



Having children or not

Longer lifespans and the low birth rate are both contributing to the rapid ageing of the Hong Kong population. 1.16 million people were aged over 65 in 2016 and this is expected to double to 2.37 million by 2036. The elderly dependency ratio is also expected to double. What is the reponse of young people?

According to World Bank data, Hong Kong's birth rate of 1.205 was the world's third lowest out of 247, just behind South Korea and Singapore. It has been declining over recent decades, from 2.1 – the optimal number – in 1979 to 1.205 in 2016. A low birth rate represents a heavy burden for Hong Kong as it will result in a reduced labour force and an increased elderly dependency ratio.



Key points from respondents

- **18.5%** intend to have no children
- **71.4%** fear the financial burden of having children
- **59.3%** see bringing up children as taking on a huge responsibility
- **54.9%** consider housing problems to be a disincentive

Nevertheless, on average, respondents wanted 1 or 2 children.

- **71.1%** say the main reason is wanting “a complete family”
- **71.3%** believed the ideal family should have two children
- **50.2%** only actually planned to have two children
- **68.5%** say children enhance family life
- **66.8%** say they want children because they love them
- **5.8%** believe the ideal family is childless

Comments from Youth I.D.E.A.S. think tank members

Alan Yip, convener, & Calvin Lam, group member Surveyed youth generally agree that raising kids is a significant financial burden so we recommend that the government makes reference to the Baby Bonus Scheme in Singapore. If this model were followed, families would receive a HK\$25,000 childbirth cash allowance for each of the first two children and a further HK\$30,000 for subsequent children. We also suggest granting parental leave of six days a year to parents with children under 6 so that they can spend more time with their kids.

Paul Lee & Carly Liu, group members The government should increase the number of subsidized childcare service places. There are only 12 childcare centres in Hong Kong. In the short term, there should be at least one in each district. For the long term, the government should set up a minimum childcare ratio and re-plan childcare service places according to the child population in each district. Furthermore, as a starting point, maternity leave should be increased from 10 to 14 weeks and paternity leave from three to five days. The government should also regularly review the length of maternity and paternity leave in order to meet the needs of the society.

Report No.32 HKFYG Youth I.D.E.A.S. Society and Livelihood group

Published title Boosting [the] Birth Rate in Hong Kong

Respondents 520 20-39 year-olds

More details [in Chinese] yrc.hkfyg.org.hk/2018/07/26/yio32/

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