

社會資本之網絡連繫、信任及互惠狀況的研究
A Study on Social Capital with regard to Social Networks, Trust and Reciprocity

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Summary Report

Hong Kong was not spared the global economic downturn. Unemployment remained high and a sense of pessimism abounded, with tragic stories of those unable to cope taking their own lives. For society as a whole, this was a wake up call, where it was being asked to look inward and identify areas where support and preventative action could be taken. The question emerged - what role did the family, the neighbourhood, school, workplace and religious groups play and what was their bearing on the issue of Social Capital?

In light of these events earlier this year, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups conducted a study on Social Capital, whereby three aspects were examined: "Charitable Giving", "Volunteering" and "Social Participation". The research findings showed that both Economic and Social Capital were essential to the prosperity and progress of a society, leading to the conclusion that further study and investigation was warranted on this issue. In continuation, therefore, of its study into Social Capital, the Federation focused on three areas that have been commonly researched upon overseas: "Social Networks", "Trust" and "Reciprocity", the findings of which are presented here.

A territory-wide Survey was conducted to assess the inter-connectedness, mutual trust and support of the people of Hong Kong in the areas of family, neighbourhood, school, workplace and religious group. These are called the "Five Systems" in this Study.

The Survey was conducted from 20 March to 4 April 2002. By random sampling, 2,026 Hong Kong people aged 15 or above, were successfully polled. Of the total, 329 were aged between 15 and 24, with the remaining 1,669 over 24 years old. To avoid an uneven age distribution, the Study adopted a weighting method to adjust the proportion of respondents' ages to keep them in line with the age proportion in the 2001 Census. Of the 2,026 respondents, 249 were students, while 1,018 were employed. 566 claimed to have some sort of religious belief.

Summary of the Research Findings

1. With regard to “Social Networks”:

“Networking” is the cornerstone of any relation, more so between individuals and society and is therefore considered a key element in assessing Social Capital. Networking includes relationships between individuals and various social systems, such as the family, neighbourhood, school and place of worship. By establishing and encouraging a mutual relationship, networking could emerge as a strong force of support and cohesively pull people together.

This Study sets out to analyse data on Networking in relation to the Five Systems as mentioned above. The data includes, (i) the number of hours devoted to the Five Systems and (ii) the assessment of respondents on individual systems, in terms of “degree of connection,” “sense of belonging” and “sense of security,” based on a scale of 0-10, where 0 is the lowest and 10 is the highest.

(a) The Family System: In general, the people of Hong Kong have close relationships with their families. “Family” was rated highly by the respondents, who also claimed that the daily average time spent talking to family members was 85 minutes.

Not taking into account the hours spent in sleep, respondents spent a daily average of 6.4 hours at home, with 85 minutes spent in talking to family members. 58.6% of the respondents said they frequently attended family gatherings.

Respondents in general gave high ratings to the degree of connection, sense of belonging and sense of security with regard to their families, with average scores of 8.0, 8.6 and 8.5 respectively. The figures show that Hong Kong people, in general, have a very close connection with their families, and that families offer an important source of support.

In comparing the two age groups (15 -24 ; over 24), it was noted that older respondents put a higher value on family than their younger counterparts. In other words, adults had a tighter connection with their families. Also, high-income respondents tended to have a greater sense of belonging and security towards their families.

Noting that Hong Kong people are closely connected to their families, the question remains how good use could be made of family links to extend the same spirit to other social systems. This is one area that requires further study.

(b) The Neighbour System: Respondents show a weak connection with their communities, with 80% not participating in any community activity, while more than 60% knew none or few neighbours.

79.2% of the respondents said they had never participated in any community activity, suggesting a lack of enthusiasm or interest. A similarly high percentage, 61.2%, claimed that they knew few, if any, of their neighbours, while 68.6% had never joined any neighbourhood gathering. Respondents also rated the degree of connection and sense of belonging to the community at a very low level (3.3 and 4.7 respectively). All these factors clearly indicate a very weak link in Hong Kong between neighbours. In order, therefore, to encourage greater community participation and ultimately increasing people's sense of belonging and security towards the community, improving relations between neighbours is of crucial importance.

