

For discussion on
17 July 2017

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE**

**Managing Work-Related Stress
in the Civil Service**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the assistance provided to civil servants for managing stress at work.

Background

2. In face of the rising expectations and changing needs of the community, the Civil Service must continue to improve its services and efficiency to keep up with the times. When accustomed to and dealing with changes, civil servants sometimes may have to face some stress arising from work, and some have to seek assistance to cope with stress.

3. The Government adopts a two-pronged approach to help civil servants cope with stress at work. On the one hand, the Government provides professional counselling services to staff in need. On the other hand, as a preventive measure, the Government organises training and educational programmes to help staff develop the necessary skills for managing stress and to promote a balanced and healthy lifestyle. A brief account of these measures is given below.

Counselling Services

4. Since 2002, Civil Service Bureau (“CSB”) has been providing a hotline counselling service scheme (the “Scheme”) to offer professional counselling services to help staff cope with stress arising from work and their personal problems. CSB currently engages Christian Family Service Centre to provide counselling services to the staff of some 60 bureaux and departments (covering all bureaux and departments within the Government except those

mentioned in paragraph 6 below which have their own dedicated departmental counselling services). The services are available to all the 85 000 or so staff, including Non-Civil Service Contract staff, of the bureaux and departments concerned. The services provided under the Scheme include –

- (a) telephone counselling service from 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, and from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, except public holidays. Telephone calls outside the service hours are answered by a paging service and counsellors will return call as soon as possible;
- (b) face-to-face counselling by experienced counsellors or clinical psychologists for staff who require the service;
- (c) referral to appropriate bodies if the service required is not covered by the Scheme. These bodies include public and private institutions providing psychiatric treatment, consultation and other welfare services; and
- (d) workshops to provide practical tips to staff for coping with stress from work and developing a positive attitude to life.

5. In 2016, about 500 telephone calls were received under the Scheme from about 290 staff. Around 490 telephone counselling sessions and 300 face-to-face counselling interviews, and about 30 clinical psychology appointments were conducted for the staff. Among those cases, about 55% were work-related problems such as relationship with supervisors and colleagues, workload, job security, work changes, etc. The remaining cases were related to personal problems such as health, family or financial issues. According to feedback from the users, the services were useful and effective in helping them cope with stress. From 2014 up to the first quarter of 2017, about 130 workshops on practical tips for coping with work-related stress were organised for around 2 300 participants to provide them with practical information.

6. Other than the Scheme, 11 departments provide dedicated counselling services to their 10 000 staff. Among these departments, the counselling teams of Correctional Services Department, Fire Services Department, Hong Kong Police Force, Immigration Department and Social Welfare Department provide their respective staff with counselling services such as interviews with counsellors or clinical psychologists, while Customs and Excise Department, Department of Health, Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, Hongkong Post, Housing Department and Transport Department have engaged

professional counselling agencies to provide hotline counselling services to their staff.

7. To strengthen the provision of counselling services to civil servants, a professional clinical psychologist has been employed by Department of Health to provide clinical psychology services to civil service eligible persons¹ (“CSEPs”) at the Families Clinics since March 2016. Professional counselling services are provided by the clinical psychologist to help CSEPs in need and referred by doctors of the Families Clinics to ease work pressure and manage stress arising from work and life in a positive manner. The services are well-received and will be enhanced by two additional clinical psychologists starting from 2017-18. The recruitment exercise of the two clinical psychologists is underway. When the posts are filled by the fourth quarter of 2017, more individual counselling sessions and educational activities will be provided by the clinical psychologists for CSEPs.

8. Civil servants may apply for time-off from duty for receiving counselling services provided by clinical psychologists of the Families Clinics. With effect from 1 July 2017, the time-off arrangement has been extended to cover counselling services provided to civil servants by clinical psychologists during working hours under the Scheme referred to in paragraphs 4 to 5 above and those dedicated counselling services provided by the 11 departments mentioned in paragraph 6 above.

Training and Educational Programmes

9. As a preventive measure, we encourage supervisors to get to understand more about the problems faced by their subordinates in their daily work, and provide timely assistance to them. At the same time, we will organise different training programmes and educational activities to equip staff with the necessary skills for managing stress and to promote a balanced and healthy lifestyle. These programmes and activities aim to –

- (a) help participants better understand the causes and consequences of stress, and enhance their capability to cope with stress positively;
- (b) introduce to participants effective measures and simple skills for coping with stress and achieving a more balanced and healthy lifestyle; and

¹ Civil service eligible persons include civil servants, pensioners and their eligible dependants.

- (c) introduce to participants skills that can be applied in work situations to support colleagues in their teams.

Examples of these programmes and activities are outlined below.

Enhancing Capability in Stress Management

10. The Civil Service Training and Development Institute (“CSTDI”) organises different seminars and workshops to enhance civil servants’ resilience when facing stress and their capability in overcoming challenges at work. These include programmes to strengthen staff’s understanding of emotional, psychological and physical wellness, programmes on customer service skills, complaint resolution, handling of aggression and violence, etc. From 2014 to the first quarter of 2017, about 11 000 officers participated in these training programmes. In addition, CSTDI provides web resources on work-life balance and positive life-style at its e-learning portal for civil servants.

11. Different departments also organise training programmes to meet the specific operational needs of their staff. For example, Hong Kong Police Force organises various training programmes on stress management, psychological skills and counselling skills for police officers at different levels, such as “Management of Stress-related Problems in Subordinates and Counselling Skills at Inspector Continuation Training”, “Psychological Skills Training for Police Communication Officers”, “Positive Psychology in Action Workshop”, etc. Social Welfare Department likewise organises diversified training and educational activities to strengthen its staff’s resilience against stress and build a positive attitude towards life, such as “Workshop on Managing and Enhancing Personal Effectiveness at Work”, “Quotients Enhancement with Positive Thinking and Working Attitude for Social Security Staff”, “Adventure-based Training on Managing Stress”, etc.

Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle

12. Departments organise educational and recreational activities to promote balanced and healthy lifestyle. For example, Hongkong Post organises wellness programmes such as “Laughter Yoga” to strengthen the physical, mental and emotional health of its staff. Leisure and Cultural Services Department conducts workshops on “Positive Psychology” to train their frontline staff how to apply positive psychology to enhance personal well-being. Hong Kong Police Force arranges a wide range of activities to promote physical and mental wellness, work-family balance and healthy life-style amongst their staff, including a 5-year programme that started in 2014 to promote psychological wellness, and an on-going programme to encourage

staff members and their families to seek help from departmental welfare officers when in need.

Promotion of healthy and safe workplace

13. In the context of promoting occupational safety and health in the civil service, CSB has promulgated guidelines on personal safety at work to help bureaux and departments compile departmental guidelines for dealing with situations that affect their staff's personal safety, taking into account their specific operational circumstances and requirements. In addition, CSB organises service-wide activities on a regular basis targeting at all civil servants to promote a healthy work environment, including seminars to help staff develop the necessary skills for coping with stress at work. From 2014 to the first quarter of 2017, about 4 300 officers attended 22 such seminars.

Advice Sought

14. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Civil Service Bureau
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