

SAFETY AND HEALTH ISSUES OF SUBDIVIDED HOUSING IN HONG KONG: AN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH FIVE YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract

The study has critically focused on the grassroots who are not supported by public housing can only rely on the private rental market. They are faced with the situation of living in more expensive and smaller spacing, and even forced to move into subdivided housing to suffer from different challenges in various aspects. Unfortunately, the number of grassroots living in subdivided housing will increase in the future, and the problems of subdivided housing will become more serious. The researcher selected five young adults who are living in subdivided housing for in-depth interview. Their housing expenditure is about 33%, reflecting the high burden of housing expenditures on the grassroots. The study identified that residents living in subdivided housing face different challenges in various aspects. Endanger personal safety, fire hazard, leaking water, concrete peeling, hygiene issues, and mental health are all unsatisfactory. They often lack relevant safety awareness and support. They are often exposed to risks, especially in old buildings and suburban squatters. The research result indicated that living in subdivided housing for long periods of time may be detrimental to the physical, mental, social development, and health of residents. The small living environment of children also hinders their learning, growth, and development. Therefore, different strategies should be adopted to overcome the challenges and difficulties faced by residents living in subdivided housing. Suggestions are provided for the government to improve the safety and health issues of subdivided housing in Hong Kong.

Keywords: Safety and health, subdivided housing, green space, Hong Kong

INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong's public housing policy is full of paradoxes. Some people think it is one of the best in Asia and the world since nearly half of housings are provided by the public sector. However, some people think that it is the worst part of all social policies in Hong Kong. In fact, the government's revenue is highly dependent on land, and monopoly developers are opposed to any reforms that could jeopardize their interests. Moreover, the investment behaviour of Hong Kong's middle class is related to housing. Any major reform of the real estate market may lead to social divisions and political disputes.

The housing problem has always plagued the people of Hong Kong. It has become a big challenge faced by all sectors of society in recent years. The poor population in 2020 is 1.653 million persons (Hong Kong Government, 2021). They rent poorly conditioned dwellings such as subdivided housing and cage homes to have a place to live. According to the government statistics, there were 92,700 subdivided housing and 20,970 people (Census and Statistics Department, 2018) living in such housings in Hong Kong in 2016. The number of subdivided housings may far beyond this figure.

The most common blame for subdivided housing is the poor living environment. Among them, the narrow living space is well known. The median floor area of the subdivided housing was 10 m², while the median per capita floor area of accommodation was 5.3

m². Some of the subdivided housing did not have independent toilets or kitchens. 87% of those people living in subdivided housing were Chinese. 40% were three-person or more households. The median rent to income ratio was 32% (Census and Statistics Department, 2021).

The economic pressure on residents from housing is increasing. The residents' safety and health of subdivided housings were seriously affected by the poor living environment. An ideal and safe living environment should like a protective net to provide protection for the individual's safety and health. Many studies have pointed out that there is close relationship between the quality of housing and the safety and health of residents (Gou et al., 2018; Hedayati, Abdullah & Tilaki, 2019; Shafi et al., 2019). Low-income people are more likely to accept substandard housings with higher hazards (D'Alessandro & Appolloni, 2020) to reduce the expense of rent.

Besides, overheating, humidity, mold growth, noise, overcrowding, harassment by outsiders, open spaces, community facilities, and fear of crime may directly affect the mental health of residents (Shah et al., 2018). Moreover, the high proportion of rental income, unstable leases, and poor living conditions continue to threaten the mental health of residents. In fact, people who are living in subdivided housings do not under the right to adequate housing protection (Hohmann, 2019). Their living environment continues to impact their safety and health. Therefore, it is important to improve the housing environment to benefit to the safety and health of residents.

(a) Objectives of the Study

The study aims to explore the current safety and health issues of living environment. The researcher selected four representative residents of subdivided housings for in-depth interviews and adopted a qualitative research approach. It hopes to to achieve the following three objectives:

- (1) To reveal and understand the current housing conditions of subdivided housings in Hong Kong, and the environmental safety and health hazards caused by them,
- (2) To analyze the different safety and health hazards that may have an impact on the residents,
- (3) To response to the situation revealed by the study, make relevant suggestions for improvement.

