

**Consultancy Services for
the Evaluation Study on the
Pilot Scheme on Social Work Service
for Pre-primary Institutions**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
of the FINAL REPORT**

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1.1 Introduction

The “Pilot Scheme on Social Work Service for Pre-Primary Institutions” (the Pilot Scheme) was launched in the 2018/19 school year in response to the increase in child abuse and neglect cases and family tragedies identified in Pre-primary Institutions (PPIs) in recent years. These children lacked the ability to protect themselves. For early identification of and to provide assistance to pre-primary children and their families with welfare needs, social work service for PPIs was designed to fill this gap. The Pilot Scheme has been implemented in three phases commencing from February 2019, August 2019 and August 2020 respectively. Upon full implementation, there are a total of 57 social work teams (i.e. 35 full-teams and 22 half-teams, including 17 teams formed under consortium) involving 41 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as service operators, serving 725 PPIs.

The Consultancy Services for the Evaluation Study on the Pilot Scheme (the Evaluation Study) began in February 2020. The interim report and final report were submitted to the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in early 2021 and early 2022 respectively to provide an overview on the findings, key success factors as identified by this study with service operators (including supervisors of social work teams and their social workers), teachers/child care workers (CCWs), and PPI principals/supervisors, so that recommendations on feasible and cost-effective service model(s) would be made and shed light on the way forward of the service. As of December 2021 the consultancy team collected questionnaires from social workers (N=234), supervisors of social work teams (N=37), PPI principals/supervisors (N=504), teachers/CCWs (N=2,397) and parents/carers (N=678) qualitative interviews with supervisors of social work teams (N=33) and social workers (N=116), longitudinal study on case development (N=60) and qualitative interviews with supervisors of Family and Child Protective Services Units on service collaboration (N=4). On top of the above, service figures provided by social work teams of Phase 1 (covering from February 2019 to December 2021), Phase 2 (covering from August 2019 to December 2021) and Phase 3 (covering from August 2020 to December 2021) of the Pilot Scheme to SWD were also incorporated in this study.

1.2 Overall Comments

1.2.1 Performance on Output and Outcome Standards

For different reasons (such as the social unrest in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021), majority of service operators for all three phases were unable to achieve all the output indicators (OS) during the initial phase upon their implementation of the Pilot Scheme. They were not able to achieve most of the required output standards, including the number of cases per team (OS1), the number of direct contact hours (OS3), and the number of cases closed having achieved the agreed goals per team (OS4). Yet there was remarkable improvement upon the second year of their services. On the number of cases (OS1), some of them were not able to achieve the required level throughout the implementation of the Pilot Scheme. Nevertheless, when combining the

two figures on number of cases (OS1) and the number of potential cases (OS2) (which was regarded by SWD as “mutually exchangeable”), most of them were able to meet the required standard. Besides, majority of the social workers agreed with the existing outcome and output indicators as set out by SWD except the one on “direct contact hours” (OS3), and viewed that some of their time spent other than providing services to their active case/ potential cases should also be included in the calculation.

A significant variation on the OS performance of service operators is noted, which is apparently related to the orientation, experience and service delivery of individual supervisor/ social worker of social work teams when implementing the service, instead of the differences on the background of children PPI that they are providing services.

1.2.2 Early Identification and Working with Unmotivated Parents

Among all social worker respondents, there were less than half of them considered having a mechanism to assess the needs of children (48.1%) and visiting (including home visiting) (31.6%) as something effective in assessing the welfare needs of children. From general observations in the qualitative interviews with supervisors of social work teams and the qualitative interviews with supervisors of Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs), majority of social workers showed their well understandings on the concept of child protection. Yet, some of them seem do not have a full understanding of the aims and objectives of the Pilot Scheme, and their services provided were not focused precisely on child protection.

From the sharing with supervisors of social work teams, the consultancy team is able to conclude that majority of them have formulated a mechanism (i.e. early identification, making assessment, intervening potential child abuse cases) which they found to be effective in implementing the early identification, prevention, and remedial service of child protection work in PPIs. They had developed a series of strategies to engage unmotivated parents as well as identifying and formulating the most essential social work activities during suspension of classes owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective early identification of cases by the “impression” of social workers was common adopted among service operators. These impressions mostly come from their previous social work professional experiences and experience in working with clients in PPIs. They also maintained frequent and effective communication with other professionals like On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS), Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs), etc. The key successful indicators will be presented in the following sections and recommendations will be made in this report.

1.2.3 Case Assessment and Support to PPIs during Non-stationing days

During non-stationing days, most of the social workers would make phone contacts with parents, which were the most common ways of making assessment of children with welfare needs. They would also arrange case discussion with their supervisors on a need basis. Yet, it was found that most supervisors of the social work teams did not regard home visit or face-to-face contact by their social workers with parents as an essential means to make assessment. There were also relatively less supervisors of social work teams considered it necessary, or regard it as essential or effective to have any mechanism in supporting PPIs or conducting assessment on the welfare needs of children and their families during non-stationing days. This is consistent with the qualitative interviews in which the consultancy team has the impression that there is relatively less service operators having developed a concrete guidelines nor clearly written down the mechanism for social worker to follow, especially in rendering support to their matched PPIs during non-stationing days.

1.2.4 Matching Mechanism with PPIs

Less than half of the supervisors of social work teams from the quantitative data indicated that service providers were satisfied with the existing matching mechanism. Together with the observations from qualitative data, supervisors of social work teams considered the matching mechanism being adopted in the Pilot Scheme that required service operators to contact and match with PPIs by themselves and to fulfil both the number of PPIs and the number of children to be difficult and time consuming. Nevertheless, they did not have a strong desire to make any change and preferred to maintain the status quo, as they considered that they have already established a work rapport and relationship with their matched PPIs notwithstanding the fact that some of the social work team supervisors expressed frankly that they wished to change some of their PPIs having matched for different reasons. This may relate to their expressed wish to continue operating this service upon service regularisation without requiring to submit another bid for operating this service owing to the possibility of unsuccessful bid.

Qualitative comments from colleagues of FCPSUs indicated that it would be much effective to collaborate with service operators on a district basis to facilitate better service collaboration, as it was difficult to collaborate with a lot of social work teams from different service operators owing to their different and unique ways, practice and characteristics in delivering their services, especially when handling child protection cases.

Another difficulty arises from the current matching arrangement was the expectation of PPIs on this service, variation in the size of PPIs (with relatively large and small number of children), the changing number of children enrolled for individual PPI, as well as the closure of individual matched PPIs and newly set up PPIs over the years. According to the supervisors of social work teams, there are some PPIs being more motivated to receive the services while some are not owing that the objectives and the activities to be

delivered under the Pilot Scheme are not the same as they expected. Some supervisors of social work teams also informed that there were individual PPIs having expressed that they might terminate their service agreements and match with other service operators owing to cooperation issues. Upon closure of individual PPI, concerned service operators would be required to identify and find a new PPI not having joined this service to match with as a substitution. On top of the above, there were also some newly opened PPIs having commenced operation during the implementation of the Pilot Scheme and which may require for the service, but unable to be matched with any service operator owing to the restriction on the number of matched PPIs per social work team. Some PPIs also became not eligible owing that they were rejected by the Education Bureau (EDB) to join the Kindergarten Education Scheme although they were accepted to join during last school years. Service operators were then required to match with another PPI as substitute, which made the matching quite complicated.

Notwithstanding this, there are still positive elements on maintaining self-matching, such as better coordination within the same NGO in ensuring the implementation of the service especially when there were different views from the social work team and the matched PPI, same religious background guiding the delivery of social work service, the long-term operation for individual PPI with the social work team with trust working relationship etc.

1.2.5 Possibility to Adopt District-based Approach when Regularising the Service

In view of the above and considering the views from service operators, the consultancy team recommends SWD to further publicise the importance of child protection elements of this service to all service operators as well as the stakeholders (including PPIs), and to review the existing output/outcome requirements (especially related to the calculation of “Direct Contact Hour”) to accurately reflect casework activities on child protection being carried out by social workers. Besides, to enable a smooth implementation of the service and upon balanced the pros and cons, SWD is suggested to consider revamping the existing matching arrangement of service operators with PPIs, and to implement the service on a district basis. Matching arrangement should be centrally coordinated by SWD as far as possible. On the manning ratio of the district based team, it is proposed to continue adopting one social work team with one supervisor and eight social workers providing service to about 3 200 children of all their matched PPIs of their serving area. Despite the number of PPIs served is recommended to be maintained at about 16 PPIs per team, there should be a flexibility to increase the number if needed.

