

Managing Financial Debts & Unemployment Middle Age Manual



The Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention
The University of Hong Kong

FOREWORD

Suicide among the middle aged in Hong Kong has become a major concern. Within a short span of just six years the suicide rate for those aged 30 to 59 has risen significantly; from 11.7 in 1997 to 18.7 persons per 100,000 in 2002. This dramatic increase within such a short period is both alarming and distressing. Using the data from the Coroners' Court, our research indicated that factors such as relationship problems, unemployment and financial debts have been identified as risk factors closely associated with suicide of the middle aged.

In response to these concerns, The University of Hong Kong-Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research & Prevention has published the following series of manuals for middle-aged people. Documented in these materials are true stories, evidence-based information and recommendations on ways to tackle the challenges encountered by the middle aged.

They are:

- (1) **How to beat depression**
- (2) **Managing Financial debts and Unemployment**
- (3) **When Marriage Turns Sour**

This manual, *Managing Financial debts and Unemployment*, is the second of the entire collection. This manual is designed to provide information and resources for the middle-aged to manage financial debts and unemployment.

Apart from conducting suicide research and training programmes, our Centre also produces resources to promote community education. This manual is written in an effort to promote community awareness on mental health.

We wish to thank the Hong Kong Jockey Club for its generous support in publishing this series of manuals. During the course of their development, a number of mental health professionals closely reviewed the materials and provided valuable information and critical input. Therefore, we would also like to express our gratitude to these experts for their contributions, which have greatly aided the development of this series of manuals.

Paul Yip, Ph.D
Director of the Centre for Suicide Research & Prevention
May, 2004



Many Middle-aged men are finding themselves under tremendous financial pressure being breadwinners of the family. They are worried about being laid off while still having to pay off their mortgages. Mortgage payments, living expenses, children's expenses and other financial responsibilities all add up to heavy financial burdens.

When there are massive layoffs and a continuous drop in real estate prices. Not only is their financial situation at stake, but their personal sense of self worth comes under fire as well.¹⁻³ Many men in debt also find themselves losing their own sense of confidence and self-integrity. They bear a sense of shame about themselves and find it difficult to face their families. Often it is very hard for men to talk about their problems. The notion that "men don't cry" is so deeply ingrained in the male psyche that they feel it is unmanly and weak to ask for help.

There is a new definition for men in modern times. **Real men** have the courage to talk about their **real problems**



Middle age is also a time when people begin re-evaluating their lives. Some people get disappointed and feel that their life is unfulfilling. Many men cope by compulsive working gambling, delving into extramarital affairs,⁴ and even falling into substance abuse.

Middle age is a stage when men need to be **acknowledged** for the **efforts** they put into their work and **creating success.**

INTRODUCTION

• Middle-aged Women

Many women find themselves caught up in multiple roles when they enter this stage in life. Caretaking, parenting and working constitute their roles as a mother, housewife and employee. Many women feel themselves getting pulled in many directions by their spouses, children, parents and employers. Many feel they cannot control their own lives because they have to devote all their time taking care of others.

The cultural definitions of gender roles have identified women as caregivers and nurturers.⁵⁻⁷ Many traditional women view marriage as a life-long endeavour. Since their personal value and social standing as women are often derived from their roles as wives to their husbands after marriage, it is natural for them to devote most of their energies into taking care of their family.⁸⁻⁹ For those middle-aged women who take pride in their families, extra-marital affairs or divorce can hurt them deeply. They may feel that they have lost their husbands, families, and personal identity and all that they have. Depression is not uncommon among women who have marital problems.

Middle age marks a major turning point in the lives of many women. It is a poignant time for them to evaluate the first half of their lives and set up goals for the next half. It is critical for many women to shift their attention from fulfilling the expectations of their families and society to balancing their personal needs with the needs of those they care about.

Learning to value themselves and attend to their needs is important in building a happy and healthy life. It takes a lot of courage to evaluate one's life and make necessary changes. In this process of self evaluation, a therapist can be a good companion on the journey.

Middle-aged women
need to be acknowledged for their
dedication in cultivating
meaningful relationships.



 REAL LIFE STORIES

Mr. Chan's Insecurity Dilemma

Mr. Chan is a 49-year-old chef who works in a local Chinese restaurant. When he was in his twenties he met his beloved wife and they got married. However, they had vast differences in their educational levels and Mr. Chan had always felt a hidden sense of inferiority and insecurity.