(c) The School System: Respondents at school have in general a closer connection with their schools, with about 75% saying that they frequently attended gatherings for schoolmates.

The 249 respondents, who were still at school, spent a daily average of 7.7 hours there and 74.7% of them claimed frequently attended gatherings for schoolmates. The findings suggest that there is a close link among schoolmates in general. The assessment of the respondents to the degree of connection, sense of belonging and sense of security to their schools were, on average, 6.4, 6.6 and 6.8 respectively, indicating a fairly close bond.

(d) The Workplace System: Employed respondents had an average connection with their workplace, with 35% claiming that they seldom, or never, attended gatherings for their workmates.

1,018 employed respondents were interviewed, of whom most spent an average of 9 hours at work – one hour more than the normal 8-hour workday, yet 35.1% said they seldom, or never, attended gatherings for their workmates. The respondents rating on their degree of connection, sense of belonging and sense of security to

their workplaces were very average at 5.2, 5.5 and 5.4 respectively.

(e) The Religious System: Respondents who claimed to have belief in religion had a loose connection with their religious groups, with 40% stating that they had not participated in any religious assembly.

566 respondents claimed to have some sort of religious belief, but 38.6% said that they never participated in religious gatherings. Of those who did attend, the average time spent was 8.9 hours per month. Furthermore, 46.1% said they never participated in gatherings with associates from their religious communities. With a very low degree of connection (3.6), sense of belonging (4.2), and sense of security (4.5) to their common religious group, a clear picture emerges of religion providing only a weak level of support.

2. With regard to “Trust”:

“Trust” is a major foundation for social development. It is also an important element for establishing social relationships. Through the building up of mutual trust, people can be drawn closer to one another, thereby ensuring that society becomes a harmonious one.

Through the collection of data in this Study, it is hoped to develop a better understanding of “mutual trust” in the 5 chosen systems. This includes (1) the number of persons that can be trusted; (2) understanding respondents choices in dealing with the following three situations: (a) to assist in financial difficulties; (b) to advise on important decisions; (c) to give support during hard times; and (3) the standard for giving trust.

(a) The Family System: Respondents have a greater trust in their family members, with the family having a key role to play in offering support. 56% of youth respondents said their mothers were the most reliable members of the family, while 34% of adult respondents relied on their spouses.

Findings showed that respondents were more likely to seek help from their family members when they were in financial difficulties (average score 6.2). They also turned to their families for advice in making major decisions (average score 7.2).

When in the midst of adversity, again their support mostly came from family members (average score 7.6). The high average scores reflect that family members are the most trust worthy. It was also found that respondents have less trust in their relatives (average scores at 2.3, 2.6 and 3.6 respectively), indicating that not much support among relatives. The average score amongst all the respondents with regard to family members being trustworthy was 4.1, while for relatives the score was 3.7.

Of respondents aged between 15 and 24, 56.1% found their mothers to be the most reliable, while of those aged over 24, 33.5% relied predominately on their spouses. These results indicate a correlation with the fact that most young people were still single.

“Trust” is a basic foundation for human relationships, contributing to closer relations all around. The family is the arena in which learning and feeling trust towards others is first experienced. Noting that the respondents rated their families highly, it is worth investigating the issue of “trust” into other relationships and systems.

(b) The Neighbour System: Respondents have the least trust in neighbours, with 63.8% believing that none of their neighbours were reliable.

Compared with other systems, respondents indicated the least trust in neighbours, in terms of solving financial problems, seeking advice for major decisions or giving support in times of adversity. The respective scores were 0.4, 0.6 and 1.0. 63.8% of respondents said no neighbour was trustworthy. The average number of trustworthy neighbours was 1.2, meaning that a good foundation for mutual trust among neighbours has not yet been established.

(c) The School System: Respondents at school have comparatively greater trust in their schoolmates, but 18.3% of them said they could not trust their teachers.