In a long run, District-based team could also solve the problem on the addition/deletion of matched PPIs, as district-based team are required to provide services to all PPIs within their serving area. SWD is suggested to consider providing additional resources for social work teams with extreme high number of children on a pro-rata basis. Say, if the number of children served by the team is 3 600 (i.e., 400 higher than the original number), SWD may consider providing one additional social worker to this team.

1.3 Key Findings

1.3.1 Service Delivery – Casework Services

1.3.1.1 Identification, Assessment and Engagement of Children with Welfare Needs

The use of questionnaire to identify families with welfare needs and potential child abuse cases were found to be effective. Questionnaires developed from child abused children and family risk factors for example, adding points to detect parents with mental health issue, children with special educational needs, was more effective in identifying potential child abuse cases. Service operators also used questionnaire to make assessment of parenting stress and/or parenting styles.

According to service statistics, majority of referrals for new/reactivated cases and new potential cases were through self-approach by family members, PPI personnel and out-reach efforts by social workers.

Regular observation of children in class (88.73%), regular talking to parents (78.31%), and regular chatting/meeting with teachers/CCWs (74.65%) are the three major strategies adopted by service operators for exploring the welfare needs of children.

Arranging phone contacts as well as conducting home visits to class absentees and during class suspension was indicated in the questionnaire as something which is effective in doing an assessment.

Engagement of unmotivated families through distribution of tangible gifts were found to be effective in engaging them.

Service operators also found it effective to use groups and programmes to engage families and let families understand social work service.

1.3.2 Handling of High Risk/Suspected Child Abuse Cases

After making an initial assessment to cases with child abuse elements, service operators will consult the FCPSU of their respective area that the PPI is located.

Some service operators would contact Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) (especially for cases receiving active follow-up by IFSC) for case consultation or collaboration.

If a suspected child abuse case is identified, a multidisciplinary case conference (MDCC) will be conducted after consultation with FCPSU.

For cases concerning parenting skills or families with other welfare needs, some service operators would continue to provide services to these families.

1.3.2.1 Observations/Recommendations

Service operators generally consider the existing model of service delivery as effective in early identification of potential child abuse cases, crisis intervention, helping the needy families and encouraging families to seek help. Service operators also consider the use of case based approach and stationing mode at PPIs useful and effective to prevent child abuse. Case based approach is also able to facilitate collaboration with other casework service units.

From observations of the consultancy team, we do not have a clear picture of service operators having a clear procedure and guideline for their action after making an initial assessment. Without clear procedures, it is hard for supervisors to monitor the quality of the services. We also do not notice from both quantitative and qualitative interviews that service operators have classified their cases according to the level of risk of child abuse, for example, welfare needs, low risk, medium risk, or high risk child abuse cases. Without clear classification, it is hard for social workers to have a clear guideline and direction of how to follow up their cases.

1.3.3 Service Delivery – Groups and Programmes

1.3.3.1 Groups and Programmes Provided

Groups and programmes for children and/or for parents were considered by service operators as effective means to engage with parents. Social workers were able to explore if there were any risk factor as reflected from participating parents and children.

Social workers also provided groups and programmes for children on emotional management, self-management, and social skills training. Some programmes were for parents and their children together to enhance parent-child relationships.

For parents, social workers provided groups and programmes for enhancing their parenting skills, helping them to adopt positive parenting style etc. There were also some programmes for parents to release their parenting stress like mindfulness training.

Child Abuse Gatekeeper training for teachers and personnel of PPIs was also regularly provided by service operators as a means to collect referrals from teachers and personnel of PPIs, for increasing their awareness, resulting in more referrals were received from them. Although a high satisfaction rate was observed from statistics, it is noted that a small proportion of these training were focuses primarily on child protection, which the lowest among all trainings was having provided.

1.3.3.2 Observations/Recommendations

A total of 2 547 responses were received from the target participants of groups and programmes. Majority of the groups and programmes having conducted were for K1 to K3 students, for parents and children together, and for students in nursery. The proportion of programmes for students with special needs, emotional and social needs were minimal. It is noted that students with special problems may have already been included in the target group “K1 to K3 students”.

Concerning the major objectives of the groups and/programme, majority are on children’s emotion and parent-child relationship. It is supposed that these groups/programmes directed mainly towards enhancing parent-child relationship might indirectly leading to the effect on prevention of child abuse. Nevertheless, as these groups/programmes are not directly addressing the child abuse risk factors, they are regarded as developmental in nature instead of focusing precisely on preventing the happening of child abuse incidents. Furthermore, the proportion of character development for children is also higher than prevention and detection of child abuse cases. From the qualitative data of questionnaire, service operators consider that groups and programmes are able to help needy families and children. It could also help identifying those children in needs. It could also enhance parenting, children’s self-care, self-protection as well as social and emotional skills.

Considering that there are different disciplines working in the PPIs, the service operators should be aware of the positioning of the groups and programmes when delivered by social workers. For example, educational and learning needs of the children should be follow-up by PPI personnel, whereas children with special educational needs should be addressed by other services, such as Integrated Programmes or OPRS. Service operators should focus more directly on the groups and programmes which are conducive to the identification, prevention and assessment of child abuse. Hence, the three main objectives of groups and programmes are proposed as follows, in which the last one on Child Protection should be prevail with dominating portion when comparing it with the other two elements –Engagement (for example: enhance parenting, parent-child relationship which are considered conducive to prevention of child abuse, social skills training of children)

1. Engagement (for example: enhance parenting, parent-child relationship which are considered conducive to prevention of child abuse, social skills training of children)
2. Gatekeeper training to PPI personnel (for example, enhance their knowledge and skills in identifying children with risk of child abuse or social needs)
3. Child protection (for example, making Assessment, intervention and therapeutic groups and programmes on early identification and child abuse, families with high risk of domestic violence and child abuse).

1.3.4 Output and Outcome Standards

1.3.4.1 Design and Components of Existing Output/Outcome Standards

1.3.4.1.1 Output/Outcome Standards

There are 6 essential output standards (OS) and 4 outcome standards (OC) of the Pilot Scheme. The level of essential OS and OC under the Pilot Scheme are as follows –

Output Standards

1. Average number of cases handled per team: 240 per year
2. Average number of potential cases: 80 per year
3. Average number of direct contact hours per team: 4 800 per year
4. Average number of cases closed having achieved the agreed goal per team: 80 per year
5. Average number of group/programme units conducted per team (excluding orientation programmes): 1 280 per year
6. Average number of professional consultations per team: 1 520 per year.

Outcome Standards

1. 75% of cases closed having achieved the goal agreed with service users.
2. 75% of group/programme sessions completed having achieved their goals.
3. 75% of service users indicating satisfaction after receiving service.
4. 75% of service users indicating enhancement in their problem-solving capacity.

1.3.4.2 Actual Performance by Service Operators

Service operators did not achieve most of the output standards, including Number of cases per team (OS1), Number of direct contact hours (OS3) and Number of cases closed having achieved the agreed goals per team (OS4). Nevertheless, when combining both the number of OS1 and the number of potential cases (OS2) (which is regarded as exchangeable by SWD), all of them could achieve this standard. There was also a difference in performance of particular teams. This indicates a high variation on the performance among different social work teams.

The second indicators that did not meet the standard was the number of direct contact hours. Another output indicator that did not meet the pledged level is the number of group/programme units by team (OS 5). However, the outcome

standards (OC1; OC2; OC3 & OC4) for all three phrases were successfully achieved.