(b) Limitations of the Study

The samples failed to draw randomly from all subdivided housings in Hong Kong which affected the representativeness. The samples are also limited to the households that the researcher can reach. However, the results may present a profile of the safety and health issues of the subdivided housings.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The in-depth interview was conducted from 1 May to 3 June 2022, and a total of five young adults living in subdivided units were invited to participate. The researcher was made the appointment to set up the date and time and meet the interviewees at their subdivided housings.

The main purpose of the study is to explore the safety and health issues of subdivided housings in private residential buildings in Hong Kong. It also reveals the relevant safety and health risks of subdivided housings that residents are suffered (Chisholm, Howden-Chapman & Fougere, 2020).

(a) Data Collection

Before starting the interview, the researcher will explain the purpose, procedures, confidentiality principles, and rights of the interviewees. The researcher needs to ensure that the interviewees clearly understand their rights and minimize unnecessary harm. The researcher also invited them to ask questions and clarify their concerns to confirm they are clearly understood the details. After obtained the written consent from the interviewees, the in-depth interview was officially started.

During the data collection process, the researcher went to the interviewed households for in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured interview question set. It can give the research sufficient space and flexibility and put forward specific follow-up questions in response to the unique situation of the interviewees. Moreover, participants were asked to give examples or further explain their experiences, significant events, or critical issues, related to safety and health issues of subdivided housings.

On the other hand, during the in-depth interview, the interviewees may look back, reconstruct, narrate, and share their present specific housing experience and life vision, and allow them to face their own challenges in the living environment. Besides, their feelings and voices are heard by the public.

(b) Participants and Sampling

The participants are young adults who are living in subdivided housings in Hong Kong. The study adopts a purposive sampling method. It is simple and easy to implement, meets the special needs of the study, and make full use of the known data of the samples. However, it may greatly influence by the tendency of the researcher. Once the subjective judgment is biased, it is easy to cause sampling bias and not possible to infer the entire population situation directly.

(c) Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted to analysis the qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews. It is the most common form of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Themes are important to the description of a phenomenon and associated to specific research questions. The themes become the categories for analysis. The data have

been summarized and organized, rather than analyzed (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). However, it was time-consuming and tedious to collect qualitative data. Themes may not always emerge.

RESULTS

Five young adults were selected by purposive sampling who are living in subdivided housings in Hong Kong. All in-depth interviews were audiotaped with the consent of participants and last for about 40 minutes at their subdivided housings at their convenient date and time. The demographic characteristics of participants for in-depth interview were shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants for in-depth interview

	Participants				
	Mr. A	Miss B	Miss C	Mr. D	Miss E
Age of the participant	20	24	22	19	21
Area of the subdivided housing (m ²)	18	15	14	17	12
Number of family members living in the subdivided housing	3	2	3	4	3
Family monthly income (\$)	18,000	16,000	14,000	20,000	16,000
Rent of the subdivided housing (\$)	5,800	5,600	4,500	5,400	5,200
Percentage of housing expenditure	36.3%	35%	32.1%	27%	32.5%
Reasons for living in the subdivided housing	Inability to rent an independent unit	Inability to rent an independent unit	Inability to rent an independent unit	Inability to rent an independent unit	Inability to rent an independent unit

Table 2 is the thematic analysis of the safety and health issues of subdivided housings in Hong Kong by in-depth interview at their households at their convenient time. Six themes are developed from the qualitative data.

