

For information on
20 May 2005

Sexual Minorities Forum

Family Services Provided by the Social Welfare Department

Introduction

This paper highlights the provision of welfare services by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to meet the needs of individuals or families, including those with a different sexual orientation.

Policy Objectives

2. The overall objectives of family welfare services are to preserve and strengthen the family as a unit, to develop caring interpersonal relationships, to enable individuals and family members to prevent personal and family problems and to deal with them when they arise, and to provide suitable services to meet needs that cannot be adequately met from within the family. These are achieved through a comprehensive network of family services, medical social services and support services such as clinical psychological services, etc. which are devoted to cater for the specific needs of individuals and families. Service users, regardless of their sexual orientation, will receive the same support catering to their needs.

Existing Services

Integrated Family Service Centres

3. There is an extensive network of 61 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) [40 operated by SWD and 21 by Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)] and two NGO-run Integrated Services Centres over the territory to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services to the needy, including those with a different sexual orientation and their families. Respecting the unique value and dignity of every individual, social worker will make professional assessment of

their welfare needs, formulate intervention strategies and provide appropriate services having regard to their unique personal or social circumstances.

4. Between April 2004 and March 2005, SWD-run IFSCs have taken on a total of 13 new / reactivated cases involving persons having issues relating to different sexual orientation. As at 31 March 2005, a total of 15 cases under this category are being handled by these centres. Services provided mainly include counselling service (e.g. on family relationship problem arising from their sexual orientation, frustration of being rejected / discriminated by others, etc), referrals for financial assistance (e.g. application for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance or charitable trust fund to resolve financial hardship caused by unemployment / underemployed, etc.) and housing assistance (e.g. application for Compassionate Rehousing, room transfer, etc.), arrangement of clinical psychological service / psychiatric treatment if needed, etc. It should be noted that there may be other service users / their family members approaching our service units for services without revealing their sexual orientation.

Medical Social Services

5. Medical social workers (MSWs) are stationed in public hospitals and specialist out-patient clinics to provide timely psycho-social intervention to patients and their families and help them cope with or solve problems arising from illness, trauma or disability. As a member of the clinical team, MSWs play an important role in linking up the medical and social services to facilitate patients' recovery and rehabilitation in the community. Major types of services provided by MSWs to patients and their families include counselling services through individual casework or group work approach, close collaboration with other medical and allied health professionals for psychosocial assessment and formulation of welfare plans, discharge planning and referrals for community resources, provision of tangible assistance such as waiver of medical charges, making recommendations for public housing and charitable trust funds, etc.

6. MSWs serving in the Kowloon Bay Integrated Treatment Centre, a specialist clinic for HIV/AIDS patients, provide counselling and support services for the patients there of whom some are having different sexual orientation, such as men having sex with men. MSWs work closely with the medical teams to provide comprehensive and one-stop services

for the clients to help them adjust to their illness and treatment. The range of services provided by MSW include psychosocial assessment, counseling on acceptance of illness and adjustment to treatment, other tangible assistance such as financial and housing assistance. In addition, MSWs also render counseling to the clients' partner on issues concerning adjustment to illness, risk reduction as well as relationship problem. Education and support group services will also be arranged for clients and their partners together with the medical team. Furthermore, MSWs also mobilize services from NGOs such as the Hong Kong AIDS Foundation, AIDS Concern and Society for AIDS Care, etc., to cater for the needs of the clients and their partners, as well as to strengthen their support network. Between April 2004 and March 2005, MSWs of SWD have taken on a total of 50 new / reactivated cases involving persons with a different sexual orientation. As at 31 March 2005, a total of 30 cases under this category are being handled by them.

Clinical Psychological Services

7. The Clinical Psychologists of the SWD provide psychological assessment and psychotherapy to individuals in need, to help them to overcome their crises and problems. In the past two years, there are altogether 26 cases falling into the category of sexual minorities receiving psychological assessment or treatment from the SWD Clinical Psychology Units. For most of these cases, the focus of treatment lies not so much in their sexual orientations but in their adjustment to their sexual orientations and interpersonal relationships. If the felt incongruence is not marked, and no formal psychiatric disorders are found, counselling from social workers may be sufficient. For those who have difficulty in accepting their sexual orientations and who manifest concomitant psychiatric problems, intervention by clinical psychologists/ psychiatrists is necessary. At present, treatment is mainly given individually but group (psychoeducational/ therapeutic) treatment can be arranged if there is a proven need.

Conclusion

8. Our policy is to provide social services to those in need, irrespective of their socio-economic status. Mainstream welfare services outlined in the paragraphs above are available to needy individuals or families, including persons with a different sexual orientation. Since many of the adjustment problems faced by the sexual minorities are

reactions to societal misunderstanding or discrimination, public education on non-discrimination and equal opportunities is important.

Social Welfare Department
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