1.3.4.3 Observations/Recommendations

Some service operators are able to achieve all/most of the output standards, whereas some of them are performed less well. 77.9%, 80.4% and 74.5% of the respondent supervisors of the social work teams agree or extremely agree with average number of cases, number of potential cases 80 per year per team and number of cases closed per year per team is 80 respectively. 72.6%, 78.5% of respondent supervisors agree each team achieve 1280 units of group and programmes per year and achieve 1520 professional consultation per team per year respectively. Agreed on the output and outcome indicators being adopted under the Pilot Scheme, but have concern on the output indicator on Number of direct contact hours per team (OS3). Over 90% of them disagree or strongly disagree setting OS3 to 4 800 per year. They also viewed that a clearer and widely accepted definition should be worked out and some of their time spent on service areas other than providing direct service to their active cases/ potential cases (for instance, travelling hours) should also be included in the pre-set output/outcome standard by SWD.

A lot of the supervisors of the social work teams have adopted the “Secondary School Social Work” service model to run the Pilot Scheme. Secondary School Social Work has been developed for more than 40 years with more emphasis on developing potential of young people. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Pilot Scheme was out of the increasing child abuse cases happened in children aged 3 to 6. The emphasis should be more on child protection assessment, prevention and remedial service. Apparently, a number of social workers under the Pilot Scheme did not perceive correctly on the original purpose of the Pilot Scheme.

Observations from qualitative interviews indicated that most supervisors of social work teams do not have a clear guideline for their social workers on how to provide service on non-stationing days. School holidays, class suspension due to outbreak of infection disease in PPIs etc. is very common nowadays. Coupled with the fact that social workers are required to provide about 2-days stationing service to each PPI (two PPIs and a total of four days during a week), there are less than half school days with their stationing service for each PPI during a week. Service operators without clear guideline and workflow for social workers during non-stationing days will lead to lack of direction for social workers to perform their role and fulfil their requirement. That maybe one of the reasons why the output indicators were not achieved.

Social workers also spend time doing services that are not directly related to the Pilot Scheme. For example, providing training to teachers on stress management; groups and programmes for parents and/or children in general topics and not focusing on child protection.

It is recommended to include a statistics on the number of suspected child abuse cases, and number of child abused cases handled by each social work team per year. This is not an output standard but can be a reference for evaluating the effectiveness of the social work team in rendering child protection services.

By reviewing the existing output and outcome standards, the consultancy team recommends that all output and outcome indicators as well as their respective levels can be maintained except to remark that SWD may consider to review OS3 related to direct contact hours and see if necessary to include additional casework related elements when calculating the hours used in this output standard.

1.3.5 Cost-effectiveness and Efficacy of the Different Components

Upon the full implementation of the Pilot Scheme, there are a total of 57 social work teams (i.e., 35 full-teams with about 280 social workers; and 22 half-teams with about 88 social workers) involving 41 Non-governmental Organisations to deliver the service, serving a total of 725 PPIs. Among these 57 social work teams, 17 teams are formed under consortium.

1.3.5.1 Observations/Recommendations

The approach of social work team with casework focus is considered to be an effective service delivery mode for early identification and provision of timely intervention. The existing output and outcome standards could be further enhanced in order to reflect the work of social work teams targeting towards child protection. SWD could consider including number of cases with welfare needs as an output indicator and number of cases that able to provide services to reduce child abuse risk factors as an outcome standard.

Concerning the use of office spaces, a lot of the service operators rented their office space far from their servicing PPIs. This restricted the usage of office space for service user to conduct casework and group work services. Furthermore, there was a lack of complementary effect of using the office space to accommodate the lack of space in most PPIs in providing casework and group work services of social workers. In view of this, the cost effectiveness of office space was very low in this sense. It is recommended that district base social work teams and district base office space could improve the service user's usage of the office space provided and improve cost effectiveness in using office space.

1.3.6 Matching with PPIs

1.3.6.1 Existing Matching Mechanism

Existing matching mechanism needs service operators to search and match with PPI by themselves. When arranging the matching, some service operators concerned about whether the PPI is from the same NGO or having same religious background, whereas other concerned about their previous collaboration relationship with PPI.

In the process of identifying PPIs for matching, some service operators were requested by PPIs to provide extra service on top of the mandatory ones as set out by SWD in order to secure the agreement for collaboration. For example, some service operators need to provide extra training for teachers, or to provide extra/other services to the children of respective PPIs on top of the required output by SWD even if such services are not echoing the main theme of the Pilot Scheme on early identification and child protection.

Existing self-matching mechanism is undoubtedly favourable to NGOs also operating PPIs, as most PPIs would tend to or being instructed to choose service operators from the same NGO rather than allowing other service operators to serve their PPIs. These service operators will have less difficulty to match with sufficient number of PPIs to meet the eligibility criteria for team formation.

Existing matching mechanism required matching of the number of students (3 200 for a full team) in PPIs and / or the number of PPIs (16 PPIs). For Phase 1, some full-teams match with less than 16 PPIs but already fulfil the requirement of 3 200 children enrolled.

1.3.6.2 Advantages

1. Most supervisors of social work teams shared to have good and cooperative work relationship with their matched PPIs at present.
2. For matched PPI from the same agency or with same religious background, supervisors of social work teams considered this is an advantage, as these similar background and philosophy will enhance a smooth implementation of the service.
3. Continuing the existing matching arrangement may maintain the trust relationship between PPIs and service operators as well as the parents having developed during the Pilot Scheme, and service operators do not need to spend extra time to establish work relationships with new PPIs. Colleagues from FCPSUs also commented that trust relationship is essential in handling suspected child abuse cases.
4. Continuity and stability of service provided to families could ensure a trustful relationship whenever there will be child abuse cases identified.

1.3.6.3 Disadvantages

1. Existing matching mechanisms inevitably lead to the scattering of matched PPIs spreading in different districts. This would undoubtedly increase the cost of supervision and liaison time, and the impracticability to mobilise the resources (including social workers) of the social work team timely to support individual PPI especially when in crisis.
2. Casework service units of different service units are required to collaborate with different service operators, which may have different internal protocol and work style.
3. Some service operators (18%) indicated there are difficulties to arrange matching themselves as lots of the resources are needed to do the matching and search for suitable PPIs. In fact, the matching process was described by majority of the supervisors of social work teams to be exhausted.
4. Individual service operator with difficulty in identifying and matching with sufficient PPIs may need to agree on providing additional input to the PPI on top of the requirement by SWD in order to obtain their consent, or even not in line with the original intent of the service.
5. Majority of service operators prefer a single team (either a full-team or half-team) operated by one NGO instead of consortium (including that existing operating in the form of consortium), which is easier for management and more effective for service operation.

1.3.6.4 Observations and Recommendations

Comments from qualitative interviews indicated that the majority of supervisors of social work teams would like to continue the existing service upon its regularisation without required to submit another bid for the service, so that they may remain the existing relationship with their matched PPIs. They considered that they have already spent lots of time establishing relationships with PPIs and service users and would like to retain these connections. Yet it was noted that some of the social work teams had indicated their plan to change some of their existing matched PPIs owing to different reasons (for instance, unable to cooperate with the PPI, wish to provide service to the PPI under the same NGO etc.). Supervisors of some social work teams also consider it more effective when service operators and PPIs are from the same NGO with same value, mission and vision, though there being no strong empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of this arrangement when comparing the output/outcome of social work teams having matched with PPIs not from the same NGO during the implementation of the service.

Considering the above and upon balancing the pros and cons, it is recommended that social work teams should be restructured and operate in a district basis, and

continue adopt serving about 3 200 students or about 16 PPIs per team. To avoid over burden the service operators in the matching process and to avoid inducing additional service requests from individual PPIs not according to the original purpose of the service, the matching could be centrally coordinated by SWD on district basis as far as possible. Upon service regularisation, while the Pilot Schem has been running for more than 3 years, most prospective service operators should have good experience and expertise in providing casework and child protection services, and able to strengthen the work of child protection in PPIs.

1.3.7 Team Composition

1.3.7.1 Existing Composition of the Team

1.3.7.1.1 Social Work Team with 1 SWO, 8 ASWOs, 1 ACO and 1 CA

The Pilot Scheme is implemented on a team-based model with one SWO taking up a role of clinical and administrative supervision and eight social workers at ASWO rank taking up stationing social work services in PPIs (for half-teams, the number of staffs per team to be adjusted on a pro-rata basis). The SWO is required to render appropriate supervision to their social workers, and at the same time, handle the administrative duties. Service operators were satisfied with the existing team composition. It is observed that some social work teams will employ non-full-time SWO/ASWOs to deliver the service.

