

Domestic violence a major cause of Beijing divorces

Domestic violence has turned out to be a major reason why couples divorced in Beijing in the last three years, a Beijing court said.

The Beijing No 1 Intermediate People's Court released a report that said from April 2014 to June this year, women in 85 percent of its 853 divorce cases claimed they suffered domestic violence.

"The figure showed domestic violence has become the main cause of divorces we've handled over the past few years," said Sun Guoming, the court's vice-president.

Sun confirmed women are still in a relatively weak position in relationships, "but their awareness to protect themselves through laws has been enhanced." He added divorce was the main part in domestic disputes it tackled in the past three years.

Disputes related to property allocation and succession also were common, the court added in a statement.

Divorce among younger people was identified as a key feature at the Beijing court. It said those born in the 1980s comprised 40 percent of the divorce cases.

Work begins to clean up Beijing's 'dirty streets'

"Dirty street" in Sanlitun was once famous for cheap food and drinks. Tian Liming, who has lived in the area for more than 50 years, knows all too well how the bar-and-restaurant-strewn thoroughfare lived up to its nickname.



Workers tear down unauthorized exterior walls on Tonglihou street, aka "Dirty street", in Beijing's Sanlitun Photos By Feng Yongbin and Zou Hong / China Daily

The Sanlitun South No 42 apartment building stands at one end of the 200-meter-long Tonglihou street – Dirty street's official name – which connects the two parts of the Taikoo Li shopping complex. "Small businesses grew out of these apartments like aggressive tumors," the 60-year-old said.

The rise of the street in Chaoyang district began when the number of visitors surged after the southern section of the popular complex was opened in 2008 as the city hosted its first Olympic Games. Many entrepreneurs saw great business opportunities, Tian recalled.

Since it was much cheaper to rent apartments than retail premises in nearby high-end commercial spaces, serving holes appeared in a number of street-facing exterior walls of the building's ground floor apartments. A large number of apartments, including many above ground level, were converted into bars, eateries and stores.

Soon, the illegal construction reached a point where it was impossible to see the real exterior walls, prompting concerns among local residents that some buildings' structural integrity had been damaged and posed a safety risk, according to Tian.

'Smelly and sticky'

Soon, the street in front of his residential building was constantly covered by trash, as well as vomit and urine from drunken late-night revelers. "The street became smelly and sticky. People then started to call it 'Dirty street', and it became famous among young people and expats," Tian said.

He witnessed the removal of the “tumors” on April 24, when the Beijing government launched a citywide campaign to block unauthorized business openings in the walls of buildings in residential areas.

On the first day, 33 businesses situated in Tian’s apartment building were stripped of their unauthorized constructions and the original walls were restored. He said he was delighted, but was wary of showing his feelings in front of people who were sad to see the street lose its former “glory”.

“For years, those businesses that some treasured deeply had been a nightmare for local residents – if they could sleep at night, that is. A friend in my building called the police five times in one night to complain about the loud noise coming from the bars,” he said, as he stood in front of a belt of grass that was previously covered by several small eateries. Now, only the electricity cables covered in evaporated grease remind people of the outlets’ existence.

Like many residents, Tian’s friend decided to move. Only about a dozen original residents of the building stayed. After the renovation, people began to move back. Moreover, the incidence of crime on the street fell by one-third, according to Liu Zhe, deputy director of the Sanlitun police station.

Tian believes the authorities should have tackled the situation a long time ago, but taking action was not as easy as he imagines.

The process of converting ground-floor apartments or courtyards in hutong – traditional alleyways – into private businesses began as China pursued the reform and opening-up policy in the 1980s and ’90s, said Zhao Yong, deputy director of the Sanlitun urban management team.

“This unauthorized behavior gradually became a common practice all over the city. Beijing has clearly grown out of that phase and things need to be strictly regulated from now on,” he said. “The removal of illegal constructions in the infamous ‘Dirty street’ demonstrates the Beijing government’s determination, and the business owners know that.”

He added that some businesses in apartment buildings remain open because their business licenses and rental contracts are still valid, but unsurprisingly business has plummeted as they are no longer visible from the street and customers have to approach them through residential entrances.

“Who knows how much longer they can survive?” he said.

Zero tolerance

By the end of July, more than 23,390 sites with unauthorized openings had been dealt with around the city, and the municipal government has stated that new unauthorized constructions will not be tolerated.

In addition to removing safety hazards, the citywide campaign is also expected to make central Beijing less crowded and provide room for improvements, such as the construction of parks and facilities to make people’s lives more comfortable.