Table 2: Thematic analysis of motivation for learning

Codes	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Building security ◇ Appear of strangers ◇ Nuisance or conflict ◇ Sexual harassment ◇ Home accident 	Endanger personal safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Overload or short circuit ◇ Lack of maintenance of public facilities ◇ Safety of electricity 	Fire hazard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Leaking ◇ Leaking hose ◇ Problem with water removal ◇ Quality of water 	Leaking water
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Exposed steel bars ◇ Concrete fall ◇ Structural safety of building 	Concrete peeling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Insect and mouse breeding ◇ Public space hygiene ◇ Ash falling ◇ Ventilation ◇ Indoor air quality ◇ Spread of disease ◇ Food contaminated ◇ Quality of water 	Hygiene issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Noise ◇ Light ◇ Lack of living space ◇ Conflicts with family members 	Mental health

The themes described below highlight the six most concerns for the safety and health issues of subdivided housings, including endanger personal safety, fire hazard, leaking water, concrete peeling, hygiene issues, and mental health.

(a) Endanger Personal Safety

Many subdivided housings are in old-style tenement buildings, there are no basic security facilities such as security guards, gates, and closed-circuit televisions. In addition, the building’s passages lack sufficient lighting facilities, the staircases are dim, and the corridors are well-connected, which can easily attract idlers and other people. It may nuisance the daily life of the residents and has higher opportunity to threaten the lives and property of the residents. In the face of poor security in the building, the only countermeasure of the respondents is to try their best to avoid going out at night and go home early for their own safety.

Even they are given up going out at night, it is only a negative solution.

“I have lived with a prostitute on the same floor, and my mother was asked for the price.” (Mr. A)

“I saw a stranger urinating on the stairs and then left. It is not safe at all sense.” (Miss B)

“I feel unsafe that a suspected mentally ill or drug addiction wandering the stairs. I heard there was an exposed madman is living in here.” (Miss C)

“There are often passers-by drinking or quarreling downstairs. My sister has been nuisance by them.” (Mr. D)

“The door lock is not robust and reliable, which makes me worry from time to time that thieves will snatch the door at any time.” (Miss E)

Residents in subdivided housings lack a sense of security in their living environment, believing that the building lacks security facilities and management, and often strangers come and go. Poor public security makes them worry about theft, sexual harassment, and even personal safety. Besides, most of the injuries to the interviewees' bodies caused by the small space are general home accidents such as accidental bumps, slips, and burns.

(b) Fire Hazard

People who are living in subdivided housings, fire hazard is the major safety concern. The Buildings Department has established a safety guideline for subdivided housings to regulate the design of exit doors, interior corridors, fire barriers, and escape routes. However, the relevant safety guidelines lack supervision and law enforcement. Whether it can protect the lives and property of residents is questioned.

The exit gates of many subdivided housings have objects obstructing the escape route, and many buildings are not equipped with fire-fighting equipment. In addition, the width of the exit gates and indoor walkouts is less than the requirements of the guidelines and failing to meet the requirements of the fire-fighting guidelines. If a fire occurs, the consequences will be disastrous. Subdivided housings and staircase environment not only hinder escape, and lack of maintenance of public facilities can easily cause fires. Inappropriate use of fire by neighbours (such as cooking with open flames) is everywhere, and the risk of fire is obvious.

Even if the residents of the subdivided housings have never experienced a fire alarm, seeing various adverse environmental factors, living in the haze of the fire alarm every day can easily cause mental distress.

“If a fire occurs in the unit, I wonder can we rely on this narrow corridor of the unit to escape and save lives.” (Mr. A)

“I am worried that there will be a fire hazard when the neighbours cook with an open fire and the wires are exposed.” (Miss B)

“I am worried about the rain causing a short circuit and a fire.” (Miss C)

“The window grilles are blocked and cannot be opened smoothly. I will be forced to be in danger in escape and rescue routes.” (Mr. D)

“Fire safety has not been given reasonable attention. The narrow staircases could not allow three families escape at once.” (Miss E)

If there is a problem in the power system or facility and it is not properly handled in time, it may cause temporary inconvenience, an accident, or casualties. In fact, the interviewees have encountered various power-related problems, of which short circuits are the most common. Most of the subdivided housings are made up of a single unit, but in the process of reconstruction, the power supply system and wires are rarely upgraded with the increase in the number of households (Yau & Lau, 2018). As a result, it is easy to overload the electricity and cause short circuits. In addition, many residents in subdivided housings need to use extension boards to obtain power due to the insufficient number of sockets in the house or because the location of the sockets is blocked by furniture, which greatly increases the risk of fire (Leung & Chow, 2016). Besides, the right to use electricity is necessary to protect individual's basic rights (Lofquist, 2020).