1.3.7.1.2 Composed of both full-teams and half-teams

In the Pilot Scheme, there were full-teams and half-teams to facilitate participation of service operators who could not meet the requirements in matching with sufficient number of PPIs for forming a full-team.

1.3.7.1.3 Consortium Teams

More than one NGOs were allowed to form a consortium team to provide service in Phase 2 and Phase 3. This is also to cater for NGOs unable to match with enough PPIs to form a full-team or half-team. Some supervisors under consortium teams considered the collaboration between/among service operators as effective. They expressed to have good collaboration and could learn from each other and support each other when they are operating their services. Nevertheless, they have the view that consortium team has put extra administrative workload on them which majority of them do not consider it a good choice. Despite they all shared the advantage and positive impact in maintaining consortium teams, most of them prefer to operate the social work team by one NGO instead of in the form of consortium if there is a choice (i.e., if they could match with sufficient number of PPIs and form one social work team).

Notwithstanding the above, it appears that consortium teams are not functioning as smooth as non-consortium teams. Supervisors of social work teams formed under consortium find that there are lots of daily administrative work between/among involving NGOs (including both social work staff under the social work team as well as administrative staff of the involving NGOs), and more time is needed for ensuring smooth cooperation. Although the service synergy with partner NGOs is one of the advantages as quoted by the consortium teams, it is observed that they are apparently running not like a “team”, but instead just serving their own matched PPIs with their own supervisor/social workers and offices. For most of the social work teams formed under consortiums, their team members were not accommodating in the same office. Non-key service operator also tends to use their own agency’s name instead of using the name of the key service operator of the team to publicise their services at PPIs. With such a service delivery mode, it is hard to establish a team identity among staff within the same team, let alone enhancing the synergy effect despite the regular sharing among all staff in every several months.

1.3.7.2 Staff Recruitment and Deployment

Some teams employed part-time/half-time/non-full-time (non-full-time) social worker to provide stationing service. Some supervisors were also employed on a non-full-time basis to supervise the service.

1.3.7.2.1 Observations and Recommendations

1. In view of the nature of service, which is focused on early identification and child protection mainly through casework service, the existing arrangement to have one SWO (for clinical and administrative supervision) plus 8 ASWOs (rendering mainly casework social work services) with adequate number of supporting staff (ACO & CA) for each team is appropriate.
2. Service operators who deploy experienced caseworkers with substantial work experiences in IFSC to this service have a higher achievement of outcome indicators according to qualitative interviews.
3. Instead of supervising jointly by more than one SWO (no matter full-time/non-full-time), each team should be supervised by one full-time SWO only to enable effective communication and decision making, leading the direction of the whole team, collaborating with other service units, and deployment of ASWOs for crisis handling for their matched PPIs etc. In fact, among 51 supervisors responding to the survey, about 20% of them replied that they were working non-full-time under the service operator.
4. It is not desirable to recruit non-full-time social worker under the social work team to deliver this service. In particular, non-full-time social workers were employed only required to work on their stationing days. Unlike full-time

social workers, on the two PPIs that he/she is responsible to serve, even if he/she is not providing stationing service in one PPI and stationing in another PPI, he/she may continue to render support to this PPI through non-face-to-face means (such as telephone enquiries) if needed, which is not practicable for non-full-time social workers who are supposed no need to work on non-stationing days. Even if there is contingency plan by relieving social worker, as he/she did have any work relationship with the PPI, the support would only be provided only during urgent and exceptional situation instead of on a regular base. The relieving social worker may also not be familiar with both the child-in-question/parents and the PPI. By the way, the responsibility of non-full-time social workers in non-stationing days are not clearly stipulated by most social work teams. It would be undesirable if suspected child abuse cases happened in non-stationing days or days that the non-full-time social worker is off duty.

5. Observations from qualitative interviews with FCPSU colleagues indicated that it is desirable for Social Work Officers of the social work team to have the ability and experience to chair “Multidisciplinary Case Conference” (MDCC) rather than purely dependent on FCPSU to provide chairmanship in future in view of their better understanding of the PPIs and their children/family owing to their daily supervision rendered to their social workers.
6. Observations from qualitative interviews with FCPSU colleagues also indicated that it is desirable for service operators to provide trainings to their social workers in drafting “Social Inquiry Report”.
7. Based on the existing manning ratio set for one social worker to about 400 children (i.e., 3 200 children per social work team), and considering that there were a number of PPIs with less than 200 children enrolled, each social work team may provide service to more than 16 PPIs (say, about a maximum of 20 PPIs) should there be more small PPIs with less children enrolled in the service area.
8. Apparently, half-team is less effective than full-team in terms of providing team support and deployment of manpower within the team, not only the arrangement and supervision of daily operational arrangements but also during crisis situations.
9. To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency and to minimise the administrative cost, it is recommended that no consortium team should be formed upon service regularisation, so that the service operators may focus on service provision.

1.3.8 Stationing Arrangement

1.3.8.1 Mandatory and Existing Stationing Arrangement

The present stationing arrangement for all social workers under the Pilot Scheme at their matched PPIs includes: 1) one social worker serving no more than two PPIs; 2) provide stationing social work service at their matched PPIs under the pre-agreed timetable, and normally no less than 2 days' stationing social work service at the PPI in a week should be arranged; and 3) the service provided by individual social work team should be in line with the opening hours of individual PPIs.

1.3.8.2 Observations and Recommendations

1. Most of the social workers considered the two stationing days not enough to complete their requirement on output indicators. Since two stationing days is a minimum requirement, some service operators will employ additional part-time staff to provide additional stationing days to individual PPIs.
2. The use of the term “stationing days” would give an impression to social workers that they only have two days per week to work in each PPI, and ignored the importance of their responsibility for the PPI during non-stationing days. Such an impression may also hinder their fulfilment of output indicators.
3. During the “mandatory” stationing time, most children are required to attend class and there being no concrete role that the social worker are required to perform in relation to early identification or child protection. Hence, they might need to perform some tasks that were not directly related to the output requirement on “direct contact hours”, which is concerning the activities related to case work services, and hinder their fulfilment of this output indicator.
4. Since class suspension in PPIs is not uncommon nowadays (especially after the COVID-19 pandemic), it would be unrealistic for social workers to work and complete their output indicators for individual PPI only during their stationing days. The concept of stationing has misled the service operators in delivering their service only during stationing days while leaving the non-stationing days not supposedly require to provide any support or service except under special circumstance such as PPI crisis. In fact, during the five days of work per week, it is not supposed that each social worker to work for four days in providing stationing services to two PPIs, leaving the remaining one day a week staying in office performing other non-service related duties.
5. It was observed that the social work teams could generally comply with the existing mandatory stationing arrangement (except that during the time of class suspension as announced by the EDB owing to the pandemic), and not

much concern on the stationing arrangement was received from both quantitative and qualitative interviews. However, considering that the number of children enrolled for each PPI ranged from less than 20 to over 1 000, it is obviously not cost effective to assign a specific number of days that social worker should station for each PPI. Instead, it is recommended that to have flexible and effective deployment of social workers under each team to address the service need for different PPIs.

6. Consideration maybe requiring all social work teams to arrange their social workers to visit the PPI that they are responsible for on a sessional basis with defined minimum stationing hours per session to allow flexibility to address the PPIs with more children or higher service demand.

1.3.9 Collaboration of Social Work Teams with PPIs and Stakeholders

1.3.9.1 Teachers/Child Care Workers (CCWs)

1.3.9.1.1 Purpose of the Pilot Scheme as Perceived by Teachers/CCWs

In all three phases, the top three purposes of having a social worker in PPI perceived by teachers is to enhance children's emotion management ability (20.82%), building up relationships with parents (20.71%), and provide group work service for students in PPIs (20.28%).

1.3.9.1.2 Case Referral Arrangement and Collaboration of Teachers/CCWs with Social Workers/Other Stakeholders

Highest number of teachers/CCWs through personal discussion with social workers (78.75% in all three phases) to refer cases to social workers. The second highest number was through case meetings to refer cases to social workers (18.29% in all three phases). 26.62% of the teachers/CCWs from all three phases found it very satisfy and satisfy (58.11%) in such a way of collaboration with them satisfactory. Teachers/CCWs who are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with both arrangements account for less than 1%.