The goal is to develop Beijing into world-class capital city and improve the general standard of living, according to a draft of the Beijing Overall Urban Development Plan, which was published in March. The process, which began last year, will continue until 2030.

In February, President Xi Jinping said the urban planners must think deeply about how the city should look and devise ways to strengthen its function as the capital.

According to the draft, Beijing will further restore the traditional appearance of neighborhoods during the campaign. In August, the revised plan was approved by the central government, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Development and Reform said.

Xisibeitoutiao, a 600m-long hutong in Xicheng district, has existed since the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), when Beijing became the capital. As one of the best-preserved hutong neighborhoods in the city, it was also among the first to launch the campaign.

“Some stores selling electronic accessories near the entrances to Xisibeitoutiao had doors that opened into the hutong. Trucks would block the alleyway for hours every time new stock was unloaded,” said Zhang Xiaozhen, who has lived in the area for 15 years.

Improvements

Since 14 wall openings in the hutong were blocked at the end of last year, the 63-year-old has noticed obvious changes.

“The alleyway is much cleaner and quieter than before. The blocked walls looked quite ugly at the beginning, but now workers have started to repaint and decorate them to restore the traditional courtyard appearance,” she said.

“I don’t mind people running businesses from the hutong as long as they treat it as their home and take care of it. They shouldn’t pour dirty water everywhere and change the structure of the houses just to make more money.”

The process hasn’t won universal approval, though, and some residents have complained that they have to travel further afield for grocery shopping and for breakfast because some small businesses, such as greengrocers and restaurants, have relocated.

“The inconvenience is only temporary. The planning of new supermarkets and convenience stores started even before the campaign was launched. Our goal is to ensure that hutong residents can find a supermarket or convenience store within 15 minutes’ walking distance,” said Wei Jihong, deputy director of Xijiekou subdistrict, which administers the hutong located on Xisibei street.

To accommodate people’s needs, more than 3,000 greengrocers, convenience stores and restaurants that offer breakfast had been built or upgraded by the end of July, according to the city’s development and reform commission.

The new convenience stores will also reserve spaces for former street traders who provide bike and shoe repairs, Wei said. "People need their skills, so we want to encourage them to continue their businesses in regulated areas."

Thomas Angotti, a professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College in New York, believes that the campaign in Beijing has many parallels with the development of the "Big Apple".

"The campaign in Beijing seems to be a response to interests by national and international capital to locate in central areas where land values and business potential are higher. Building regulations and zoning, when strictly applied, can be the mechanism (for that)," he said.

Zoning

New York is now divided into three basic zones – residential, commercial and manufacturing – and construction application forms and permitted uses are strictly applied in all of them. Residents can use the city's urban planning website to discover their neighborhood's zonal code and work out if they are allowed to operate businesses there.

Angotti suggested that before it takes action the Beijing government should make greater efforts to work with small businesses to improve their compliance with local laws. In many places, governments provide incentives, grants and assistance, he said.

Back in Beijing, "Dirty street" is no longer dirty, according to Tian: "The city is changing so quickly. I can't imagine what it will look like in 10 years' time. All I know is that it is my home, whatever changes are made."

26 elected as new legislators of China's Macao

The legislative election management committee of China's Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) announced the preliminary results of the election of the sixth Legislative Assembly early Monday morning.

The preliminary results showed that 14 candidates won the directly-elected seats, and 12 won the indirectly-elected seats.

The election of the sixth Legislative Assembly of Macao SAR kicked off on Sunday morning.

According to legislative election management committee, some 174,872 eligible voters cast their ballots, accounting for 57.22 percent of total eligible voters, 2.2 percentage higher than the last legislative election.

In line with the Basic Law, the new legislature is composed of 33 seats including 14 directly-elected seats, 12 indirectly-elected seats, and seven others which will be appointed by the SAR's chief executive. The term of office of the sixth Legislative Assembly will start in October 2017.

Heshan Forum underlines roles of stem cells

A two-day forum focusing on the prospects and major achievements of stem cells research and clinical trials was held in Jimo, Qingdao, Shandong Province from Sept. 14 to 15.



Richard John Roberts, a Nobel Laureate of Physiology and Medicine in 1993, addresses the opening ceremony of a two-day forum of life sciences on Thursday, in Jimo, Qingdao, Shandong Province. [Photo by Wu Jin / China.org.cn]

Officially titled Qingdao China-2017 International Annual Meeting on Biology and Medicine, also known as Heshan Forum, the workshop, proposed by Zhao Chunhua, doctor and chief scientist from Peking Union Medical College Hospital, attracted an outstanding line-up of biomedical luminaries. The presence of Richard John Roberts, the 1993 Nobel Laureate of physiology and medicine, has given prominence to the cross-country and interdisciplinary meeting.