(c) Leaking Water

Two participants pointed out that water seepage in the subdivided housing not only caused property losses, but also caused household accidents and endangered lives. When they are worried about water seepage problems, there is nothing to do. All kinds of worry, anxiety and negative emotions gradually arise, which affect mental health.

Water seepage is not only about loss of property, but also a matter of life. When there is water seepage on the ceiling and the water drops, it will damage the electric switch or the computer. Since the position of the switch cannot be changed, it is worried that it will leak electricity and causes a fire.

“When the typhoon and rainy come, the room will have water on the floor. A towel has placed in the gap between the bed and the wall to absorb the rainwater to prevent it from seeping into the mattress.” (Mr. A)

“Water seepage not only damages the structure of the building, but also causes nuisance and inconvenience to the occupants.” (Miss B)

“There was severe water seepage during heavy rain. Half of the floor of the house was soaked by rain. I was busy cleaning up the stagnant water all night, but one of the wardrobes was still damaged. I had to do some simple waterproofing works at my own expense to reduce water seepage.” (Miss C)

“Water seepage can breed mosquitoes and more likely to cause serious diseases.” (Mr. D)

“Water leakage may affect electrical facility such as a socket or light switch to cause fire.” (Miss E)

(d) Concrete Peeling

Buildings are exposed to the sun and rain from the natural world every day, as well as the influence of human activities inside, which will inevitably cause a certain degree of damage. Over time, the damage and aging of the building will gradually appear, such as the peeling of concrete and the damage of the canopy structure. These situations are dangerous to residents and even passers-by.

“The dust of the concrete may cause skin problems, eye irritation, and symptoms of respiratory distress.” (Mr. A)

“There is peeling off the concrete in the public space of the building.” (Miss B)

“Concrete peeling is making food vulnerable to contamination and clothes pollution.” (Miss C)

“There is a concrete peeling at my house. It has been repaired, but it is still peeling off.” (Mr. D)

“Large dust particles will be captured in my nose and throat, get in my eyes, and fall on my skin.” (Miss E)

Besides, excessive thickening of the floor slab of subdivided housings or partially removed the structural members (such as beams, columns, or structural walls) may affect the structural safety of building.

(e) Hygiene Issues

The sanitary conditions of the subdivided housings are unsatisfactory, which can easily become a hotbed of diseases and threaten the health of residents. Many households have been plagued by insect infestation, foreign oil fume, peculiar smell, noise, dust, stair garbage, and sewage from time to time, and their quality of life is affected. Ventilation is unfavourable due to small space of the living. It also promotes the spread of diseases. During the raging period of influenza and COVID-19, the risk of households infecting is even higher. Moreover, many subdivided housings share kitchens and toilets, making food vulnerable to contamination and directly endangering the health of residents.

“Once, there was redness and swelling on my toes. I wonder if I was bitten by a mouse. I could not sleep well for a week. In addition, rats crawled over the dishes from time to time, contaminated eating utensils, affected hygiene, and spreading diseases.” (Mr. A)

Many residents of subdivided housings have encountered serious pest problems. The frequent infestation of pests not only affects hygiene, increases the risk of spreading diseases (Fung et al., 2020), and endangers the health of residents. On the other hand, the infestation of pests also seriously affects the daily routine and emotional health of residents.

Many households are affected by different types of insects, including mosquito, rats, psyllids, cockroaches, and ants.