When their son was born, Mrs. Chan decided to send the youngster to Taiwan for a better education. From then on, the family split up with Mr. Chan staying in Hong Kong and his wife and son living in Taiwan.

Mr. Chan earned a little more than \$10,000 each month but he had to cover both the living expenses for himself and his family, and also pay for the educational costs in Taiwan. Whenever his wife would call from Taiwan asking for money, Mr. Chan would always agree to pay all expenses even when he did not have the financial resources to do so.

Mr. Chan had always used his credit card to cover all the family's expenses. In his own leisure time, he also gambled with his colleagues. Eventually over the years his debts had rolled up like a snowball as he continued to gamble and used his credit card to cover his expenses. Mr. Chan did not understand how he came to incur \$300,000 in financial liabilities nor did he know how to seek help. He began to hide the fact that he was seriously in debt, and he continued to linger on.

In time Mr. Chan felt so ashamed about his debts that he could not face his family. And there were times when he felt so hopeless that he wanted to end his life.

Eventually his wife found out about his spiraling debts and called a social worker who encouraged her husband to receive help at a counseling centre. After weeks of hesitation, Mr. Chan finally managed to put aside his male pride and attended a session with the social worker. That marked a turning point for the family.

He was surprised at how well his social worker was able to understand his situation as well as his reluctance to seek help. He confided honestly with the social worker regarding his debts and after gaining a comprehensive picture of the financial situation, the social worker enrolled him in a debt rescheduling programme and drafted a proposal for him to help negotiate a more favorable interest rate with the bank. Mr. Chan felt very relieved after this session. Counseling also helped him rebuild the relationship with his wife. Not only did the favorable interest rate with the bank help him, he also received a more manageable repayment schedule. Mr. Chan was also able to experience a greater sense of self worth as he no longer had to avoid his problems but instead confronted his debt situation with courage and integrity.

Special thanks to the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, Healthy Budgeting Family Debt Counseling Centre for their contribution in this section.

Mr. Chan's situation is not uncommon in Hong Kong. Based on the data from the Coroner's Court, among the estimated 1,100 suicide deaths in 2002, 24.7% of them involved financial debts with 60% of these cases occurring among those aged 30 to 49.

Real life stories

Ms Cheung's Mortgage Misery

Ms. Cheung and her former husband had mortgaged a property under the joint name of mortgagors prior to their divorce in 2001. After the break-up, Ms Cheung's former husband had requested her to continue paying her agreed upon monthly portion of the \$6,000 mortgage installment under their joint names. Ms. Cheung was obliged to agree with his proposal because she wanted to gain custody of her two year-old son. At this time, it was also plain to her that her former husband's business was deteriorating after the financial crisis of 1997 and there was always a real risk of default on the installment payments. She was still recovering from the sadness of her failed marriage. To Ms. Cheung, this overall arrangement was still regarded as a viable option for her as she and her son could continue to stay in same flat that she and her former husband owned even though he had agreed to move out.

Ms. Cheung did not propose to sell the property, although it had already become a negative equity asset after the financial crisis. Instead, she continued to share the property with her husband and paid the monthly mortgage installments under their joint names. A year later, to her dismay and surprise, her former husband applied for bankruptcy and the case was sent to the Official Receiver's Office.

Since he could no longer afford to use his monthly income to cover his agreed upon portion of the \$6,000 mortgage installment, the bank approached Ms. Cheung and claimed from her as much as \$12,000 in monthly mortgage installments. Ms. Cheung knew that she definitely could not afford to pay this amount on her own, considering her monthly salary was only \$15,000 and she had the obligations of paying for family expenses and her son's kindergarten fees.

It was at this time that Ms. Cheung even considered the idea of applying for bankruptcy but this could have led to the loss of her job. Caught in a serious dilemma, she even had the impulse to kill herself and her son in order to put an end to all her financial burdens and the trauma brought about by her divorce.

Luckily, with the support of her mother she was able to pay off the more than \$100,000 in loans borrowed through her credit card. She then proposed to the bank a special mortgage restructuring scheme. Initially, the bank refused to give her more favorable interest rates for her mortgage because it had inadequate knowledge of her financial background. But later on with the assistance of a social worker, Ms Cheung was able to put her case before the bank. She restated her wish for special repayment conditions and a re-evaluation of her financial status, and the bank ultimately agreed to re-execute her mortgage deed.

Under the new arrangement, she would pay a lesser amount of \$8000 for the monthly mortgage installment and there would be an extension of her repayment period. This meant that she could still retain her home and it would not auction off by the bank as a repossessed property.

