

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

1. The Hong Kong Family Welfare Society (HKFWS) commissioned the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (PORI) to conduct this “Hong Kong Family Wellbeing Index 2022” before the peak of the fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first survey was conducted in 2019 by another research team. The main objective was to assess the latest wellbeing of Hong Kong families in 2022 and to make comparisons with previous results. Two new topical questions were added to the questionnaire to study the impact of the pandemic on family wellbeing.

### Research Design

2. As in the 2019 study, “family” was defined as “a socially recognised group (at least two people in a relationship) that forms an emotional connection involving care, responsibility and commitment”, while “family wellbeing” was defined as “a state in which a family can perform various functions to satisfy the diverse needs of individual members of the family through interactions with the environment”.
3. A questionnaire with 26 key questions using 11-point Likert scale (i.e., a scale on 0 to 10) was used this year, same as 2019. Individual scores for 6 domains and 6 subdomains were computed and ultimately an overall HKFWI score.
4. For valid and direct comparisons between the surveys conducted in 2019 and in 2022, the structure of the HKFWI and the survey questionnaire were largely kept unchanged. However, some methodological enhancements have been made: (1) treatment of missing values, and (2) weighting of survey data. Apart from applying these enhancements this year, the same have also been done retrospectively to the 2019 survey data so that comparisons would be made on the same ground.

### Overall Results

5. The telephone survey which targeted Hong Kong people who were living with their families was conducted from 5 to 27 January 2022. A total of 2,002 respondents, including 994 landline and 1,008 mobile samples, were successfully interviewed.
6. The previous survey was conducted during July and August 2019 in times of social unrest in Hong Kong. Despite a low start, however, this study found that the wellbeing of Hong Kong families has further deteriorated over the past two years or so, dropping from 6.31 in 2019 to 6.10 in 2022 (-0.21), mainly due to weakening in the areas of “social connection” (-0.86) and “social resources” (-0.47).

7. The percentage of respondents scored “average” on the overall HKFWI has dropped from 50% in 2019 to 43% in 2022. However, those scored “poor” has increased significantly to 19% during the same period, i.e., an increase of 7 percentage points.
8. The relative strength of the 6 domains have remained stable. The domain that received the highest score continued to be “family solidarity” (7.40), followed by “family resources” (7.20) and “family health” (7.07), all are domains that concerned the situation within the family. However, domains that concerned the family’s interaction with the outside world recorded lower scores, including “social resources” (4.80), “work-life balance” (4.66) and finally “social connection” (3.26).

### Factors that Influence Family Wellbeing

9. To study the effects of demographic variables on family wellbeing, the mean scores of the index and the 6 domains by different demographic groups in both 2019 and 2022 have been calculated, and ANOVA and multiple linear regressions have been conducted.
10. Among various demographic variables, the traits associated with lower index score would be (1) lower family income, (2) younger in age, (3) lower education level, (4) being a student or be unemployed, (5) living in public housing, (6) being separated, divorced or widowed, (7) families with household size of 6 or above, (8) single-parent families, (9) families with members who needed special care, and (10) families in which a family crisis occurred recently.
11. Specifically for the three domains with lower scores: (a) lower-income families, younger and less educated people had poorer “social connection”; (b) older people had poorer “work-life balance”; (c) lower-income families, the unemployed, the widowed and families in which a family crisis occurred recently had fewer “social resources”.
12. Comparing the index and domain scores in 2019 and 2022, the demographic groups traditionally considered to be more vulnerable (including people who only attained primary school education level or below, the unemployed, the separated / divorced / widowed, families with members who needed special care, families in which a family crisis occurred recently, and families with monthly income less than \$15,000) were also those who experienced larger drops than the rest of the population.
13. In particular, family monthly income continued to be a strong predictor of index and domain scores, and there were rather large gaps between low-income and high-income families. Both ANOVA and regressions found its significant impacts on family wellbeing. Also, decline in “family solidarity” and “family resources” mainly happened in families with monthly income less than \$15,000, while families with higher income have not seen much change in their scores. All these changes meant that the wellbeing gaps between low-income and high-income families have further widened since 2019.

## Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

14. The pandemic has had no effect on the family relationships of two-thirds of the respondents, while some others had their relationships worsened and some improved. However, the pandemic has caused the family income of half of the respondents to go down, while the rest mostly remained unaffected and only very few have had family income increased.
15. These two variables were related. Among families with income unaffected or increased, slightly more had family relationships improved rather than deteriorated due to the pandemic. However, for families that had income hit by the pandemic, it was much more likely to see family relationships turning worse.
16. When a family's income was affected by the pandemic, its family wellbeing would also become worse. Also, the pandemic was more likely to result in deteriorating family relationships in low-income families, but improved family relationships in high-income families.