“When I was sleeping on the floor, I felt a little itchy on my body. I reached out and found that it was a cockroach. Since then, I have often worried about cockroaches will climb on my body again, which put me under great stress.” (Miss B)

Dirty drinking water often makes the residents of subdivided housings feel uneasy in sleeping and eating, causing great mental distress. Although a filter can be inserted into the faucet to clean the water, the quality of water cannot be improved. They may worry about the damage to their health and made them feel very troubled. Water security is not only addressing the quality of water system services but also consider the social equity and environmental sustainability (Hoekstra, Buurman & Van Ginkel, 2018).

“I have seen that drinking water is very dirty. Even a filter is used, I am worried that it will affect my health. I try to reduce to drink water at home. I have no additional resources to buy bottled water instead of drinking or cooking. It is also impossible for me to move away from the current subdivided housing.” (Miss C)

The indoor space environment of the subdivided housings is small, there is generally no independent kitchen, or the kitchen and toilet are very close. Hence, the food and cooking stoves are easy to contact excrement, causing cross-contamination, spreading diseases, and endangering health. The hygiene of the cooking environment in the subdivided housing is unacceptable, but there is no way to improve it.

“The cooking environment and hygiene are very important to maintain a healthy diet. The shared kitchen and toilet do not meet the hygiene standards at all.” (Mr. D)

“There is no independent kitchen in my house. My mother must use the zinc basin in the bathroom to clean the ingredients and it is impossible to vacate a stand-alone to place the ingredients. Some cleaned ingredients are temporarily placed in the toilet or on the washing machine.” (Miss E)

Cooking environment and hygiene are very important for maintaining healthy diet. Kitchen and toilet sharing do not meet sanitary standards at all and must be separated. The living environment that meets safety and sanitation requirements is more important than the size of the space.

Poor ventilation not only affects indoor air quality (Tsang et al., 2019), but also affects heat dissipation. It has played a role in the infection transmission among the subdivided housings (Wang et al., 2022). Most people will turn on the air conditioner to relieve the pain of the hot weather. However, for the grassroots respondents, long-term use of air-conditioning will greatly increase their electricity bills. Moreover, some landlords will charge tenants a higher electricity bill than their actual consumption.

“It is difficult to fall asleep and even causes insomnia because the weather is too hot. My mother will turn on the air conditioner before going to bed and turned off at two o'clock in the morning to save electricity bills. However, it started to wake up again at four or five o'clock in the morning.” (Mr. A)

“When the indoor temperature is too hot, it is easy to make me feel uncomfortable, affect my mood, and directly affect sleep; if the sleep quality is not good for a long time, the lack of energy will affect my job performance.” (Miss C)

(f) Mental Health

The lack of space in the subdivided housing environment makes friction between family members prone to accumulate negative emotions. Residents are more likely to accumulate negative emotions. If they fail to express themselves through appropriate channels, life will be like a pressure cooker, and mental health will always be a warning sign. It is important for children to expose to green space to improve their mental health through both psychological and physiological pathways (Engemanna et al., 2019).

“The cramped and harsh living environment makes family members prone to friction and disputes, resulting in interpersonal tension and emotional distress.” (Mr. A)

“Family members compete for space and there is friction, which makes the relationship tense and brings invisible mental stress and damage.” (Miss B)

“My mother is facing a lot of annoyed and negative emotions for her son because of the lack of space to study.” (Miss C)

“The source of my stress comes from different issues in the housing, such as rent burden, insecurity, and instability of the living environment, and so on. The cramped and harsh living environment makes family members prone to frictions and disputes, resulting in interpersonal tension and emotional distress.” (Mr. D)

“We lack reliable and supportive neighbourhood relationships. We are unfamiliar with each other and rarely talk to each other.” (Miss E)

Residents of subdivided housings are facing with higher mental health risks than general individuals. They need more support and help from their neighbours and communities. Many households do not know or have contact with institutions that provide mental health services, and there is a lack of information on seeking help. The government should create a liveable and healthy social neighbourhood for the citizens and reduce their loneliness (Kemperman et al., 2019). It should also increase social and institutional supports for disadvantaged patients (Alegría et al., 2019). Moreover, it is helpful to provide sufficient exposure to green spaces for children and adults to improve their mental health (Vanaken & Danckaerts, 2018).

