

Section 2

Family Background And Dynamics

2.1 Introduction

In the previous profiles, the family background of the youth population was incorporated in the section on demographic characteristics. The topic is expanded and treated as an independent section in this profile with the purpose of providing more detailed statistical information regarding the family characteristics and dynamics of the young people in Hong Kong.

2.2 Household composition

Table 2.2.1 compares the household composition of the population over a period of 10 years.

Table 2.2.1: Domestic households by household composition, 1986-1996

Household composition	1986 %	1991 %	1996 %
One person	12.9	14.8	14.9
One unextended nuclear family	59.2	61.6	63.6
One vertically extended nuclear family	11.9	10.7	9.9
One horizontally extended nuclear family	2.1	1.8	1.2
Two or more nuclear families	6.2	4.8	4.8
Related persons forming no nuclear family	4.8	4.3	3.3
Unrelated persons	2.1	2.0	2.2
Households composed only of persons who do not usually live there	0.8	--	--
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Census and Statistics Department (1996a)

It can be seen that the majority of domestic households consisted of one unextended nuclear family, and that the proportion had increased from 59.2% in 1986 to 63.6% in 1996. The proportion of various extended nuclear family households had however decreased over the same period.

Table 2.2.2 gives the details of the household composition of the youth population in Hong Kong.

Table 2.2.2: Youth population by age and household composition, 1996

Household composition	Age							Total
	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30 and over	
One person	0	0	196	2716	15255	25571	233168	276906
One unextended nuclear family	234190	296662	350151	327083	303003	323553	2321481	4156123
One vertically extended family	46544	45393	50544	51433	58367	63702	518960	834943
One horizontally extended nuclear family	7034	5957	4711	4444	6658	12268	56898	97970
Two or more related family nuclei	49646	29959	20337	18105	34520	59778	317254	529599
Two or more unrelated family nuclei	183	168	133	135	218	456	1370	2663
Non-family nucleus with related and/or unrelated persons	1760	2228	3608	10077	28799	42876	158578	247926
Total	339357	380367	429680	413993	446820	528204	3607709	6146130

Source: Census and Statistics Department

2.3 Household size

The 1996 Population By-census Report noted a trend towards smaller household over the past years. The average household size decreased from 3.7 in 1986 to 3.4 in 1991 and 3.3 in 1996. The proportion of households with 6 persons and over also dropped drastically from 16% in 1986 to 10.9% in 1991 and 8.2 in 1996.

Table 2.3.1 gives detailed information about the household size of the youth population in 1996.

Table 2.3.1: Youth population by age and household size, 1996

Household size	Age							Total
	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30 and over	
1	0	0	196	2716	15255	25571	233168	276906
2	3374	4723	7053	11273	34467	98418	554630	713938
3	68644	49665	51137	49335	61358	97273	740310	1117722
4	115516	147775	164797	140870	118832	117682	977600	1783072
5	81358	105389	122068	115213	110439	93622	627376	1255465
6 and over	70465	72815	84429	94586	106469	95638	474625	999027
Total	339357	380367	429680	413993	446820	528204	3607709	6146130

Source: Census and Statistics Department

2.4 Family relationship

According to a telephone survey conducted by The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups in 1993 of 540 young people aged 15 to 29, most of the respondents characterized their family life as 'happy'. The findings were supported by a

questionnaire survey conducted by the same agency of 2,087 school youth aged 11 to 19 in 1994 (See Table 2.4.1).

Table 2.4.1: Youth's perception of family life

	FYG (1993a)		FYG (1994c)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Very happy	N.A.	N.A.	282	13.6
Happy	390	72.2	901	43.4
Average	130	24.1	783	37.7
Unhappy	10	1.9	87	4.2
Very unhappy	N.A.	N.A.	25	1.2
Don't know	5	0.9	N.A.	N.A.
Total	535	100.0	2078	100.0

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1993a, 1994c)

In terms of relationship, the 1994 study also found that most of the respondents were quite satisfied with their relationships with their parents and siblings (See Table 2.4.2).

Table 2.4.2: Family relationship of respondents

	No.	%
Relationship with siblings		
Very good	224	11.6
Quite good	910	47.2
Average	700	36.3
Quite bad	66	3.4
Very bad	27	1.4
Total	1927	100.0
Relationship with father		
Very good	315	15.2
Quite good	743	35.9
Average	808	39.1
Quite bad	114	5.5
Very bad	41	2.0
N.A./No comment	47	2.3
Total	2068	100.0
Relationship with mother		
Very good	485	23.5
Quite good	933	45.3
Average	528	25.6
Quite bad	67	3.3
Very bad	20	1.0
N.A./No comment	28	1.4
Total	2061	100.0

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994c)

Table 2.4.3 summarizes the frequency of conflicts between the respondents and their family members from the same study.

