

The Predicament of the Elderly

Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my concern over the predicament of the elderly in Hong Kong. Seemingly, Hong Kong is very wealthy and harmonious. Yet, have you ever contemplated the lives of the older generations? In such a prosperous city as Hong Kong, it is inconceivable that many old people nowadays are impoverished and living in worn-out buildings all by themselves. However, this is the truth. The elderly had contributed a lot to our society so that we can enjoy such prosperity today. How can we just forget all the efforts they had made and simply stand aloof from their plight?

Prior to tackling the problem, let's first gain an insight into what troubles the old are facing. The following problems are generally threefold.

First and foremost, poor living conditions are omnipresent. Regardless of the affluence in Hong Kong, many old people cannot enjoy the fruits of economic recovery and are still living in dire destitution. They can only afford to live in old and cramped flats like caged or subdivided ones. For many old people, their accommodations are aged and dilapidated, with inadequate spaces and facilities. These buildings are putting old people's lives in peril since it is in poverty of up-to-standard fire-fighting equipment and there are no any clear routes for fire escape too. Worse still, many old people are living alone. No doubt, it is formidable for them to perform housework and take care of themselves. This may lead to a myriad of home accidents.

One other reason adding fuel to the problem is physical abuse. It is known to everybody that the thinking of the older generations is traditional and sometimes even obstinate. Their lifestyle is contrary to the one of Hong Kongers. This stirs up many conflicts between the young and the old and in the long term it can, to a large extent, exacerbate their relationship. Besides, Hong Kong is a fast-paced city with people regarding time as money. Both adults and youngsters are occupied with work or study. Therefore, they are too busy to share and communicate with their parents or grandparents. Lack of interaction aggravates their relationship too. Eventually, old people may succumb to mental and physical torment.

Added to the above are health problems. According to a recent survey conducted by several local hospitals, the number of old people contracting severe diseases like heart diseases, cancer and diabetes is on an alarming increase, which connotes that the health conditions of the majority of old people is deteriorating. The culprit of this scenario is the government's lack of provision of health education. Had the government provided the old with sufficient information about healthy lifestyle and ways to prevent diseases, the aged would not have to suffer from a range of diseases. Also, the government did not help the old with financial difficulties to receive proper medical treatment. Even if it did, the current public health care system is not capable of catering for all aged people.

Elderly people definitely deserve our respect. In an attempt to rectify the worsening situation, something concrete has to be done in no time. The following are some suggestions.

Regarding the poor living conditions of the aged, the first and foremost avenue is to support them financially. For short-term strategies, the government should provide the old with direct pecuniary support in a bid to bail them out of awful accommodations. With adequate money, they may renovate the inner part of their houses or buy more basic electric appliances, thereby raising their living standard. As to the long-term methods, the government should speed up the building of public housing in hopes of providing sufficient affordable housing supply for aged people. The government should also step up the inspection of the facilities of old buildings, which in turns improve the living conditions of the elderly.

In order to deal with the problem of physical and mental abuse, provision of prompt assistance and education is of utmost importance. The Social Welfare Department should give top priority to rendering assistance to elderly people. Community centres should be established in every district and ample social workers should also be sent to these centres with a view to helping the old immediately. Social workers can hold activities such as yoga classes, computer classes, trips and so on, with a view to encouraging old people to participate so that they can develop their own interests and be more confident. As for the latter, education is essential to eliminating conflicts between the aged and the youth. The concept of respecting an elder should absolutely be instilled into youngsters. They should learn that violence is not a suitable way to solve a problem, but communication is. The parents should take the lead to show respect for the aged in order to raise the morals of their children.

Last but by no means least, the government can cope with the health problems of elderly people by supplying more medical support for them. The government should not waver in increasing the efficiency of the public health care system and make it an affordable one for the old. Besides, Hospital Authority can cooperate with the Social Welfare Department to hold some talks and forums which is regarding healthy lifestyle, for the purpose of raising the awareness of preventing disease among old people.

After all, had it not been for the efforts of the elderly, never would Hong Kong be as robust as today. As a member of our society, all of us should make every endeavor to help them out of this ordeal.

Yours faithfully,

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