Parents may feel helpless to their children for living in the oppressive environment. They may blame themselves for not being able to provide children with a better studying environment and felt ashamed. In the face of these emotional distress, they have harmed their mental health, which cannot be dealt with by themselves or by emotional counselling and community support. They are suffering more stress to understand their child's needs (Spinelli et al., 2020) and to maintain hygiene during the outbreak of COVID-19.

DISCUSSION

The Gini coefficient of Hong Kong is as high as 0.539 in 2016, which is far above the warning line of 0.4. Hong Kong's affluent economy society cannot benefit the grassroots. Public rental housing has been an effective way to reduce housing costs and benefit most grassroots in Hong Kong. According to the website of Hong Kong Housing Authority, the average waiting time for public rental housing has lengthened from 3 years to 6.1 years. Hence, it has become more difficult to improve grassroots' living standards, safety, and health. People should have the right to live in adequate housing and it is their expectation of the government (Leijten & De Bel, 2020). In fact, it is a basic need for individual's survival and development (Hong & Xu, 2019).

Although the area of public rental housing is small, it solves the living problem of many people. When the supporting facilities of public rental housing have been handled well, the users can enjoy great value. It is impossible for most of the middle class living in public rental housing. Therefore, private housing is necessary for middle class. From the perspective of social development, the government should help low-incomed people to live with dignity. Hence, the investment of public rental housing has certain legitimacy and necessary. The government should promote social redistribution by providing more public rental housings units and increasing the taxes related to housing to improve social equity (Chen, 2019).

Many people believe that "little land and many people" is the dead end of Hong Kong's housing policy. If there is too little land, the government should control the supply of land. Controlling the supply will inevitably support high housing prices, and high housing prices will require a lot of resources to invest in public housing. In fact, many people of insight also believe that this concept is not correct. In many emerging countries and regions, "little land and many people" is often the norm, and the key lies in how to guide public policies. The current feasible strategy is to adjust the land policy. Moreover, it is necessary for government to regulate the developers and landlords to provide a safe and healthy living environment for tenants.

Hong Kong is an international metropolis and a financial center that is increasingly prosperous, however subdivided housing are everywhere. The grievances of the citizens are accumulating, and social conflicts may cause a big eruption. The deep-seated contradictions are not only political, but also economic and people's livelihood. Government should face the problems of economic and people's livelihood and tried to solve it as soon as possible. Many young adults cannot afford to buy a house for themselves. They need to stay longer in the rental market and eventually push up the rental prices (Wong & Wan, 2018).

Recommendations for Safety and Health Issues of Subdivided Housings

Most of the poor people are forced to live in unsuitable living conditions (Liu, 2018) for long periods of time, facing the dilemma of narrow environment, poor sanitation, danger, and threats to their personal safety and health. The government has the responsibility to improve the living conditions of the grassroots and supply sufficient public housing to improve their living environment. The subdivided housings lack relevant standards for

per capita living area, environmental hygiene, and fire safety. As a rich society in Hong Kong, the government should ensure that the poor have a suitable, safe, and decent living environment. The following recommendations may improve the safety and health issues of subdivided housings.

