

## **Press Release**

### **“A Study of Low-Income Mainland-Hong Kong Cross-Border Families” Release of Research Findings**

Department of Education Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University

#### **HKBU Research Reveals Inadequate Support for Low-Income Mainland-Hong Kong Cross-Border Families from the Government in Social Integration**

This study was conducted by the Department of Education Studies of Hong Kong Baptist University to explore the everyday challenges of low-income Mainland parents and their children in Hong Kong and to understand the education opportunities of these Hong Kong-born children. The project was funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission under its “Funding Programme of Research Projects on Equal Opportunities 2017/18.” From January to May 2018, 28 low-income Mainland-Hong Kong cross-border families participated in the research. Five monthly home visits to each family and one in-depth semi-structured pair-interview (parent and the child) per family were conducted.

Research findings reveal that many parents gave birth in Hong Kong in order to evade China’s one-child policy. At the same time, they received inaccurate information about Hong Kong’s migration and education policies, leading them to underestimate the challenges they would face in Hong Kong. Their Hong Kong-born children are sometimes excluded from social support because of the lack of permanent resident status of the parents. The general negative social ethos of Hong Kong against Mainlanders also discourages the cross-border families from building up their sense of belonging to Hong Kong. Parents feel they can offer little support for their children partly because of their lack of knowledge on the local educational system and partly because of their low education level. Tensions between parents and children build up as children’s academic performance does not meet the parents’ expectations. To make

Hong Kong society more inclusive to the low-income Mainland-Hong Kong cross-border families, there is a need for appropriate policies and interventions.

### **Background**

In 2001, the Court of Final Appeal ruled in favor of Chong Fung Yuen that he had the right of abode, and consequently legally granted Chinese nationals born in Hong Kong the right of abode regardless of the Hong Kong immigration status of their parents. In addition, the Individual Visit Scheme launched in 2003 opened up a channel for Mainland women to give birth in Hong Kong. From 2003 to 2012, the number of babies born to Mainland women whose spouses were not Hong Kong permanent residents skyrocketed from 2,070 to 26,715. While the first wave of tourism birth witnessed Mainland mothers from middle class backgrounds, the later waves saw families from working-class and rural origins who are excluded from the migration and welfare policies on either side of the border.

### **Scope of the Study**

The research aimed to explore the everyday challenges of low-income Mainland parents and their children in Hong Kong and to understand the education opportunities of these Hong Kong-born children.

### **Key Findings of the Research**

The key findings of the research are as follows:

- (1) For various reasons, Mainland parents gave birth in Hong Kong to evade China's one-child policy. One common reason was that the traditional Chinese patriarchal norms in the Mainland produced pressures from in-laws, husband, or even the mother herself to have at least one son. Another reason was unintended pregnancy.
- (2) Parents received inaccurate information about Hong Kong's migration and education policies, leading them to underestimate the challenges they would face in Hong Kong.
- (3) Owing to their non-resident status, cross-border families are most challenged in areas of income, housing, school place for children, visa, family separation, and social support.
- (4) They feel they are excluded from government social provision in Hong Kong.
- (5) Their sense of belonging to Hong Kong is discouraged by the difficult livelihood and the general negative social ethos in Hong Kong against Mainlanders.
- (6) Parents feel they can offer little support for their children partly because of their lack of knowledge on the local educational system and partly because of their low

education level.

- (7) They also report that their Hong Kong-born children are sometimes excluded from social support because of the lack of permanent resident status of the parents themselves.
- (8) In many cases, tensions between parents and children build up as children's academic performance does not meet the parents' expectations, and parents are not able to provide schoolwork assistance.

### **Recommendations**

With reference to the research findings, a number of recommendations are made:

- (1) The government and other social service providers should revisit their related policies to make sure that no eligible children are denied access to resources on grounds of the residency status of their Mainland parents.
- (2) The government should revert the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme application to the pre-2008 policy to allow Hong Kong-born Mainland children under the age of 18 to apply on an individual basis.
- (3) The "One-year Multiple Entry Permit" should cover all cross-border parents who need to stay and take care of their children in Hong Kong, regardless whether their spouses are Hong Kong permanent residents or not.
- (4) A proper mechanism for parents to voluntarily exchange their children's Hong Kong permanent resident status with Mainland hukou should be implemented.
- (5) The Hong Kong government should consider granting conditional temporary work permission to parents of low-income cross-border families.
- (6) The government should conduct comprehensive public consultation and research on discrimination on grounds of residency status to address the discrimination widely experienced by cross-border families.

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