Through qualitative interviews, the consultancy team has an impression that service operators usually work closely with other service units, such as OPRS, IFSC, and FCPSU. Their perception of collaboration seems mainly focused on how "helpful" this service is from another service unit, and did not perceive that through their communication with these units, they could learn from them how to work with child abuse cases.

1.3.9.2 Family and Child Protective Services Units

In general, the views from colleagues of FCPSU is that the collaboration is smooth. Having said that, there were observations that some social work team supervisors/social workers do not have proper understanding of child abuse and

child protection, or over reliant on FCPSU and wish to hand over the case to them rather than taking up their own responsibility. There was also ambivalent on whether the case is a known case of the social work team, as “potential cases” were regarded as not a known case by some operators. On handling the suspected child abuse case, there were cases that the service operators did not inform the parents explicitly their concern and to initiate the child protection investigation. Some of the cases indicated their inability to engage the family well, resulting in spending a lot of time unnecessarily before conducting the investigation or referring to FCPSU upon knowing the child abuse incident, which has made the situation worsen.

1.3.9.3 Other Stakeholders

Some stakeholders like parents and personnel of PPIs may not have proper understanding of the objectives of the Pilot Scheme. Their positive views are not attributed to the original purpose of the project.

1.4 Problem and difficulties

1.4.1 Factors Undermining Child Protection in PPIs

Some service operators with different orientations in services provided at PPIs make the original purpose of the Pilot Scheme on child protection not as effective and efficient as expected. It is observed that service operators who do not have a clear understanding on the scope of service were less effective in providing child protection services in PPIs. Views from FCPSU colleagues, interviews with supervisors of social work teams found that some of them and their frontline social workers do not have a clear concept of child protection.

It is also indicated clearly in qualitative interviews that a number of service operators who have been providing services to PPIs before the Pilot Scheme found it very difficult to adjust to the service objective and requirements of the Pilot Scheme. Some service operators considered providing emotional support to teachers/CCWs, handling the emotional outbreak of some children during class in PPIs, organising playgroup to PPIs etc. are part of their services. They may incline to provide preventive or developmental services, resulting that less time being used on providing services conducive for early identification and handling the risk and protective factors for needy children on child protection, which were indeed the core purposes and focuses of the Pilot Scheme.

The responses from some of the social workers during the qualitative interviews indicated that they have misunderstood the meaning of “child protection”. Some of them replied that it should be focused on “providing a safe environment for children”, which is totally out of the expectation of the consultancy team. The understanding of the concept of “child protection” and “child abuse” should better be articulated by all service operators to their social workers. The meaning of child abuse on the “persistent action” by an adult sometimes were not taken seriously by the social workers.

Another observation from the qualitative interview was that social workers who were unable to maintain a good working relationship with PPI personnel were usually having difficulties in communicating with them for delivering the service to PPIs according to the original objectives, nor to establish a trustful collaboration.

From the qualitative comments of some of the supervisors of social work teams, some PPIs have different perception on the objectives of the social work service than the original design. For example, some PPIs would expect social workers to support Special Educational Needs (SEN) children as these children have more needs in their social and emotional problems at PPIs.

The other factor that come from qualitative comments of supervisors of social work teams indicated that some principals of PPIs did not have a trustful relationship with the service operators. Some principals of PPIs do not want to start the child protection procedure even when cases were identified. Some principals of PPIs have a suspicious attitude towards the casework service provided by social workers with families.

Some PPIs personnel may not be able to observe the confidentiality of casework service of social worker. Social workers need extra effort to explain to PPIs personnel on the confidentiality issue. On the contrary, some PPIs do not provide the contact information of the family to social worker even the child and concerned parents was a potential case.

Some PPIs required social worker to pay home visits together with PPIs personnel like teachers. This also makes extra time and effort in collaboration and compromise a time to visit the families. This affects the timing of making assessment and provide suitable service to families.

1.4.2 Environmental Factors Undermining the Service

Environmental constraints of participating PPIs are identified as one of the most common unfavourable conditions that may negatively affect the service outcomes. Most of the PPIs did not have the provision of a very small quiet room with suitable facilities or equipment for use by social workers. Hence, some of the interviews and even small group sessions are required to take place in a corner inside the PPI, in the office of the PPI principal/supervisor, or at the end of the corridor next to the emergency exit. Some social workers even need to meet up with parents in the leisure park just outside the PPIs.

Despite there are provision of office under the Pilot Scheme, the PPIs are self-matched by all service operators and it is not uncommon that the matched PPIs by almost all social work teams are spreading in different districts. Hence, the utilisation of the office bases carrying out their social work activities are poor as they are not accessible to the service users. Besides, the possibility for most PPIs to expand their size to enable carrying out social work activities is low owing to the site restriction. Hence, this also supports providing the service on a district basis with the office of the social work team located in the same district upon service regularisation, as this would undoubtedly enable

all social work teams to work more effectively through fully utilise their office base to support this service for carrying out individual, group and programme activities.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic also make service operators working in an especially difficult situation for them to operate than in normal situation. Service operators need to spend time to design suitable strategies to engage clients, making assessment of welfare needs of clients through innovative means like the use of information technology and use of tangible gifts to engage clients. They also need to use information technology to run groups and programmes. This inevitably affects the time spending on direct casework and group work activities.

1.4.3 Factors Undermining Support from PPIs and Involvement in the Service

Teachers/CCWs of PPIs do not have a clear concept of the purpose of social work service. Although they mentioned that they are satisfied with the way and time in contacting social workers, their perception of the social work service provided to PPIs under the Pilot Scheme are rather distorted. Their expectations to this service are not exactly related to the original one on child protection.

It is recommended that service operators should have a clear understanding of their own role, and to provide a clear guideline to teachers of PPIs on how to collaborate with social workers in making assessments of potential child abuse cases, working together in the implementing welfare plan, or for fewer risk cases, an action plan.

1.4.4 Factors that Affect the Quality of Service Provided

Service operators, in general, do not have a clear strategy in classifying high risk, medium risk, low risk, and welfare needs cases. Without such classification, social workers do not have a clear mind set of priority of following up the cases.

Most service operators do not have a clear timeline of how often the case will be reviewed, the children's needs will be reassessed. They also do not have a clear guideline in when to visit the family when they receive case referrals etc.

Most of the teams do not have a clear strategy and guideline for social workers during non-stationing days and class suspension days.

1.4.5 Administrative Measures that is Effective for Smooth Running of the Service

1.4.5.1 Training, Supervision and Meeting

More training for frontline social workers provided by service operators should be provided. Training on child abuse, working with parents and consultation is needed. Social workers expect to have more sharing of the skills and experience. Different

service operators are also encouraged to share their experience with other service operators to enhance the service quality in general.

1.4.5.2 Arrangement during Class Suspension

During class suspension, over half of the social workers used different online platforms to provide a wide range of services (e.g. evaluation by phone conversation, online meetings, and online programmes). They wish SWD to adopt a flexible arrangement on handling the unmet output and outcome indicators owing to class suspension.

1.4.5.3 Time Spent on Different Tasks

44.7% of respondent social workers indicated that they have put 40-59% of their working hours on casework. About 31.2% use 20-39% of their working hours on casework, followed by group work (29.5%) and administration work (24.9%). More than 97% usually put 0.5-19% of their time on attending individual supervision, group supervision, case study, training, staff meeting, and PPI collaboration.

1.5 Recommendations

The social work service provided under the Pilot Scheme is widely recognised by different stakeholders for its effectiveness in early identification of children and families with high risk factors, including child abuse. The Pilot Scheme demonstrated that children observed in the play sessions demonstrated comparable level of positive affects when compare with other researches using the same method. In addition, parents receiving parenting group training was found to have statistically significant improvement in parenting stress score. From this perspective, this service has promising impact on children and parent samples after interventions. Parents, teachers, and the principals of the Pilot Scheme are highly satisfied with the service although their expectations towards the Pilot Scheme do not tally with its original purpose. In addition, service collaborators were satisfied with the Pilot Scheme and views from FCPSU also indicated the importance of engaging parents and children before working on child abuse cases. Furthermore, with the coming legislation of Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse cases, it is necessary to have personnel who have social work training to provide service in PPIs and comply with the mandatory reporting requirements. With the above observations, the Consultancy Team Support for service regularisation with the following modifications on service delivery –

1.5.1 Refining the Scope of Services

During the implementation of the Pilot Scheme, there are some key components of the services (including but not limited to the following) for pre-primary children and their families and for child care/teaching staff.