249 respondents at school were interviewed, and trustworthy schoolmates were rated at 6.3. Only 0.6% of the respondents said that none of their schoolmates were reliable. The average scores for trustworthy schoolmates were 6.3 and 6.8 respectively, in terms of seeking advice on major decisions and getting support during times of adversity. However, the respondents gave a fairly low score (3.6)

when it came to classmates dealing with financial problems. It maybe because students are in general not very well off financially.

This group of respondents rated the number of trustworthy teachers at an average of 2.9. 18.3% of them said they could not trust any teacher. The average score for trustworthy teachers was 4.7 when respondents wanted to seek help in times of adversity. This score was higher than when compared to other suggested situations. In terms of solving financial difficulties and making important decisions, the average scores were only 1.2 and 3.5 respectively.

(d) The Workplace System: About 20% of the employed respondents said no colleague or supervisor was trustworthy.

The 1018 employed respondents ranked the trustworthiness of their colleagues and supervisors at 3.3. In fact, a considerable 21.1% of the respondents said no colleague or supervisor was reliable. To make a comparison on the two age sample groups, the average number of trustworthy colleagues and supervisors was 2.8 for respondents aged between 15 and 24, and 3.4 for respondents over 24 years old. Years of service may perhaps affect the scores. In the three given situations, the average scores ranged from 1.0 to 3.9 (all under 4.0). The findings reflect that there is not much mutual trust among co-colleagues.

(e) The Religious System: 43.1% of respondents who claimed to have religious faith did not believe that even one of their religious associates was trustworthy.

This group of respondents ranked the trustworthiness of their religious associates at 5.5. 43.1% of them did not believe that a single religious friend was trustworthy. In solving financial difficulties, making major decisions and facing adversity, the average scores for trustworthy religious associates were 1.3, 2.3 and 3.0 respectively. The findings reflect that there is a lack of mutual trust among religious companions.

3. With regard to “Reciprocity”:

“Reciprocity” is the act of receiving a benefit from another person in response to what has been done to him or her. This study defines “reciprocity” as “people trying

to help each other,” based on the understanding that reciprocal relationships can help achieve better cooperation and harmony in society.

This Study seeks to explore the extent to which people are benefited mutually within the 5 chosen systems. Data was collected on the following three issues: (a) offering help; (b) consoling the depressed; and (c) helping settle disputes.

(a) The Family System: It is common for family members to help one another. However, youth seems less spontaneous than adults in offering help to family members.

This Study suggested three scenarios (helping with the housework; to counselling the depressed and settling family disputes) and invited respondents to show their willingness to respond. The data noted that respondents gave an average of 6.7, 6.6 and 6.2 scores, indicating their willingness to offer help to their families in response to the three suggested scenarios.

By comparing respondents in the two age groups, it was found that the average score for youth was slightly lower than those of adults, implying that youth are less likely to volunteer help to members in their family.

(b) The Neighbour System: Mutually beneficial relations are not common among neighbours. The concept of neighbourliness is fairly weak among youth.

Once again using the three situations mentioned above, respondents were invited to show their willingness to help their neighbours (e.g. to look after their flats or to baby-sit their children; to console the depressed and to settle disputes). It was found that respondents were very unwilling to become involved, as reflected in the average scores of 1.2, 1.6 and 1.4. It is obvious, therefore, that helping others is not so common among neighbours. Youth are even less neighbourly than adults.

(c) The School System: Schoolmates are more willing to help one another. However, respondents are less likely to volunteer help to their schoolmates in dealing with difficulties in studies.

Data collected from the 249 respondents at school show that it is quite common for schoolmates to help one another. The average scores for helping classmates to

deal with problems in their studies, consoling depressed classmates and settling disputes were 5.2, 6.7 and 6.1 respectively. It is obviously quite common for schoolmates to help one another, though the score for helping each other with their studies scored the lowest.

(d) The Workplace System: Help offered by the respondents to their colleagues is basically work-oriented.

