

Comment on the positive function and dysfunction of social policy in hong kong. a...

[Sociology](#)



2. Definition of Social Policy Social policy primarily refers to guidelines and interventions for the changing, maintenance or creation of living conditions that are conducive to human welfare. Thus, social policy is a part of public policy that has to do with social issues. More specifically, it also considers detailed issues in policy and administration of social services, including policies for health, housing, education and social work, and needs and issues affecting the users of services, including poverty, old age, disability, and family policy.

To have more clearly speaking, terms of social needs, social integration and alienation will be elaborated. Social needs are people's needs which are socially defined according to social conditions. Yet we can still have a look at Hierarchy of 'Need' as a reference since social needs are part of the basic needs. According to A. H. Maslow (1943), there are a hierarchy of five sets of goals including physiological, safety, love, esteem and respect, and self-actualization. These goals are related to one another, being arranged in hierarchy of prepotency.

Social integration is referred to the process of building up a sense of community and social network amongst different community groups and individuals, hence people all live together in a peaceful and harmonious manner. It is the key element to social stability and can be achieved by promoting social mobility. Alienation is opposite to social integration, which means the feeling of being neglected or isolated and excluded from the rest. Such feeling of seclusion may destroy any sense of community or belonging and hence lead to social instability.

Various types of social policy are being implemented in a society, such as family policy, education policy, and healthcare policy and so forth. We will particularly focus on social policies which aim to improve human welfare and to meet human needs for health, education and housing.

3. Overview and Comment On Social Policy in Health Aspect

The health system of Hong Kong is considered as one of the best world-wide. It is divided into two parts, which are public health services and private health services. Our government heavily subsidised for the former services but citizens need to pay for the fee for the latter services.

The Department of Health executes health care policies and statutory functions so as to safeguard the health of the community through preventive and rehabilitative services. In order to achieve the goal, subvention for the Hospital Authority has been increased in recent years. Besides, it is expected that ageing population will increase, expectations of health care will rise, and medical costs will soar. Therefore, it is not difficult to foresee that health expenditure will become a heavy burden for our government.

Based on this problem, our government proposed to have a reform and some policies were implemented. I will look at two schemes in the following part.

3. 1 Early Health Care Voucher Pilot Scheme

Early Health Care Voucher Pilot Scheme (HCVS) was addressed in the Policy Address 2007 -2008. The Scheme is to give elders who aged 70 or above five health care voucher of \$50 annually. It aims to allow elderly to gain access to health care services in the private sector with subsidy and hence minimize the number of patients on the waiting list in the public sector.

Through the Scheme, the elderly can have additional choices on top of the existing public healthcare services which would continue to be provided, hence equity is encouraged as a universal access to medical services regardless of wealth or status is promoted. It will contribute as a positive function since social integration is encouraged. Besides, complaints are always arouse due to the long waiting list of the public sector, patients can now save their time by visiting private doctors with partially subsidization.

However, in order to further fulfill the social needs, eligibility for joining the Scheme should be relaxed from 70 to, for example, 65 years old and the subsidized amount of \$250 should be increased. It is because only small amount of people can benefit from the scheme and financial support given to them is not enough due to the high consultation fee of private doctors. 3. 2Health Care Reform A lot of people support there is an urgent need for the reform especially after consultation documents in health services and financing reforms during the past ten years.

One part of the proposed reform is tax deduction should be provided for private medical insurance premium or expenses. Our government is working out a supplementary healthcare financing option operating on a voluntary participation basis, containing insurance and savings components. For using this kind of method, it is believed that indemnification can be provided for citizens, which meets the second level of basic need in Maslow's Hierarchy Needs. Moreover, it can release the pressure on the public sector and hence ensure a high quality of services in public sector.

On the other hand, the reform should be taken into deep consideration, if health insurance plan is mandatory to all citizens, it may lead to dissatisfaction of some citizens and which will at last violate the aim of social policy. In short, providing both public health services and private health services can maintain competition in the private sectors which can ensure its quality. Giving welfare to our citizens can foster a sense of belonging and unity in the community. Subsidization in health care services given to the poor by various scheme can encourage redistribution of wealth and hence promote social mobility.

Though Hong Kong's health care standards are comparable to many major European cities and always being praised at, it will be a shame if our citizens cannot receive appropriate treatment due to the long waiting list problem.

Therefore, it has been urged to think of new schemes and more partnerships between the city's public and private hospitals in a bid to ease the burden on the public sector.

4. Overview and Comment on Social Policy in Education

Aspect Education has long been regarded as a long term method to stabilize the society and promote economic development in the city. In Hong Kong,

Education Bureau's Vision is to provide quality school education for our students to develop their potential to the full and to prepare them for the challenges in life. Hence, it promises to deliver professional services and ensure effective use of resources, and forge partnerships to promote excellence in school education. The Bureau is responsible for formulating, developing and reviewing policies, programmes and legislation in respect of education from pre-primary to tertiary level. Those policies formulated by the

Bureau will be divided into the four categories in the following part. .

1Kindergarten Our Government plays as a supporting role in pre-primary education, which provides in-service teacher training facilities, lower rent to non-profit-making kindergartens, permission of allocating kindergartens in public housing estates, and supplies financial assistance in the form of reimbursement rates to parents and kindergartens. 4. 1. 1Kindergarten Scheme In 1996 Policy Address, our government brought up the idea of allocating more financial assistance and providing additional training for existing kindergarten teachers through implementing Kindergarten Scheme.