1.5.1.1 For pre-primary children

- to identify early pre-primary children with social needs or deprived of proper parental care and supervision as well as the families having high risk of domestic violence or other welfare needs, and refer them to other welfare services as appropriate; and
- to provide support and therapeutic treatment for pre-primary children in relation to their developmental process and / or adjustment to pre-primary life.

1.5.1.2 For families / parents

- to engage families and parents in helping process through counselling, home visits, outreach service and crisis intervention; and
- to conduct support / developmental groups, programmes and other activities to meet the developmental needs of pre-primary children, equip their parents with proper / effective child care / parenting skills, enhance parent's awareness of child protection and strengthening their family relationship etc.

1.5.1.3 For child care / teaching staff

- to provide professional consultation and / or organise training for child care / teaching staff and support them for better interfacing with other support services for children with social needs or deprived of proper parental care and supervision.

In general, the existing scope of services under the Pilot Scheme could be maintained as the services have covered remedial, supportive and preventive nature. However, more focused should be stressed on child protection and strengthening the support for families/parents instead of focusing on working with children. As such, the consultancy team suggested that the scope of services should be confined and some suggestions are made as follows:

1.5.2 The scope of services should be confined to –

1. Protecting children from maltreatment.
2. Preventing impairment of children's health and development.
3. Ensuring that children are growing up with the provision of safe and effective care.
4. Ensuring that children are receiving appropriate service to enable healthy development.

Each service operator should have a clear induction and staff training programme that is child protection focused. Regular training and updating on child protection strategies

should be provided to all the social workers. The current percentage of social workers' time spent in casework is only around 40-59%. The percentage can go up if social workers have a clear guideline and flowchart of how to work with clients classified in different risk levels.

1.5.3 Case Management Guideline

Each service operator should have a clear guideline on case management. In particular, the timeline of their response to crisis cases. Each service operator should have a clear guideline on what the social worker should do during non-stationing days. For example, contacting potential cases, following up the high-risk cases, rendering support (including crisis intervention) to all PPIs being assigned to the social worker under defined circumstances etc.

1.5.4 Adopting a New Approach to Child Protection

A holistic approach to child protection should be encouraged in future regularisation. When making an assessment of the child, service operators should understand the child within the context of the family and the educational setting, community and culture in which he or she is grown up. The service operators should also consider the interaction between the developmental needs of the children, the capacities of parents and caregivers to respond to those needs.

In addition, an integrated approach in which a variety of agencies and services in the community are involved with a child. Multi and inter-agency work is emphasised to safeguard and promote children's welfare and starts as soon as it is identified.

Service operators should formulate their own guideline deliberating clearly on the duties that what their social workers should perform and do when they visit the PPI.

Service operators should have a clear guideline and procedure on what social workers should do when the PPIs' services are suspended or when they are on school holidays.

Service operators should have a clear guideline and procedure on classifying cases and potential cases into different risk levels. And also making clear at each risk level, the action and the frequency of the action should be taken, and reviewed by their supervisors.

Service operators should also have a clear guideline and timeline on a reassessment of the case and review the intervention that they have provided to the child and their family.

1.5.5 Renaming of the Service to Highlight the Theme

For future regularisation of the Pilot Scheme, the consultancy team recommends to rename the service in order to highlight the focus of this service on child protection, such as "Child Protection Social Work Service for Pre-Primary Institutions". The renaming

reminds the service operators that they are doing child protection work for pre-primary children rather than other supportive/developmental services for PPIs.

1.5.6 Enhancing the Training/Supervision Arrangement to Social Workers

Upon the enactment of relevant legislation regarding mandatory reporting of child abuse cases in the coming year(s), it is anticipated that there will be remarkable increase on the number of reported suspected child abuse cases, leading to the corresponding increase on the number of social investigation reports required. The work load of FCPSU will undoubtedly be increased. Besides, social workers of PPIs should be more familiar with the social situation and in better position to investigate into the social situation of those suspected child abuse cases who are studying/under the care of their respective PPI.

Considering that some of the supervisors of social work teams may lack the knowledge and experience in chairing MDCC, which was mainly conducted by FCPSU during the implementation of the Pilot Scheme, they should be trained with related knowledge to enhance their competence on this area, so that they would be competent in providing quality supervision to their social workers on child protection. The training should also aim at enhancing their competence in designing and implementing effective mechanism in detection, prevention and remedial measures of child abuse cases.

For social workers, they should be provided with more trainings to enhance their capability in writing proper referrals to FCPSU; enhancing their competence and independence to make assessment of child abuse cases rather than partnering with teachers, IFSC and FCPSU; enabling them to write up Social Inquiry Reports and to make social inquiry in a professional manner; as well as paying home visiting in a professional and effective manner.

1.5.7 Strengthening Support for Parents

A lot of comments from parents have indicated their preference for social workers to provide more groups and programmes related to enhancing their parent child relationships. Some of them wish that social worker may able to help their children to better perform in PPIs. Parents seems to have different expectations from the original purpose of the Pilot Scheme. We recommended that social work service to parents should concentrate on the following –

1. Providing information and training, either at individual or group level on parents' capacity to perform positive parenting to prevent child abuse case.
2. Providing tangible help to parents who have high risk of child abuse.
3. Supporting parents in establishing a support network in the community in order to prevent them from suffering from possible domestic violence or child abuse.

4. To provide information to parents related to available resources in the community/PPI that may help to address the development/training needs of their children.

1.5.8 Strengthening Support for PPI Personnel

One of the scope of services for PPI personnel is to provide professional consultation and/or organise training for child care/teaching staff and support them for better interfacing with other support services for children with social needs or deprived of proper parental care and supervision.

Teachers and Principals of PPIs should also be trained the objectives of social work service for PPIs, including its scope and target participants to avoid misunderstanding and false expectations to social workers. It is also essential to provide training for teachers and personnel of PPIs to understand the importance of child abuse prevention, understanding the issue of confidentiality and ways that social workers deliver service to reduce the suspicious attitude on social work service.

To enhance the child protection element in the service, we recommend social workers to focus on providing training on “Child Abuse Gatekeeper” to teachers and personnel of PPIs with following training areas –

1. To enable teachers/ PPI personnel to becoming child abuse gate keeper (instead of trainings on other themes).
2. To help teachers/ PPI personnel to participate in the mechanism set up by the service operator on prevention of child abuse, and ways to handle or help parents with high risk of child abuse.
3. To increase the awareness of teachers and personnel of PPIs on the main purpose of the service, and to enhance their understanding on the referral mechanism when referring case to social workers for follow-up.

1.5.9 Restructuring the Team Structure

1.5.9.1 Team-based Model

The Pilot Scheme is implemented on a team-based model through assigning an SWO to take up the role in supervising the team, and at the same time providing clinical supervision to social workers at ASWO rank, who will be assigned to providing stationing social work service at different PPIs. The existing arrangement on team composition is detailed below –

1.5.9.1.1 Composition of the team (essential staffing and team mode)

1. Essential Roles of the SWO

The role of SWO regarding social work services for pre-primary institutions is important and necessary. SWO has the important role of clinical supervision, who will supervise their respective ASWOs to ensure that they are able to provide effective casework service (and especially, on child protection). The SWO should be competent on all matters related to child protection, including the capability to chair Multi-disciplinary case conferences (MDCC) and collaborate with other stakeholders so as to maintain a good service interfacing and service collaboration. Besides, the SWO also has the administrative duties to ensure and monitor the smooth operation of the social work team.

