

LCQ21: Death cases handled by Police

Following is a question by the Hon Hui Chi-fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

Will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information in respect of each of the death cases (including dead body found cases) handled by the Police during the period from June 12 to September 30 this year (set out in a table):

- (i) the date, time and location of receipt of the case by the Police,
- (ii) the gender and age of the deceased,
- (iii) whether the identity of the deceased has been confirmed,
- (iv) whether the Police has notified the family members of the deceased,
- (v) whether the deceased died in official custody,
- (vi) whether the deceased had any record of arrest within three months before death,
- (vii) the category under which the case is classified,
- (viii) whether there were suspicious circumstances surrounding the cause of death, and
- (ix) whether investigation of the cause of death has been completed; and

(2) of the respective numbers of fatal suicide cases and dead body found cases during (i) the aforesaid period and (ii) the same period last year, with a breakdown by the age group (each group covering five years) to which the deceased belonged?

Reply:

In accordance with section 10 of the Police Force Ordinance (Cap 232), the duties of the police force include assisting coroners to discharge their duties and exercise their powers under the Coroners Ordinance (CO) (Cap 504).

In accordance with section 9(1) of CO, a coroner may investigate a reportable death or any other death of a person which the coroner considers should be investigated in the public interest. Section 9(2) specifies that the purpose of such an investigation shall be to investigate the cause of and the circumstances connected with the death of a person.

As prescribed under CO, there are 20 types of reportable deaths including deaths caused by suicide, an accident or injury as well as crime or suspected crime. In accordance with section 4(1) of CO, where a death comes to the knowledge of a person under a duty to report deaths (including a police officer), he shall report it to the coroners as soon as possible.

In accordance with section 14(1) of CO, where a person dies suddenly, by accident or violence or under suspicious circumstances, a coroner shall hold an inquest into the death. According to section 27 of CO, the purpose of the inquest shall be to inquire into the cause of and the circumstances connected with the death. For that purpose, the proceedings and evidence at the inquest shall be directed to ascertaining the following matters in so far as they may be ascertained, which include the identity of the dead person; how, when and where the person came by his death; and the conclusion of the coroner/jury concerned as to the death.

Our consolidated reply to Hon Hui Chi-fung's questions is as follows:

(1) and (2) In handling every death case, the Police report to the coroner's court in strict compliance with the law and guidelines. The Police will investigate every reportable death and submit to the coroners an initial investigation report together with a post-mortem report prepared by a clinical pathologist or forensic pathologist. Where the coroners consider that further investigation of the death is required, the Police will investigate further and submit a more detailed death investigation report. Upon perusal of the relevant report, and upon considering all the circumstances of the case, the coroner will consider whether to hold an inquest into the death.

The Police maintain their professionalism in investigating each of the death cases and follow it up in a meticulous manner. In fact, as indicated in the Coroners' Report 2018, the Coroners recognised the performance of the police investigators and that their standard of conducting investigation into every incident of death was very high, as was their reports.

Based on Police's initial classification at scene, the number of suicide reports (including person found hanging or felt from height), and dead body found and death before or on arrival to hospitals reports (including cases of uncertain cause of death at scene) received by the Police between June and September 2019, as compared with the same period in the past four years, are listed below:

Between June to September	Suicide (including cases of person found hanging or fallen from height)(Note 1)	Dead body found, death before or on arrival to hospitals (including cases of uncertain cause of death at scene)(Note 2)
2019	256	2 537
2018	222	2 226
2017	250	2 407
2016	235	2 161
2015	216	2 159

Note 1: based on Police's initial classification.

Note 2: cases may be reclassified upon conclusion of the investigation, including reclassifying them as suicide reports.

The above figures do not include reports by persons who have a duty to report deaths to coroners, and the relevant cases are eventually being concluded as suicide cases by the coroners. The Police do not maintain other breakdown statistics as mentioned in the question.