

LCQ21: Safeguarding mental health of academic staff members and students

Following is a question by the Hon Lillian Kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

The mental health of academic staff members and students in Hong Kong draws societal concern. There are views that the Government should strengthen the protection of their physical and mental health as well as to provide appropriate support services to the families of suicide victims concerned. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of academic staff members and students committing suicide and attempting to commit suicide in each of the past five years and, among them, the numbers of cases in which death inquests were held, together with a breakdown by types of school (i.e. (i) primary school, (ii) secondary school and (iii) university);

(2) of the Government's follow-up and support procedures in respect of cases of suicide attempts among academic staff members and students, including the policy bureaux involved, the category of professionals providing support services in those cases and the areas and extent of intervention, as well as details of the support services provided by them; and

(3) in respect of the suicide cases mentioned in (1), whether the Government has provided support services (e.g. professional emotional counselling services) to the families, relatives and friends of the suicide victims; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; primarily which government departments' staff members to provide assistance to the families of suicide victims and inform them of their rights under the law (including the rights of the families to request for holding a death inquest)?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) attaches great importance to the mental health of teachers and students, and has all along been encouraging schools to adopt the Whole School Approach. Through cross-departmental, cross-disciplinary and cross-sector collaboration, the EDB enhances the mental health of teachers and students and provides enhanced support for students with mental health needs (including those with suicidal risk) via various measures and activities directed at three levels, namely Universal, Selective and Indicated. In recent years, the EDB has implemented a number of measures to support students' mental health. This includes implementing the "4Rs

Mental Health Charter" in the 2024/25 school year, with a view to helping students develop healthy living habits and positive interpersonal relationships, and enhancing their resilience. In addition, starting from the 2023/24 school year, the EDB has launched the Mental Health Literacy Resource Packages suitable for students at different learning stages. In consultation with the Social Welfare Department (SWD), our reply to the question raised by the Hon Lillian Kwok is as follows:

(1) and (2) The EDB has all along required primary and secondary schools to report fatal suspected student suicide cases. The numbers of relevant cases in primary and secondary schools in the past five years (2020 to 2024) are tabulated as follows. Of the cases reported, secondary students accounted for about 91 per cent of the total cases, while primary students accounted for about 9 per cent.

Year	Number of cases
2020	21
2021	25
2022	25
2023	32
2024	28

The EDB does not collect data on fatal suspected suicide cases of school personnel, attempted suicides of students, relevant cases of university students and number of death inquests held.

We continue to strengthen the identification of and support for students with mental health risks. For example, the EDB organises about 40 additional thematic teacher training workshops in the 2024/25 school year to introduce the practical skills, counselling techniques and intervention strategies in supporting students with mental health needs, as well as organises parent education talk series for parents of primary and secondary school students that cover topics related to the mental health of children.

Regarding support measures, if schools suspect the students having suicidal risk, schools will arrange school guidance personnel (for example, student guidance teacher/student guidance personnel or school social worker) for early support. If necessary, schools will solicit professional support from the school-based educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, medical, or police officers to ensure that appropriate intervention measures will be taken. To enhance cross-sector collaboration, starting from December 2023, the Government has implemented the Three-tier School-based Emergency Mechanism in all secondary schools in Hong Kong by pooling together the schools' multi-disciplinary teams, the off-campus support network and medical services. The implementation of the Mechanism has been extended till the end of 2025 and related arrangements were enhanced.

Furthermore, the Government established a cross-departmental referral

and collaboration mechanism in April 2024. For instance, when police officers handle attempted suicide cases concerning primary and secondary students that happen outside schools, the Police will, upon obtaining the consent from the student concerned and the parent/guardian, refer the case to the school the student is attending, via the EDB, for support services. If the student and parent/guardian wish to receive support services from other organisation(s), the SWD will refer the case for services provided by other social services units, such as Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs), Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness, and Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres. Schools or relevant social welfare organisations will provide students with emergency intervention services, such as assessments, support and counselling through individual, group or online mode.

Regarding support for teachers' physical and psychological well-being, the EDB has set up the Teachers' Helpline since 2006 to support teachers in coping with stress at work and mental health problems. Apart from this, professional counselling services and face-to-face counselling will be provided as and when necessary, and professionals will be arranged to follow up relevant cases. Meanwhile, the service providers will organise talks on how to relieve stress for teachers. In addition, starting from the 2023/24 school year, the EDB has commissioned non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or tertiary institutions to organise courses on physical and mental health for teachers every year, covering topics on mental health, expressive arts, mindfulness and physical health, to enhance teachers' capacity at work.

(3) The SWD subvents The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong to operate the Suicide Crisis Intervention Centre (SCIC), which offers immediate crisis intervention and in-depth counselling services for persons in need. The SCIC also renders support services to persons affected by suicidal behaviours (including families and friends), including consultation hotline, groups, talks and workshops. Moreover, 67 territory-wide IFSCs (including two Integrated Service Centres), operated by the SWD or subvented NGOs also provide appropriate service and assistance for the families and relatives of suicide victims, including financial assistance, counselling service, and connection with community resources.