Of the 1,018 respondents, it was found that colleagues, to a certain extent, offered mutual help, even though it is largely work-oriented. In helping colleagues over come difficulties at work, the average score was 6.2. As for consoling the depressed and settling disputes, the average scores were 5.3 and 4.6 respectively. The findings reflect that respondents are less likely to offer help to their colleagues when it comes to personal matters.

(e) The Religious System: It is not a common practice for religious associates to help one another.

It is found that among the 566 respondents who claimed to have religious faith, the average scores for helping their religious associates, for example, in looking after a flat or babysitting, consoling the depressed and settling disputes were all on the low side (respectively 1.7, 3.4 and 2.3). Among all three deeds, religious associates were slightly more willing to console the depressed. The result reflects that helping one another among religious associates was not common.

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| Major Observations |
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(a) Unemployed respondents have a weaker link with their families and neighbours

125 of the total respondents were unemployed. Of them 5% and 32.4% respectively claimed that no member of either their families or a relative was reliable. 9.2% said there was no conversation between them and their family members, and 16% said they did not attend family gatherings. The findings seem to suggest that the unemployed are in general quite alienated from their family members.

The unemployed are even more alienated from their neighbours and community. 86.8% and 73.3% of respondents in this group had never participated in community activities or neighbourhood gatherings. 72% claimed that not a single neighbour was reliable, while 61.6% said they knew very few or no neighbours. These percentages are all on the high side. The figures show that the unemployed barely participate in communal gatherings, and have a very weak connection with their communities. This may be because the unemployed were anxious about their own difficulties, and therefore tended to be passive in their human relations. Ways should be explored to support the unemployed so as to link them to their families and the community again.

(b) There are always some groups within society that are alienated from the system. They trust nobody and do not participate in any activity or gathering. This situation deserves greater attention.

It has been found that in every system there are some special groups of respondents who are alienated from their social networks and the outside world.

In terms of social connection: Of all the 2,026 respondents, 7.8% (158 persons) said they never talked to their family members; 79.2% (1,604 persons) said they did not participate in community activities; 15.2% (309 persons) said they knew absolutely nobody in the neighbourhood. The findings show that some respondents are total outsiders to both their families and communities. This serious lack of relationship needs to be investigated in greater depth.

In terms of attending gatherings: 7.7% (157 persons) said they did not attend any family gathering, and 68.6% (1,390 persons) said they did not join in any neighbourhood activities. Among the 1,018 employed respondents, 14.5% (148 persons) said they never attended gatherings with colleagues; and among the 566 respondents who have a religious belief, 46.1% (254 persons) said they did not participate in any gatherings with their religious associates. The results show that some respondents have a great apathy towards their families, neighbours, colleagues and religious associates.

In terms of trust, 1.7% (34 persons) claimed they could trust no body in their families, communities, schools/workplaces and religious groups. Though the percentage is low, it shows that there are some people who have no trust at all systems.

Of all the respondents, 3.6% (73 persons) and 28.6% (579 persons) did not have any trust or belief in their family members and relatives respectively. The percentage of respondents not trusting their relatives is significant. An even greater percentage of 63.8% (1,291 persons) had no trust in their neighbours. 18.3% (46 persons) of the 249 student-respondents said not a single teacher was reliable, and 21.1% (214 persons) of the 1,018 in-job respondents said that no colleague or supervisor was trustworthy. Of the 566 respondents who claimed to have a religion, 43.1% (243 persons) said no religious associate was trustworthy. With such a low attitude and belief in trusting one's community, leads to the conclusion that respondents would find it difficult to secure support during times of adversity.

(c) People who retired have a weaker connection with family, but they are comparatively more active in the community, with which they have a certain connection.

Of all the respondents, 313 were retired. Of the group, 21.1% said they never talked to their family members; 9.7% never attended a family gathering; 8.8% had not trust in any family member and 34.7% said not a single relative was trustworthy. The results show that retired people have a weaker link with their family members.