2. Number of SWO and ASWO in a full-team

In view of the nature of service, which is focused on early identification and child protection mainly through casework service, the existing arrangement to have one SWO (for clinical supervision and other administrative duties of the team) plus 8 ASWOs (rendering mainly casework social work services) with adequate number of supporting staff (ACO & CA) for each team serving about 3 200 children and their families upon service regularisation is considered appropriate.

3. Impact of employing non-full-time SWOs/ASWOs

It should be reiterated that social workers are not providing support to their matched PPIs only during their stationing days, but should also cover non-stationing days (for instance, when they were stationing in other PPIs) under pre-defined situation other than during crisis. Hence, non-full-time SWOs/ASWOs, who are mainly worked during their stationing days and off on other non-stationing days, are unable to render support to the PPIs that they are responsible to during non-stationing days. Hence, it is considered not appropriate to employ non-full-time SWOs/ASWOs under this service upon its regularisation.

1.5.9.1.2 Full-team, Half-team and Consortium

Among 57 social work teams under the Pilot Scheme, there are two types of social work teams, including the (1) full social work teams (35 teams); and (2) half social work teams (22 teams). Among them, 17 teams (including 8 full-teams and 9 half-teams) are formed under consortium. All consortium teams are formed by two NGOs except one half-team under Phase 3 of the Pilot Scheme, which is formed by three NGOs.

The provision for half-teams is half of that for full-teams, which is composed of 0.5 SWO, 4 ASWOs, 0.5 ACO and 0.5 CA. In terms of the use of available resources, half-team is apparently less effective. For instance, it would result in the lack of

sufficient social work staff to mobilise and provide support to individual matched PPI of that social work team during a crisis. Besides, it is noted that some of the half-teams have even employed non-full-time SWO to supervise the social work team, which had led to the lack of supervisory support/contact point for days that the SWO was off duty during some weekdays.

For consortium teams, it is apparently not functioning as smooth as non-consortium teams, and lots of time was spent on deliberating a consensus on daily operating social work arrangement for the whole team. Despite “service synergy” for participating NGOs is one of the advantages supporting the setting up of consortium teams, most (if not all) consortiums are not running as a “team”, but just two/three teams serving their own matched PPIs.

Considering the above, full-teams is apparently an optimal team model instead of continuing the half-team and/or consortium team model upon regularisation of service. It is suggested to have full-teams only in the future composition of service.

1.5.9.2 Maintaining the Existing Manning Ratio

The current manning ratio (3 200 students and / or 16 PPIs) is recommended to be maintained. Although there are great variation on the number of children in different PPIs, PPIs with large number of children does not necessarily means that there were more cases with problems being identified and required social work follow-up.

It is not arguable that the problem of an individual child usually reflects the problem of the family (for instance, parenting matters). How to work with the parents/carers of children during the working hours of the social workers is apparently more important.

Considering that the number of children enrolled for each PPI ranged from less than 20 to over 1 000, it is obviously not cost effective to assign a specific number of days that social worker should station in each PPI. Instead, it is recommended that to have effective deployment of social workers under each team to address the service need. For instance, instead of requiring the social worker to station in the PPI for a whole day, consideration might be given to arrange them to station in each PPI on a “sessional basis” with defined number of hours for each session (say, one or two sessions in a day and two or three days in a week, depending on the service need of individual PPI), which might allow flexibility for them to carry out other social work activities during non-stationing sessions (such as conducting home visits, interview at the office base, meeting with other casework units, performing other administrative duties such as recordings etc). An additional output requirement on the number of “stationing session” maybe added to make sure that the total number of stationing hours in each PPI would be remained in a planned level.

1.5.10 Matching mechanism between the service operators with PPIs

There were advantages on the existing matching arrangement (that is, service operators to arrange self-matching with prescribed number of PPIs before submitting their proposals), such as –

1. Enhancing effective communication and implementation of the Pilot Scheme for service operators who are also the sponsoring body of concerned PPI owing that they share same vision and mission;
2. Allowing flexibility for service operators to test out the service model that enable them in implementing the Pilot Scheme in PPIs sharing the same idea;
3. Enabling service operators to continue their all along good working relationship and rapport having built up with PPIs through their own resources before the implementation of the Pilot Scheme / service synergy on other similar services provided by the same organisation (such as OPRS) for PPI, so as to extend/enhance their cooperation and network etc.

Notwithstanding the above, adverse experiences were being identified from the existing matching arrangement during the implementation of the Pilot Scheme, including –

1. Difficulties for social work teams to enable district collaboration owing that the PPIs being matched by respective service operators are spread and located in various Home Affairs Department (HAD) districts;
2. Difficulties for other casework units (such as IFSCs, FCPSUs etc.) to maintain close collaboration with PPI social work teams owing that they are required to deal with a number of social work teams serving in the same HAD district with different expectations on them;
3. Difficulties to enable service synergy with other existing service for same service targets (such as Comprehensive Child Development Service), while their services were provided on district basis;
4. Difficulties for social work teams to convince some of their matched PPIs on the importance of delivering casework service in PPI. Some of them had demanded the social workers to seek prior agreement or even simply prohibited them from contacting the parents, or to conduct home visits;
5. Difficulties to maintain professionals autonomy when carrying out social work activities for PPI children owing that some of the PPI principals/supervisors/ personnel are thinking from education angle and demand social workers to perform their expected activities (such as organising playgroups, delivering recreational services, training up the capability of children with special needs, helping teachers/CCWs in looking after children with emotional problem in class etc.)

during stationing days. Some of the service operators were being “reminded” that in case social worker were unable/unwilling to carry out their requested service, the PPI may decide to match with another service operator instead;

6. Difficulties to render timely support by other social workers under the team to support individual PPI in crisis and served by them owing to the spread locations of PPIs. In fact, it was not uncommon that during crisis, supervisors of social work team would tend to seek assistance from other service units of the same organisation located in the vicinity to provide support;
7. Difficulties to make use of the office base of the social work team (supported by SWD) to conduct interview/activities for parents/family despite the space constraint of individual PPI, as most office bases are not located in the vicinity of the PPI owing that PPIs under the social work team are spread in different districts. Parents/families were usually reluctant to travel far to receive services in the office of the social work team, leading to the low utilisation rate of the office bases;
8. Among 725 PPIs having joined the Pilot Scheme, about 50% of them (373 PPIs) were having their OPRS and Pilot Scheme operating by the same service operator. Besides, about 21% (153) PPIs are being provided service by the social work team operating by the same NGO/sponsoring body. Apparently, among the above two types of social work teams, the synergy effect on self-matching is not significant, and there being no significant difference on service delivery for social work teams formed other than these two types except that extra effort were required during the initial stage when implementing the service;
9. There are close liaison for PPI principals/supervisors in the same district, who always compare on the service and support rendered by social work teams of different service operators. Some of them even urged for additional support from the service operator on top of the resources being allocated by SWD on the Pilot Scheme in order to align with other service teams;
10. Prior to the commencement of service, each service operator are required to match with a designated number of PPIs in order to be eligible for operating the service. However, as the number of eligible PPIs is fluctuating (especially during the start/end of each school year) owing that some of the PPIs may decide to quit the service, closure of the PPIs, PPIs becoming not eligible to join the Kindergarten Education Scheme, special consideration by the sponsoring bodies of individual PPIs for not joining the service etc, service operators are required to match with another PPI not having joined the service in order to meet the service requirement. Besides, while there were new PPIs set up/ decide to join/ become eligible to join, which may create difficulty in considering how to include them in the service; and
11. There were on and off comment from service operators requesting SWD to assist in liaising with PPIs and explain to them the original purpose of the service. While the PPI were matched by them, who might have agreed with them on the provision

of some of the services (originally not the focus under the Pilot Scheme), it is apparently difficult and not appropriate for SWD to involve in such a contractual commitment that they have agreed between themselves.

1.5.10.1 Suggestions - Establishing District-based Social Work Teams

Making reference to the above, it might be beneficial that to have centralised matching by SWD. Consideration might be given on arranging district-based matching with an aim to enhancing effective district collaboration, and to assign each social work team a clear catchment area, so that social work teams might be able to render the prevailing services according to the requirement as set out by SWD without required to bargain with them, and PPIs not having joined might approach the social work team direct for service.