Table 2.4.3: Youth's conflicts with family members

	No.	%
Conflicts with siblings		
Very often	74	3.8
Quite often	310	16.1
Average	860	44.6
Quite few	514	26.7
Very few	169	8.8
Total	1927	100.0
Conflicts with parents		
Very often	241	11.6
Sometimes	1121	53.9
Very few	527	25.3
Never	192	9.2
Total	2081	100.0

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994c)

2.5 Parenting style

Regarding parental control, the 1994 study found that the young people did not in general feel that their parents were too harsh on them. Another telephone survey conducted in 1996 of 525 young people aged 10 to 24 by the same agency also came up with a similar finding (See Table 2.5.1) .

Table 2.5.1: Youth's perception of parental control

	FYG (1994c)		FYG (1996a)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Very harsh	81	3.9	30	5.7
Harsh	431	20.7	143	27.3
Average	1271	61.2	170	32.5
Not harsh	249	12.0	165	31.5
Not harsh at all	46	2.2	13	2.5
Don't know/Hard to say	N.A.	N.A.	2	0.4
Total	2078	100.0	523	100.0

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1994c, 1996a)

The 1996 report also noted that the young people interviewed preferred to talk to their mother more than to their father, and that the mothers were in general more

willing to share their feelings with their children than the fathers (See Table 2.5.2 and 2.5.3).

Table 2.5.2: Youth's choice of listener: Father or mother

	No.	%
Mother	290	55.4
Father	57	10.9
Both	119	22.7
Neither	32	6.2
Don't know	17	3.3
N.A.	8	1.5
Total	523	100.0

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1996a)

Table 2.5.3: How often did parents share their feelings with respondents

	Father		Mother	
	No.	%	No.	%
Often	50	10.3	88	16.9
Sometimes	158	32.6	269	51.5
Never	277	57.1	158	30.1
Don't know	0	0.0	8	1.5
Total	485	100.0	523	100.0

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1996a)

While the respondents in general felt that their parents did know them well, the positive attitude decreases with level of education (See Table 2.5.4).

Table 2.5.4: Youth's perception of whether their parents knew them well (N=499)

	Education level			Overall
	Primary and below	Secondary	Post-secondary	
Very well	32.9	9.0	1.9	12.0
Quite well	62.0	65.4	65.5	64.9
Not very well	5.1	21.2	26.7	19.2
Not at all	0.0	4.4	5.8	3.8
Total (%)	15.9	73.7	10.4	100.0

Source: The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1996a)

2.6 Missing persons

Although not direct measures in themselves, statistics on missing persons provide some sense of the problems that the young people are facing in relation to their family life from another perspective. Table 2.6.1 shows the number of missing persons over a five year period:

Table 2.6.1: Missing persons by age and sex, 1992-1996

Year	Under 2		2-6		7-15		16-20		21 & over		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1992	7	10	42	27	1338	1891	258	643	920	1097	2565	3668
1993	4	1	46	45	1301	2160	289	738	978	1249	2618	4193
1994	3	6	38	40	1088	1924	277	682	1057	1283	2463	3935
1995	10	7	39	32	1034	1919	252	615	926	1017	2261	3590
1996	13	4	34	34	1017	2133	213	570	898	816	2175	3557

Source: Police Public Relations Branch

It can be seen that for the age groups between 7 to 20, the number of missing persons did not show any significant changes over the years.

According to the figures provided by the Police Public Relations Branch, of those missing persons aged under 16 found, 984 in 1994, 709 in 1995, and 540 in 1996 were established to be running away from home. Table 2.6.2 summarizes the reasons cited by them.

Table 2.6.2: Reasons of running away from home for young people below 16, 1994-1996

Reasons	1994	1995	1996
Family dispute	335	455	460
Lack of parental supervision	550	181	9
Truancy	76	53	56
Desire for independence	23	20	15
Total	984	709	540

Source: Police Public Relations Branch

It can be seen that the most frequently cited reason for the young people to run away from home was family dispute.

2.7 Summary observations

Two general observations may be drawn from the above review:

First, it can be seen that overall speaking, the majority of the local youth still

perceive their family life to be a happy one in terms of their overall impressions and in terms of their self-assessment of their relationships with their parents and siblings. However, more systematic studies may be needed to see if there are significant changes in these aspects from the longitudinal perspective.

Furthermore, one should note that the family performs many functions as a social institution. To say that the youth population are quite happy with their family life does not necessarily mean that the family has been successful in performing other functions such as socialization or providing support for the younger generation when needed. With respect to this, section four, for example, examines the help seeking pattern of the youth population in greater details.

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