However, retired people had a relatively greater linkage with the community. 22.9% of retired respondents spent on average between 1 to 10 hours per month in community activities. 40.9% of them claimed they knew most, or all, of their neighbours. The findings show that though retired people may have a weak connection with their own families, they have a relatively closer link with their communities. This may be due to the fact that retired people have lived in the same place for a long time, and are familiar with the community in their neighbourhood.

Retirement also implies more time for participation in community activities. Society should spend greater effort to help retired to cope with changes, strengthen their connection with families, and encourage their participation in community activities. These are ways to expand their social network, thus helping them to live a richer and more meaningful life.

(d) Housekeepers are comparatively more active in community participation; they have a higher degree of connection and greater sense of belonging to the community.

309 of all the respondents were housekeepers, and the majority was female. 19.6% of them said they spent an average of between 1 to 10 hours per month participating in social activities. The percentage is slightly higher than the overall rate of participation. 12.3% said they frequently attended neighbourhood gatherings and 30.2% said they knew most or all neighbours. The assessment of housekeepers with regard to community relations in terms of degree of connection, sense of belongings and sense of security were represented by the average scores of 4.1, 5.6 and 6.0 respectively, reflecting their linkages with their community. This group of people can be a potentially positive force in the community.

(e) Figures show that the more educated the respondent, the higher the rate of attending family gatherings, reflecting that they held a high value to the quality of family relations.

Figures show that the more educated the respondent, the less time was spent at home. Of 398 people with a tertiary education level, 69.6% said they spent a daily average of less than five hours at home. However, 68.7% of the same group of respondents said they frequently participated in family gatherings. The findings suggest that by frequently attending family events, they had a closer link with, and a higher sense of belonging and security towards their families. It further reflects that although more educated respondents spent less time at home, they still held a high value to the quality of family relations.

(f) Respondents living in private housing knew less about their neighbours, and were less likely to attend neighbourhood gatherings.

In terms of residential background, it was found that those who lived in private housing, 66.6% said they knew very few or even nobody from their neighbourhood. The percentage was higher than that of people living in public housings (57.9%). On the other hand, 18.3% of private housing respondents said they knew all or most of their neighbours, which was lower than the 24.3% of public housing respondents.

Figures also showed that private housing respondents participated comparatively less in neighbourhood gatherings. The findings suggest that there was a certain relation between the kind of housing and people's familiarity with their neighbours. How to enhance neighbourliness among residents of private housing estates is a topic awaiting greater analysis.

From the research findings and the above observations, it has been established that the family is still a very reliable system that offers support. However, community networks are very weak in comparison. There are also some special groups, such as the unemployed, who appear to be alienated from their networks, and they need greater support from the community. As such, the failure of community networks has shaken the entire supporting network. This is a problem that needs to be dealt with immediately.

Recommendations

- I. **Findings in this Study reveal that Hong Kong people have a relatively strong family support network. However, their other supporting networks appear to be quite weak, with the community network being the weakest. Alienated community relationships and the lack of a solid foundation for mutual trust and support among Hong Kong people, in the long run, will only intensify their dependence on the Government. It also directly affects their participation and involvement in the community. This is a deeply worrying phenomenon and needs to be seriously dealt with.**

- II. **In order to strengthen and develop community networks, it is recommended that the Government should develop the following strategies:**
 - (1) **Certain district groups, such as Mutual Aid Committees, Incorporated Owners Committees, grass-root and self-help groups are useful means for encouraging social participation of the public. The Government should allow more space for such organizations to develop, so as to encourage greater public participation, and hence cultivate the people's sense of belonging to the community.**

 - (2) **This Study clearly indicates that women and retired people showed far greater participation in community affairs. The Government could consider providing greater support to these two groups, recognizing their contributions and helping them to further develop their spirit of participation.**

III. The new initiative of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, “Community Investment and Inclusion Fund” is a good start. The Fund can provide direct financial support to organizations so as to encourage greater mutual support among people. This good practice should continue so as to further motivate Hong Kong people’s voluntary participation in community activities to strengthen networks within the community.