As one of the critical breakthroughs in the sector of life sciences, the research, application and regeneration of stem cells is expected to save more people who are suffering from deadly diseases such as cancer, leukemia or diabetes.

Leukemia patients, who could only survive in many cases with a compatible organ donation chosen from a bank of millions, may in the future have a better chance of surviving by receiving marrows donated from their lineage family members, Zhao introduced.

According to Martin Zenke, a professor of cell biology and chairman of the University Hospital Pauwelsstrasse, the science of artificial stem cell has a close relation with genetic engineering.

"It's a big topic and we have different kinds of stem cells, conventional stem cells and unconventional stem cells, because we can make artificial stem cells," he said.

"What is also very important is that the stem cells have property. When it grows, and it divides one stem cell into two stem cells. They can also change their identities to become a different cell. This also goes together with the technology of genetic engineering, genetic editing with stem cells and engineering cells, which give us, the new bunch of cells and cell products," he added.

Zenke's interdisciplinary explanation has been echoed by Steve A. Kay, the provost professor of neurology, biomedical engineering and biological sciences of the University of Southern California.

"[We aim] to really pool together people from very different backgrounds, much broader than normal, from our cinema school, from our art, design school and our engineering school and our medicine school to really look at big and massive things like cancer and diseases related to aging," Kay said.

"So, gathering as much patient data as we can on different diseases within a diverse population. We don't think we know everything about health to solve these problems, so we are really interested in collaborating with institutions, individuals and government," he added.

During the opening ceremony, two standardized programs, namely, "the clinical standard of mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) transplantation for treating graft-versus-host-diseases (GVHD)" and "the clinical standard of MSCs transplantation for treating acute Myocardial infarction" were launched and "the establishing of the biomedical sciences international alliance of the 'Belt and Road' initiatives'" was inaugurated.

In retrospect of China's progress made in biomedical sciences and healthcare services, the forum, with an attendance of 600 people from both home and abroad, aimed to forge ahead with the exchanges and cooperation among the professionals.

Following Chinese President Xi Jinping's remarks made in August, 2016, during which he reiterated that the policymakers should observe people's healthcare

demands as one of the top priorities on their strategic agendas, the Qingdao government mapped out an outline endeavoring to shape the coastal city's medical and pharmaceutical layout within four years.

"China has spent lots of money on research, and I think this is because you have leaders who are technically savvy as they understand important modern technologies and they understand important sciences," said Roberts.

The organizers of the forum have chosen Jimuo, the county-level city under the jurisdiction of Qingdao, as the venue for the annual biomedical workshop.

CPC improves overall quality of Party officials

The Communist Party of China (CPC) has been improving the overall quality of Party officials by selecting the most competent and sacking the corrupt.

In some local governments, officials used to be selected or promoted merely because they had been in their posts during periods of rapid GDP growth, or because they had been working for the government for a long time.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012 however, GDP growth is no longer the only game in town. Quality and sustainable development, rising standards of living and social harmony are now included in the mix.

In June 2014, the general office of the CPC Central Committee declared that young officials should be given more opportunities to work in remote and impoverished areas where they can gain better experience. Those who distinguish themselves will be promoted.

Party secretaries and specified discipline officials are now required to sign off on guarantees of newly promoted officials' integrity.

While selecting candidates on the basis of their merits attacks the problem from the bottom up, it is equally important to identify the bad apples which are already in the barrel and throw them out.

The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection has now completed all the inspections mandated by the 18th CPC Central Committee. Over the past five years, inspections have swept through local governments, public institutions, state-owned enterprises, financial institutions and universities.

The CPC has removed more than 40,000 Party leaders and cadres from part-time "jobs" in enterprises.

More than 200 vice-ministerial or higher levels of officials and managers have been investigated since the 18th CPC National Congress, according to

Zhang Hao, a professor from Party School of the Guangdong Provincial Committee of CPC.

“The number has tripled that of the 2007 to 2012 period,” he said.

Apart from “tigers”, or high-level officials engaged in major graft cases, “flies,” or grass-root officials, have also been addressed.

A report released by the Supreme People’s Procuratorate of China in March said graft cases of over 17,000 low-level officials had been handled over the past year, mainly in land grabs, demolitions and fund management related to agriculture, rural area and farmers.

Change is underway and there is no going back.