

LCQ9: Police officers and their family members being mistreated

Following is a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (May 5):

Question:

It has been reported that since the eruption in June 2019 of the movement of opposition to the proposed legislative amendments, incidents of police officers and their family members being mistreated have happened time and again. For instance, some healthcare workers in public hospitals deliberately inflicted greater pain on police officers when treating their wounds, and some children of police officers were bullied by their teachers and classmates in schools. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of related complaints received by the authorities since June 2019, with a breakdown by the type of organisations (e.g. schools and hospitals) involved in the complaints;

(2) of the details of the follow-up actions taken by the authorities in respect of such complaints, including whether any teachers and healthcare workers under complaint have been punished;

(3) of the new measures in place to provide assistance for the police officers and their family members who have been mistreated (e.g. assisting in school transfer, and providing additional allowances or medical insurance for them to switch to using private healthcare services); and

(4) whether it will set up a dedicated task force to follow up on such complaints, and render assistance to the police officers and their family members concerned; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Since the outbreak of acts of serious violence, "Hong Kong independence" and riots that prevailed in the latter half of 2019, there have been complaints from police officers about them and their family members being bullied or unfairly treated at schools and public hospitals. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is deeply concerned about this. The Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) has also immediately established mechanisms with relevant organisations and bureaux/ departments to reflect and refer such cases, and provided necessary assistance to the colleagues concerned.

According to the information provided by the Education Bureau (EDB), the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) and the HKPF, my reply to the Hon Jeffrey Lam's question is as follows:

Bullying in Schools

As at end-March 2021, the EDB has received 25 complaints/ requests for assistance concerning bullying of police officers' children in schools. According to the EDB, the majority of the cases (16 out of 25) related to disharmony in speeches and relationship among the students, while the remaining cases involved suspected bullying of students by teachers.

As regards the aforementioned cases received, the EDB said that the schools have handled them in accordance with the guidelines issued by the EDB and provided emotional support and counselling to the students affected, as well as explained the incidents to the parents concerned. For complaints that were substantiated after investigations, the schools have taken disciplinary action against the teachers/ students involved.

According to the EDB, it has been adopting a zero tolerance policy on any act of bullying in schools. The Bureau has reminded schools to pay extra attention from time to time to the emotional wellness of the students who are particularly vulnerable to bullying (including children of police officers during the times of violent riots), and how they get along with other students, so as to provide timely support and take necessary follow-up actions. As regards acts of bullying among students, schools should immediately stop such improper act, re-evaluate the situation of students involved and provide appropriate assistance. Schools should guide their students to have self-reflection and work on ways to solve the problem, with the aim of preventing the recurrence of such incidents. If necessary, schools will arrange counselling staff to assist the children being bullied, or further enlist the help of professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, to provide support and mediation services so as to safeguard their psychological health while preventing them from being hurt again.

As regards cases involving teachers, the EDB advised that it takes every one of them seriously, same as other suspected cases of misconduct of teachers, to protect the well-being of the children of police officers, so as to ensure that they can learn and grow happily in a healthy and peaceful campus environment. For any substantiated case, the EDB will consider the gravity of each case and take appropriate action against the teacher concerned. Actions may include issuing an advisory, warning or reprimand letter, or even cancellation of teacher registration in accordance with the Education Ordinance.

Complaints against Medical Services

According to the FHB, as a public healthcare service provider, the Hospital Authority (HA) has the responsibility to provide professional and equitable healthcare services for the public, and has reminded its staff to

avoid leading to misperception from patients that public hospitals could not adhere to the code of conduct for healthcare professionals because of difference in stances or background, even to the extent of affecting public hospital services. The HA has put in place an established mechanism to handle disciplinary matters of its staff. Disciplinary actions taken are not confined to cases relating to complaints on medical services. The HA will consider the seriousness of the incidents and take appropriate disciplinary actions, including counselling, verbal or written warnings, and dismissal for cases of gross misconduct.

According to the FHB, as at end-March 2021, the HA has received 43 complaint cases referred by the HKPF. These complaints mainly concern issues of operational arrangements, staff attitude or communication. The HA has conducted investigations on the cases in accordance with the established procedures, and has completed following up on 42 of them with replies issued. The HA is following up on the remaining case. The HA has reminded its staff in respect of professional attitude as well as communications with patients or members of the public, and handled individual cases involving breach of discipline in accordance with its established personnel procedures.

Communication Mechanisms and Other Support

Regarding the bullying of police officers' children in schools, the management of the HKPF and the EDB have established a reporting mechanism for handling and following up on such cases with a view to safeguarding the safety of police officers' children. As necessary, the HKPF management has provided full assistance to arrange school transfer for the police officers' children being bullied. For any request of school transfer made by the parents, the EDB will first understand the parents' concerns and need, and encourage them to work with the schools to help their children face and cope with the problems of bullying. Besides, the parents will have to be aware of the potential issues of school transfer that might have on their children. For instance, the children may have to adapt to a new learning environment. If the parents still consider it more appropriate for their children to have the school transfer, the EDB will provide all necessary assistance in accordance with the established mechanism. According to the EDB, as regards police parents who have requested school transfer for their children, they are satisfied with the school transfer arrangement, with some preferring their children to remain in the original school after communication with schools.

The HKPF and the HA have set up a two-tier communication platform to improve the mechanism of communication regarding provision of medical services between both sides since the outbreak of the violent riots in 2019. At the headquarters level, management of the HKPF and the HA meet regularly to exchange views on policy issues. At the district level, representatives of the police districts/ divisions can reach out to the hospital representatives of the district directly on various matters for instant communication and handling.

Besides, the HKPF has put in place a mechanism to provide welfare and

support services to the colleagues and their families in need, including providing assistance in seeking private healthcare services to injured/sick colleagues according to their wish. Besides, the Psychological Services Group of the HKPF also offers a range of psychological counselling and support services to police officers and their families who are in need or affected, providing them a channel to alleviate their emotions.

The Government reiterates that these instances of police officers' children being bullied and police officers being unfairly treated are absolutely unacceptable. All departments and organisations concerned have to handle each and every complaint seriously. For cases involving teachers or medical staff which are found to be substantiated, their professional misconduct will be followed up seriously.