One of its commitments is to ensure more than 40% of kindergarten teachers would complete the Qualified Kindergarten Teacher Education Course by September, 1997. Although such policies legislated by the government were reacted because of pressure from the public, it still can ensure the quality of preschool education to all. Besides, equity is advocated as good quality preschool education made available universally. Yet, the policies can only partially fulfill social needs because our government is always taking a supporting role only, a higher degree of support for preschool education is needed. . 1. 2 Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

The Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) provides fee subsidy for parents or legal guardians or registered custodians to meet towards school fees for pre-primary education of their children in the form of pre-primary education vouchers. Eligible children who attend nursery, lower or upper classes in eligible local non-profit-making kindergartens or Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres may benefit from PEVS.

The Scheme was launched in 2007 to promote the “3A’s” of early childhood education (ECE): affordability, accessibility, and accountability. The PEVS has three unique features. The first one is discriminating against profit kindergartens and hence to discourage social alienation. The second feature is promoting teacher professional development to ensure quality of preschool education so that the gap of quality between profit kindergartens and non-profit kindergartens can be minimized. Children from poor families can still have a qualified and good education.

The last feature is limiting parents’ choice to only non-profit schools. On one hand, it can promote freedom of choices; on the other hand, it can encourage social integration as children may get into the school they want regardless of wealth of the families. To conclude, the majority of the parents perceive positive impacts towards schemes launched by the government. Nevertheless, principals and teachers of kindergartens reported some implementation difficulties and more sufficient support are needed for parents.

4. 2 Primary and Secondary Education

The Government’s policy objectives are to provide a balanced and diverse school education that meet the different need of our students and help them build up knowledge, values and skills for further studies and personal growth.

4. 2. 1 Universal Basic Education

Compulsory primary education was introduced in 1971; afterwards, 9-year free education was implemented in 1978 to fully subsidize both primary and junior secondary education. Starting from the 2008/09 school year, senior secondary education is provided free through public sector schools.

In addition, with effect from the 2008/09 school year, the Government provides full subvention for full-time courses run by the Vocational Training Council for Secondary 3 leavers to offer an alternative free avenue for senior secondary students outside mainstream education. Advocating universal basic education can promote social integration as the poor can be able to receive education. Besides, it can equip students with ample knowledge and prepare them for entrance into the knowledge-based economy.

Hence, it will be easier for the poor to climb up the social ladder, without basic knowledge they may need to work as low-skilled workers for the whole life. 4. 2. 2 School Entrance System In 1978, two systems were used to determine whether the students can get into the secondary school.

Secondary School Entrance Examination is a selected mechanism by which students who scored higher would be selected for places given higher priority in their school choices. Feeder and Nominated System is a mechanism allowed feeder and nominated secondary schools to directly admit a certain proportion of their students from designated primary schools.

Through the Secondary School Entrance Examination, social mobility can be promoted as children from poor families can still have a chance to get into the best school. Oppositely, the other scheme would minimize the effect of promoting social mobility. It is because wealthy families can send their children to prestigious primary schools and hence let them to go into the linked prestigious secondary school. Hence, it may bias towards wealthy people. 4. 2. 3 Secondary School Places Allocation System Secondary School

Entrance Examination was later changed to Secondary School Places Allocation System.

It is a mechanism to allocate secondary school places to primary school-leavers. The allocation mechanism is designed in such a way so that it would help reduce public examination pressure on Primary six students and restore a more balanced education in primary schools. In addition, due regard is given to parental choices and, through regionalization, the need for students to travel long distances to schools is minimized. Moreover, it helps to achieve a degree of mixed ability intake at Secondary one level.

Therefore, social integration can be promoted in this way, nevertheless, it can never be promoted into full extent since well-off families can afford to move within the proximity of prestigious schools, for instance mid levels of Hong Kong Island, to get into those famous traditional schools. 4. 2. 4School Management Initiative Programme School Management Initiative Programme (SMI), introduced in 1991, provides participating schools with school planning/staff development days, approved collection of charges for specific purposes, and computer system for school administration.

It aims to attain an effective school system. In the spirit of the SMI, it was proposed that the school funding system should be able to meet the basic needs of students to ensure fairness across the school sector, provide schools with greater flexibility in the effective use of resources in order to achieve individuality. However, the teachers complained about the heavy increase of work load and reported that the accountability framework failed to make any impact on the quality of teaching.

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The focus of our government should be the attitudinal and behavioral change in those directly involved in delivery of services instead of structural and administrative change. 4. 3Tertiary Education The government increased the number of degree places in late 1970s and 1980s. Today, 14, 500 first-year first-degree places are provided to cater for about 18% of the 17 to 20 age group through the eight institutions funded by the University Grants Committee to further develop Hong Kong as a regional education hub.

Moreover, our government has financial support to students who are in financial needs. By increasing the number of degree places, equity is promoted as students can have a higher chance to admit into tertiary education. Providing subsidization to students can ensure that no qualified students are denied access to higher and post-secondary education due to a lack of financial means. Besides, it can improve the standard of living as the rate of illiteracy is lowered and hence stimulate economy of the city due to the increase in competitiveness.

However, demand of post-secondary education is progressively increasing, policies, which are being implemented, still cannot meet the social needs. 5. Conclusion Based on the review above on the social policies in Hong Kong, we can see that each social policy has its positive functions and dysfunctions. With regard to the three aspects in social policy, there is much room for improvement. But at least, our government is working hard to improve the conditions of our society and paying effort to meet social needs, promote social integration and discourage alienation.