Although the remaining portion of her salary can just about cover the family's living expenses, she is already content with the new arrangements. From now on, she can concentrate on her work and the upbringing of her son, so he can grow up to become a well-adjusted adult. The new arrangements have also allayed her previous fears over her inability to pay off her mortgage installments and she can sleep soundly now. Ms. Cheung feels that she is really lucky in that she could finally secure a mortgage restructuring, and since then everything has been going smoothly.

MANAGING FINANCIAL DEBTS

Managing Financial Debts



- (I) Negotiation with the creditor by the debtor
- (II) Through organizations providing social services
- (III) Individual voluntary arrangement
- (IV) Direct application through the court on voluntary arrangement
- (V) Interbank debt relief plan

Option (I) Negotiation with the creditor by the debtor. (1 to 2 months)																																																		
Course of Action	Negotiate with the creditor by the person involved on his/her own on options of repayment. The latter has to bring along valid proof of income and expenditures. Meticulous attention will be paid to verification of all the particulars of the debt rearrangement. No need to apply through the court.	Example An income of \$10,000 and a debt of \$80,000; those remaining single can consider appropriate 60% of the monthly salary for repayment; those with family dependents (from 2 to 3 people) can appropriate 30-40% of their monthly income.																																																
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) processed in a much shorter time. (2) One can fix the most viable option on his/her own with the creditor (3) avoid any service charge required by an agent. 	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Creditor</th> <th>Debts</th> <th colspan="2">% of monthly salary for repayment</th> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <th>60%</th> <th>40%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>30,000</td> <td>2,250</td> <td>1,500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>15,000</td> <td>1,125</td> <td>750</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C</td> <td>35,000</td> <td>2,625</td> <td>1,750</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>80,000</td> <td>6,000</td> <td>4,000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Creditor	Debts	% of monthly salary for repayment				60%	40%	A	30,000	2,250	1,500	B	15,000	1,125	750	C	35,000	2,625	1,750		80,000	6,000	4,000																								
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Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Applicable only to conditions involving fewer number of creditors. (2) Might involve a risk of creditor's requesting another re-execution of a new option for repayment. (3) may experience greater pressure given direct contact with the creditor. (4) No application to the court is required, The debt rearrangement has no force of constraint of the laws. 																																																	
Option (II) Organizations providing social services (3 to 4 months)																																																		
Course of Action	Conduct an option of repayment through the service of a volunteer accountant and a lawyer who agrees to provide legal advice without requesting payment of service. No need to apply through the court.	Example An income of \$20,000 and a debt of \$300,000; e.g. if a total sum of \$12,000 can be paid every month, payment can be cleared within 3 to 4 years																																																
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) No professional charges required. (2) No direct contact with the creditor is required, so the person involved can feel more relaxed. (3) a social worker can provide help in regards to problems at work, with family and for emotional difficulties caused by financial burdens. (4) Applicable to cases involving more creditors 	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Creditor</th> <th>Debts</th> <th colspan="2">% of monthly salary for repayment</th> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <th>60%</th> <th>40%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>90,000</td> <td>3,600</td> <td>2,400</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>20,000</td> <td>800</td> <td>533</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C</td> <td>40,000</td> <td>1,600</td> <td>1,067</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D</td> <td>10,000</td> <td>400</td> <td>267</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>50,000</td> <td>2,000</td> <td>1,333</td> </tr> <tr> <td>F</td> <td>20,000</td> <td>800</td> <td>533</td> </tr> <tr> <td>G</td> <td>30,000</td> <td>1,200</td> <td>800</td> </tr> <tr> <td>H</td> <td>15,000</td> <td>600</td> <td>400</td> </tr> <tr> <td>I</td> <td>25,000</td> <td>1,000</td> <td>667</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>300,000</td> <td>12,000</td> <td>8,000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Creditor	Debts	% of monthly salary for repayment				60%	40%	A	90,000	3,600	2,400	B	20,000	800	533	C	40,000	1,600	1,067	D	10,000	400	267	E	50,000	2,000	1,333	F	20,000	800	533	G	30,000	1,200	800	H	15,000	600	400	I	25,000	1,000	667		300,000	12,000	8,000
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Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) No application to the court is required. The debt rearrangement has no force of constraint of the laws. (2) In case certain creditors do not accept the proposed option of debt rearrangement, the debtor's scheme of debt rearrangement may fail. 																																																	

MANAGING FINANCIAL DEBTS

Option (III) Individual voluntary arrangement (4 to 6 months)