- (a) Strengthen the "Resident Liaison Ambassador Program" and propose subsidies to recruit owners or tenants who live in buildings with 15 years or older to become resident liaison ambassadors to establish a resident liaison network and promote effective building management information. The Resident Liaison Ambassador will assist residents in discussing and handling daily building management matters (such as building cleaning, security, and fire safety, etc.), and encourage residents to share building management experience and knowledge. They will also assist government departments in contacting residents to convey information on matters related to building management.
- (b) Strengthen the "Fire Safety Ambassador Program" in the old districts and cooperate with non-government organizations to establish a mutual aid network for residents through fire information training for community members. Fire safety ambassadors held by residents can effectively pass through the network between residents, conduct education work in the community, and promote fire safety information. Moreover, the government should provide subsidies to install basic fire-fighting facilities to reduce the impact of fire hazards.
- (c) The government should require landlords to take the responsibility for the maintenance of the subdivided housings so that tenants can obtain a reasonably protected housing environment. In addition, the government should formulate policies to ensure that buildings and subdivided housings are designed to comply with relevant safety standards and strengthen supervision and law enforcement.
- (d) The government should strengthen the scale of the "Operation Building Bright" to strengthen the structure of the building through building maintenance and renewal to slow down the rate of building aging and reduce the spalling of concrete.
- (e) The government should refer to the existing "Building (Planning) Regulations" for indoor architectural planning requirements, establish "best practices" for all subdivided housings, and encourage owners of subdivided housings to implement it to improve the basic quality of the living environment to guarantee physical and mental health. The government may allocate additional resources from the "Epidemic Prevention and Anti-epidemic Fund" to assist residents of the subdivided housings in the epidemic prevention work, such as providing anti-bacterial and anti-epidemic coatings for buildings, hand sanitizers, to reduce the risk of infection and achieve the city's anti-epidemic effect. Besides, the government should educate the public not to turn on the exhaust fan, and close the toilet lid before flushing the water, to prevent the spread of the virus. If your home has a bad smell or leaking water, you should ask the owner to deal with the problem immediately.
- (f) The government and related organizations should use diversified public publicity and education efforts, such as regularly setting up street stations in areas with dense

subdivided housings, holding lectures, workshops, exhibitions, and carnivals to promote mental health and related support services information, so that potential emotional distress low-income people and residents of subdivided housings understand and pay attention to mental health, identify mental health problems early, build coping skills and abilities, and seek professional assistance when necessary. The establishment of a community support network to enhance the community's support capacity can provide an additional protection network for households suffering from mental health problems. Moreover, the government should increase funding for comprehensive mental health community centers or other corresponding service providers in areas with many subdivided housings to strengthen community mental health services, consider adding 24-hour counselling hotlines, and outreach services to evaluate subdivided housings more effectively.

- (g) The government should regularize the "Non-Public Housing, Non-Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Household Living Allowance" and review the rent allowance in Comprehensive Social Security Assistance payments. In addition, people who have been waiting for public rental housing for more than three years receive rent allowances to improve their living environment.
- (h) The government should build public rental housing as soon as possible to solve the poverty problem. Indeed, public rental housings provide the poor with a low-rent and safe living environment and are far more secure than subdivided housings. Although the government has not been able to significantly increase public rental housing in a short period of time, it should consider making good use of the current vacant community land to build temporary modular housings. They are managed and operated by the government as another housing option to immediately solve the housing plight of some grassroots. They can increase the housing supply and reduce the rent level of private properties as a short-term measure to relieve the situation of poor tenants.

CONCLUSION

All participants hope that the government will build public rental housing as soon as possible to solve their poverty problem (Census and Statistics Department, 2020). Indeed, public rental housing provides a low-rent and safe living environment for the poor, and it is far more secure than renting a private building or subdivided housings. Although the government has not been able to significantly increase public rental housing in a short period of time, it may make good use of the existing vacant lands to build "temporary modular housing". It can be managed and operated by the non-governmental organizations as another housing chooses to solve the housing dilemma of the poor households immediately. At the same time, it can also increase the supply and adjust the market so that the rent level of private buildings will fall.

The narrow space of the subdivided housings and the harsh environment seriously affect residents' safety and health. All participants believe that obtaining public rental housing is the real solution to stress, and hope that the government can provide residents with a safe and affordable housing. However, the waiting time for public rental

housing has repeatedly broken new highs. The average waiting time for public rental housing was 6.1 years in March 2022. Therefore, the government must actively build more public rental housing in the long run to reduce the waiting time for listing. The Landlord and Tenant (Consolidation) Ordinance should be reviewed again in response to the current surge in rents for subdivided housings. It should establish a new rent control policy to give grassroots families more choices in housing.

Conflict Of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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