cooperation between different local NGOs were inconsistent and not enough
- Insufficient manpower of social workers
- No clear improvement in assisting the clients and the operation with other disciplines
- Lack of sufficient resources assistance
- The 24-hour service hotline was not enough and always busy , then refer the clients to the message box
- Lack of sympathy
- Social services assistance was inadequate
- Inflexible and rigid handling attitude during the intervention process
- Refused to offer help to the service seeker, se.g. abused women
- Rejected clients' application to living, transportation subsidies, or entered the shelter.

2008

- Maltreated the clients by saying rudely to them, e.g. _if you feel unhappy to be here, you can return to mainland'
- _political coalition _and _accused corruption' between the social service agencies, Social Work Registration Boards and social workers in handling social workers' complaints from the public
- Social workers were insensitive to what bad situation the clients were staying
- Social workers take advantages verbally from clients' wound

2009

- The public complained the social workers: though the abusers and victims seek help from the social workers before the tragedy happened, it helplessness to

prevent spousal abuse. (Case: A male abuser killed his wife by using hammer as a weapon in Tuen Mun)

- Social workers were unqualified to conduct risk assessment and handle high risk cases, e.g. some cases were followed by social workers trainees who knew nothing clear to the cases
- Social workers were not sincere to help the clients
- Uncaring to the clients
- Social workers would not refer the urgent and risky cases to the related organization for better treatment
- Social workers were verbally abused their clients and ignored their actual needs, e.g. some clients complaints what social workers said to them like this, “we can not help you to apply some assistances since you are not hit so serious that lose your foot or hands...” if you can not sleep at night seriously, you can apply some job which can work at night.”, totally uncaring to their clients
- Social workers ‘working experience was not adequate which leading them to accept unprofessional assistance
- Social workers in IFSCs, lack of cases handling experience in spousal abuse cases
- Social workers always shuffled off their responsibility to take the cases

2010

- Another spousal abuse tragedy happened though this family had social workers to follow. Social workers end this case after assessing this case without serious violence. One year after, a tragedy happened with the battered wife got killed.
- Public blamed the Social Welfare Department for lacking of sufficient community assistances to every family.

2011

No specific blaming news for to the social workers in handling spousal abuse.

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