		Example																																																												
Course of Action	Through an organization providing social services, through the professional services either free of charge or charges for direct contact. Apply to the court for debt rearrangement on voluntary arrangement by person. The court deliberates the option regarding the debt rearrangement. It must be made sure that there is an adequate number of creditors (comprises 75% of the total debts) in order to accept this option.	An income of \$20,000 and a debt of \$420,000; and a court fee of \$12,150																																																												
Advantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Has legal binding force (2) If over 75% of the creditors agree on accepting the option and the creditor with most debts can do nothing but comply. (3) Normally, a debtor who adopts this option has more debts, it may not be workable for rearranging his/her debts on his/her own. But in order not to apply for bankruptcy, this option can still be considered a more secure practice. 	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Creditor</th> <th>Debts</th> <th colspan="2">% of monthly salary for repayment</th> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <th>60%</th> <th>40%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>A</td><td>100,000</td><td>2,857</td><td>1,905</td></tr> <tr><td>B</td><td>20,000</td><td>571</td><td>381</td></tr> <tr><td>C</td><td>10,000</td><td>286</td><td>190</td></tr> <tr><td>D</td><td>30,000</td><td>857</td><td>571</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td>40,000</td><td>1,143</td><td>762</td></tr> <tr><td>F</td><td>40,000</td><td>1,143</td><td>762</td></tr> <tr><td>G</td><td>20,000</td><td>571</td><td>382</td></tr> <tr><td>H</td><td>50,000</td><td>1,429</td><td>952</td></tr> <tr><td>I</td><td>50,000</td><td>1,429</td><td>952</td></tr> <tr><td>J</td><td>20,000</td><td>571</td><td>381</td></tr> <tr><td>K</td><td>25,000</td><td>714</td><td>476</td></tr> <tr><td>L</td><td>15,000</td><td>429</td><td>286</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>420,000</td><td>12,000</td><td>8,000</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Creditor	Debts	% of monthly salary for repayment				60%	40%	A	100,000	2,857	1,905	B	20,000	571	381	C	10,000	286	190	D	30,000	857	571	E	40,000	1,143	762	F	40,000	1,143	762	G	20,000	571	382	H	50,000	1,429	952	I	50,000	1,429	952	J	20,000	571	381	K	25,000	714	476	L	15,000	429	286		420,000	12,000	8,000
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Disadvantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Takes more time to proceed in wait of arrangement for a date to deliberate in court. (2) During that period debtor may give up on the application since they may be harassed by loan-sharks authorized by creditors in pursuit of repayment. If this happens, debtor can discuss with social workers or professionals a contingency plan. (3) Charges from court fees and charges for professionals may add to the burden of the debtor. The debtor has to know if he/she can afford to cover the original court fees. 	Professional service charges are mostly amortized on pro rata in installment within the repayment period.																																																												

Option (IV) Direct application through the court on voluntary (4 to 6 months)

		Example																																																												
Course of Action	Aside from collecting 12,150 of court fees, 17% of the administrative charges in relation to the total sum of debts should also be levied (the procedures and channels are similar to Option III.)	An income of \$20,000 income and a debt of \$420,000; court fee of around \$12,150.																																																												
Advantages	More direct contact with the Official Receiver's Office in respect of this Option	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Creditor</th> <th>Debts</th> <th colspan="2">% of monthly salary for repayment</th> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <th>60%</th> <th>40%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>A</td><td>100,000</td><td>2,857</td><td>1,905</td></tr> <tr><td>B</td><td>20,000</td><td>571</td><td>381</td></tr> <tr><td>C</td><td>10,000</td><td>286</td><td>190</td></tr> <tr><td>D</td><td>30,000</td><td>857</td><td>571</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td>40,000</td><td>1,143</td><td>762</td></tr> <tr><td>F</td><td>40,000</td><td>1,143</td><td>762</td></tr> <tr><td>G</td><td>20,000</td><td>571</td><td>381</td></tr> <tr><td>H</td><td>50,000</td><td>1,429</td><td>952</td></tr> <tr><td>I</td><td>50,000</td><td>1,429</td><td>952</td></tr> <tr><td>J</td><td>20,000</td><td>571</td><td>381</td></tr> <tr><td>K</td><td>25,000</td><td>714</td><td>476</td></tr> <tr><td>L</td><td>15,000</td><td>429</td><td>286</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>420,000</td><td>12,000</td><td>8,000</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Creditor	Debts	% of monthly salary for repayment				60%	40%	A	100,000	2,857	1,905	B	20,000	571	381	C	10,000	286	190	D	30,000	857	571	E	40,000	1,143	762	F	40,000	1,143	762	G	20,000	571	381	H	50,000	1,429	952	I	50,000	1,429	952	J	20,000	571	381	K	25,000	714	476	L	15,000	429	286		420,000	12,000	8,000
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Disadvantages	Proportionately higher charge; a majority of debtors cannot afford to pay the said sum.	Professional service charges are mostly amortized on a pro-rata basis in installments within the repayment period.																																																												