## Getting Worse in “Social Connection” and “Social Resources”

17. The survey has revealed large drops in scores in the “social connection” and the “social resources” domains. In view of the period in which the 2022 survey was conducted, this is most likely the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
18. People's social lives have been greatly affected during the pandemic, due either to fear of infection or social distancing measures such as the group gathering ban, shutdown of various venues including restaurants and other facilities, work-from-home arrangements, suspension of face-to-face classes, etc. There is no doubt all these must have led to social disconnection.
19. At the same time, as a result of the pandemic and the subsequent social disconnection, informal support from relatives, friends and neighbours also dwindled, which explained why “social resources” also took a big hit.

## “The Poor Getting Poorer”

20. Both the 2019 and 2022 studies have found strong correlations between family income and family wellbeing. Its effect was present and strong in domains such as “family solidarity”, “family resources” and “family health”, as well as subdomains including “family time”, “family atmosphere”, “family responsibilities”, “care and support” and “psychological capital”.
21. Unfortunately, apart from increasing disparity in family income, family wellbeing in Hong Kong is also in turn seeing increased disparity. Although family wellbeing has generally

dropped for most families compared to 2019, it was the low-income families that experienced the largest drops.

22. Therefore, to address the needs of low-income families, we should not only focus on poverty alleviation and provision of resources, but also work on improving family wellbeing at the same time to achieve better results, such as by strengthening family relationships.

## Recommendations

In view of the decline in the overall HKFWI score and the poor getting poorer phenomenon, we call on the government to set enhancing Hong Kong families' wellbeing as their policy objective

23. The low overall score of HKFWI 6.31 recorded in the 2019 HKFWI Survey was believed to have set a low starting point of family wellbeing. Worse still, this score in 2022 has further descended to a worrying level of 6.10.
24. Both the 2019 and 2022 studies have evidenced the notable associations between the level of family income and that of family wellbeing. The 2022 study further reveals the chasm of family wellbeing between low-income families and high-income ones. The stark phenomenon “the poor getting poorer” manifests not only in the financial conditions of families, but also in their family wellbeing.
25. “Building a caring society” is among the four tenets of the new-term government’s vision. As families are the essential building blocks of society, forging family wellbeing should be an important strategy to build a caring society. Following this tenet, we call on the government to intervene at the policy level and formulate family-friendly measures in the realms of social welfare, education, health care, labour, etc., to bring different sectors of our society together for the promotion of family wellbeing.

Enhancing cooperation among family members, realising the “family-carer partners” concept to strengthen family functions

26. Families typically viewed as deprived like those with members requiring special care, separated/divorced/widowed persons and low-income families are found to have lower family wellbeing than other types of families. Even worse is their deterioration to an extent much larger than the other groups. We observe from our practice experience that the carers of these deprived families are experiencing much caring stress.
27. Under the concept of “family-carer partners”, no matter living together or not, family members can work as a team to handle the various matters of the family, and above all the responsibility of looking after family members requiring special care, lest

overburdening any single carer. Efforts in coordination and communication are indispensable in forming an effective team, which serves not only to share caring stress among family members, but also strengthen “family solidarity” and bring wellbeing to a family.

28. Hong Kong Family Welfare Society has never spared ourselves in pursuit of this end. We promote inter-generational communication through service programmes that facilitate cooperation between parents and grandparents in parenting. We also provide services for divorced and separated families to assist in their co-parenting. To support carers, we deliver mental health consultation and groupwork services, as well as programmes for carers who take care of elderly family members.

Encouraging tripartite collaboration among the government, the business community and the general public to reinforce interactions between families and external environment

29. Compared to 2019, the scores in the “social resources” and “social connection” domains in 2022 have shown significant deteriorations. The score of “social resources” has even plunged by as much as 0.86 (representing a drop of 20.9%), descending into the “poor” level. Such deteriorations are undoubtedly partly attributed to the pandemic. Under the devastation of the pandemic, linkage to external support like from friends and relatives, neighbours, community organisations and government departments is crucial to families.
30. We anticipate the results of this study could serve as insight for government to formulate and strengthen policies to support families. For example, in the coming two years the government could strengthen the connection between families and society as a strategy to prevent family problems. With the injection of more resources, the government could get together and coordinate community organisations to build up versatile supportive networks for families.
31. Under the devastating pandemic condition, many corporations are actively supporting families. In particular, property management companies have been playing important roles in distribution of antiseptic materials and daily necessities, as well as dissemination of anti-pandemic information. We believe these property management personnel are in a vantage point to identify families who are in crisis and refer them to suitable services. Thus, we recommend promoting cooperation between social welfare agencies and property management companies to provide the personnel of the latter with training in this aspect.
32. For the general public, we encourage the reinvigoration of the concept of “mutual support of neighbours”. Amid the fragile relationships between neighbours and with the benefit of hindsight of the fifth wave pandemic, we see huge effects could be brought by the mutual support among neighbours. Neighbour support could start with volunteer

service, no matter participating in individual or family as a whole basis. Contribution through volunteer work not only strengthens community network, but also underpins “family solidarity”. In the era of technology advancement, mutual help platforms may appear in the form of physical or virtual ones. Beyond mutual help, these platforms could also serve those families not knowledgeable about public resources to access appropriate public services.