1. The team will be district-based and confined to the same district area according to IFSC boundaries, FCPSU, or SWD/HAD administrative districts. It will be easier for one service operator to liaison with IFSC/FCPSU or other stakeholders in one district rather than establishing links with different districts.
2. If district team is adopted, the existing matching is no longer valid. SWD should take up the role in matching PPIs with service operators on a district level to ensure fairness, and to avoid any NGO operating a lot of PPIs to dominate the provision of this service.
3. As district team is recommended, it is more beneficial to have the service operator's office within walking distance of the PPIs they matched. This is to enhance the existing service provision through using service operator's office in case interviewing, group work and programmes.
4. We also recommend the mechanism to incorporate those newly registered PPIs / handle the change of PPIs served due to closure of PPIs or other reasons according to the catchment area of district-based team. In other words, the district-based team should provide social work service for all eligible PPIs within their respective service boundary no matter if they are newly opened.
5. By the way, to ensure that appropriate resource is being allotted to each service team, SWD may review and consider to regulate the number of PPIs served by each social work team/under each catchment area (for social work teams serving PPIs with exceptional high number of children enrolled) during renewal of the service contract.

1.5.11 Enhancing Service Collaboration, Synergy and Interfacing with Other Mainstream Services

To enhance the effectiveness of child protection, the social work teams should have a better and effective interface with mainstream services including but not limited to IFSCs, FCPSUs, CCDS, OPRS, and so on.

OPRS and Tier 1 Support Services in Kindergartens/ Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres are the services targeted for assessed and suspected borderline developmental problems or other disability respectively. The division work between social work teams and the pre-school rehabilitation services should be clearly defined to avoid overlapping of resources, but also be co-operative to avoid any service gaps.

Operationally, the OPRS and Tier 1 service may focus on provision of training to the pre-primary children as well as their parents on rehabilitation purpose. The social work teams may render casework services to the parents with stress arising from caring and parenting difficulties, and considering making referrals to IFSCs or other social service units for meeting the needs of families when the referral is considered beneficial to help the parents/families to meet their welfare needs.

To achieve service synergy, the professionals working in the PPIs should communicate with each other while the social work teams should focus more on risk assessment for high risk of child abuse children/ families through face-to-face contacts, as well as service interfacing with other existing services.

1.5.12 Adopting “Visiting” Social Work Service to PPIs instead of “Stationing”

The concept of stationing social work service seems to have restricted the service provided by social workers, who may perceive their work should be provided during the “two” stationing days for each PPI being served. That maybe one of the reasons why they perceive they cannot achieve the pre-set output requirement on direct contact hours solely from the work for that two days.

The concept of stationing social work service also implies the need of the social worker to become part of the PPI. This has created an atmosphere that social workers need to spend time to integrate into the PPI through liaison, providing extra services etc., and continue staying in the PPI even there being nothing to do when all children are in class and their parents were not available to stay in the PPI owing to work. Hence, social worker may tend to engage with some non-core casework services (such as preparation for group work services), or to join as observer inside class in order to give some meaning to their stationing arrangement. Some even asked the children to attend individual session during class similar to the arrangement for social work service for secondary school students, which was obviously not preferred by the parents.

In order to enable all social workers to work meaningfully and make use of the time spent in the PPI, it is necessary to adopt “Visiting Social Work Service at PPIs” rather than social worker “stationing” in PPIs. Hence, depending on the service need, each PPI should be “visited” by a social worker at least two days per week for about 3 to 4 sessions with at least 2 to 3 hours per session. This will facilitate the social worker to accord priority to visit PPI with more service need according to professional judgement, and to make use of the non-visiting time to conduct other related social work activities, such as home visits, case interview with individual parents at office etc.

1.5.13 Widening the Definition of some Service Output and Outcome Standards

Concerning the output and outcome standard, the consultancy team recommended remaining the existing output and outcome standard level.

Casework service is one of the important elements in the service delivery, especially in child protection. The measurement of “direct contact hours” adopted by SWD is casework related activities as mentioned in its explanatory notes. The consultancy team viewed that “direct contact hours” set for 4 800 hours per team is appropriate as about half of the working hours for each social worker is on casework related activities. In response to service operators concern of not being able to achieve the “direct contact hours”, a clearer and widely accepted definitions should be worked out. For instance, the consultancy team recommended SWD to consider widening the definition of direct contact hours to include the following areas –

- Counting the traveling time for home visit as part of the direct contact hours. This arrangement would be more achievable when the social work teams are formed on a district based and the office and the PPIs are located in the same district, which would shorten the traveling time;
- Time that social workers spent on observing their active/potential cases with suspected child abuse elements in PPIs.

If “stationing session” is adopted, an additional output requirement on the number of “stationing session” maybe added to make sure that the total number of stationing hours in each PPI would be remained in a planned level.

1.5.14 Provision of Office Base

During the Pilot Scheme, social work teams were supported to rent a premises as their office base in case their respective service operators were unable to make self-arrangement. However, the utilisation of the office base for most social work teams are apparently on a low side during the implementation of the Pilot Scheme. It is also noted that the offices that most service operators rented were situated in commercial areas. The reason maybe owing to the matched PPIs by most social work teams were spreading among different districts and is not possible to have any location convenient to all

matched PPIs. Hence, they are not easily accessible for all service users, and not practicable for service operators to carry out social work activities (including case, group or programme). Besides, the prevailing requirement for social workers to station a total of four full days in the PPIs that they provide their services each week would hinder their need to use the office (i.e., at most one daily for the remaining day of the week).

From qualitative interviews, most of the service users indicated that they would not join the service provided by service operators in their office if it is not located in the neighbourhood. The existing arrangement is not efficient and effective.

Noting that most PPIs are in lack of appropriate space for conducting interviews/organising groups and programmes, it is recommended to continue providing the office bases to all service operators at present level upon service regularisation to facilitate the social work teams in carrying out their activities. Besides, to enable service operators to fully utilise the office base in carrying out social work activities to address the service need as well as in view of the space limitations of most PPIs, SWD is recommended to arrange district-based matching and to provide an office for each social work team in their respective serving district. As such, all matched PPIs may likely be located within walking distance of these offices.

1.5.15 Exploring the Service Needs for Ethnic Minorities

It is found that most social work teams were in lack of a systematic strategies in promotion, prevention and remedial service to children and their families from ethnic minorities (EM). Despite some social work teams shared that to address the unique needs of EM children and their families, they would provide translator and printing of service leaflet in different language, there were no service guideline or instruction deliberating the procedural arrangement.

It is recommended that upon regularisation, each social work team should develop their own guidelines in working with EM children and their families according to the characteristics of the PPIs that they are serving to facilitate their social workers in understanding how to work effectively with the EMs according to. This guideline should highlight the characteristic of EM in the PPIs of their serving district, detailing the assessment on their race/culture, language used, their specific needs, and also providing a clear procedure for social workers to follow in engaging, making assessment and providing services to these clients that cater for their diverse cultural needs. Arrangement should be made by respective service operators (such as staff training) to enable the capability of their social worker in working with EM children.

Owing to the integration education policy of the EDB for non-Chinese Speaking Students, children from EM family are usually studying together with other Chinese speaking children in the same PPIs for better support in the community. Additional funding are provided by EDB to PPIs having enrolled a designated number/portion of EM children. Hence, social work teams should liaise and collaborate with their

matched PPIs to make use of these additional resources for providing additional support to EM children.

1.5.16 Social Work Service for Private Pre-primary Institutions / child-care centre

During the implementation of the Pilot Scheme, all subsidised/aided PPIs, including aided standalone CCCs and subsidised KGs/ KG-cum-CCC that have joined the Kindergarten Education Scheme, are eligible to receive social work service. There are about 300 private PPIs and their service users who are relatively better-off and able to afford a higher school fees. The consultancy team considers that private PPIs may have their own resources (including self-financing social work service) to help their service users with difficulties, and capable to refer them to other social service units in the community if needed. As child protection is the main focus of the Pilot Scheme, priority should be accorded to address the service needs of children and their families from aided/subsidised PPIs instead of private PPIs in case there is resources constraints. Notwithstanding this, social work teams may offer a helping hand to private PPIs of their serving district on an incidental bases for further promotion of child protection in the community if there is a need or upon their request.

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