

## Becoming independent

### Becoming independent

Many young people depend on parents for support and put off leaving home. This phenomenon is being explored by researchers in Hong Kong and overseas. Does it mean growing up is being postponed?

In 2006, according to a Federation poll, 74.8% of young people aged 18-34 were living with their parents.<sup>1</sup> Over a third said they were short of money, 9% said they wanted to be looked after, and 7.5% said staying on with their parents helped them to save. By 2010, according to a subsequent Federation poll, 62.6% of young people in a larger age group of 18-39 year-olds were living with their parents.<sup>2</sup>

### Key to the door

How do you define adulthood? Being responsible for your own choices and decisions, being financially independent, completing education and working full-time - all are very important. Marriage and parenthood, on the other hand, are no longer considered defining markers in many parts of the world. But leaving home to set up an independent household is accepted universally as a significant step in growing up. For many it also involves the freedom to come and go from the parental home, as they feel fit.

### A state of semi-autonomy

Full-time work usually comes after post-secondary education, and the rising costs of tuition, especially for Hong Kong's self-financed degree programmes, have great impact on life plans. This trend was explored in a 2013 report by HKFYG on financial pressures on tertiary students caused by debt from government loans for tuition fees.<sup>3</sup>

Many young people partially support themselves as they move through higher education. They linger in a state of semi-autonomy in their 20s, combining support from their families with earnings from part-time work. In the 2013 HKFYG study, over two-thirds of tertiary students with government loans were working an average of 34 hours a month.<sup>4</sup>

It has become more common for young people to go back and forth from independence to dependence as economic necessity dictates. However, in Hong Kong, young people tend to stay with their parents longer simply because of the lack of availability of appropriate housing. This prolonged family dependency and slow transition to adulthood is a process rather than a clear-cut event, and can be stressful, especially, when that dependence overstretches limited resources.

Parents and young people alike have to cope with conflicts and lack of privacy.<sup>5</sup> Yet social norms, material, and educational factors, plus the degree of freedom and the level of harmony, also play a large part. In this respect, Hong Kong is no different from other developed economies, despite cultural variations, and the keys to adulthood in the city fit into a complex matrix of factors, just as they do worldwide.

### **Not only Hong Kong**

In a large-scale European Union survey of youth, completed in 2007, 62% of respondents lived with their parents.<sup>6</sup> The authors say, "There seems to be a strong correlation between perceptions of material opportunities to become independent and the desire for autonomy."

In Britain, three million 20-34-year-olds currently live with their parents.<sup>7</sup> In Canada in 2011 42.3% of young adults aged 20-29 were still living at home.<sup>8</sup> New US figures, based on a survey of 75,000 households, show that, "36% of young adults aged 18-31 ... were living in their parents' homes ... the highest share in at least four decades."<sup>9</sup>

As in Hong Kong, contributing factors were rising enrollment in higher education, declining marriage and lower numbers at work, but a substantial number here also continue to receive support from their parents even after they begin working.

### **Sources and further reading**

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4. <http://yrc.hkfyg.org.hk/news.aspx?id=19067596-d3f6-4c46-a507-0cf3a45c3720&corpname=yrc&i=2527>

5. For more on parent-adolescent conflict, see HKFYG Youth Research Centre poll survey. *Current Youth Issues Series No. 2*. July 2013.

6. Biggart, A. *Families and Transitions in Europe*. European Communities, 2007

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9. Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau

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Article from *Youth Hong Kong*, December 2013 (Volume 5 Number 4) p.26-27