MANAGING FINANCIAL DEBTS

Option (V) Inter-bank Debt Relief Plan																																						
Course of Action	Debtor can submit the application to the Creditor A who has the largest share. Creditor A will then liaise with the others creditors and gain their consensus with holding more than 75% of credit. All credits will combine into one and Creditor A is responsible to collect the lump sum from debtor's bank account and transfer back to all others creditors.	<p>Example</p> <p>An income of \$20,000 income and a debt of \$420,000</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Creditor</th> <th>Debts</th> <th colspan="2">% of monthly salary for repayment</th> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <th>60%</th> <th>40%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>100,000</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>B</td> <td>20,000</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>C</td> <td>10,000</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>D</td> <td>30,000</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>40,000</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>F</td> <td>20,000</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>420,000</td> <td>12,000</td> <td>8,000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Creditor	Debts	% of monthly salary for repayment				60%	40%	A	100,000			B	20,000			C	10,000			D	30,000			E	40,000			F	20,000				420,000	12,000	8,000
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Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) No service charge, administrative charge and professional charge (2) Debtor has 30 days waiver of asking for repay, full payment and liquidation by creditors. (3) Lower to acceptable interest rate 																																					
Disadvantages	Take longer time, say 4 months. Not legally binding																																					

The above list should only be used for individual reference only.



CHANGING HABITS OF CONSUMPTION

After a debtor has undertaken debt restructuring, the person should take special care to strike a balance between income and expenditures to avoid the risk of living beyond reasonable means. Aside from taking a drastic cut in various expenditures, the debtor should keep basic needs in mind. The person should also establish a proper attitude toward fiscal management and patterns of consumption. This includes adopting a simpler lifestyle. In the past, a meal with relatives in a restaurant during holidays might have been fine, but now careful calculation of total monthly expenses for this type of activity must be taken into consideration. Consequently, a decision should be made as to whether or not to continue with this kind of activity every month would serve the purpose of a family reunion. In fact other alternative activities might be considered like outings, etc. These alternatives cost less and are still recreational activities that are ideal for the well being of body and mind, and also serve to enhance communication among family members.

Guidelines for Spending:

We advise debtors to consider the following questions every time before spending money:

1. Is this spending absolutely necessary?
Can it be replaced by more appropriate and comparatively cheaper items or activities?
2. Is it a good time to buy?
Or can we put it off for a later date before making a final decision?
(This technique is used normally as a way to control the desire to buy.)
3. If I do not buy it, will this make me feel depressed?
Are there any other activities that can make me feel better?



CHANGING HABITS OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Establish the Habit for Saving Money

Furthermore, while most income will have already been used for paying off debts and living expenses after debt restructuring, the debtor should still cultivate saving. This can create a safety net. Despite the small amount of monthly savings, it can be accumulated into a lump sum overtime and can be used for contingency purposes. An example of monthly expenditure and savings is illustrated in the chart below.

	Individual	Family (3-4members)
Income	10,000	12,000
Expenses: Repayment	6,000	4,800
Rent	1,000	1,200
Charges for using water, electricity, coal gas and telephone	400	500
Transportation fees	500	1,200
Expenses for food	1,500	3,500
Clothing and/ or other kinds of deposit	400	500
Deposits	200	300

Social Support

After the debt arrangement is done, the debtor may find life most difficult during the first 12 to 24 months. Many debtors choose to give up during the process and eventually apply for bankruptcy and still others may choose to shoulder their responsibilities and soldier on.

These debtors also insist on leading a very simple life.

They really hope that after they have paid off their debts, they can see light at the end of the tunnel. Over such a long period of time the debtor's determination hinges on the support from both family and friends who are there to share their grievances and stress. If a debtor cannot find a suitable partner,

he/she should take the initiative by
keeping in touch with friends.

This is to prevent staying alone and feeling depressed. If necessary, a debtor who is depressed can also seek
professional counseling.

MANAGING UNEMPLOYMENT

• Mr. Chan's new life after depression

Real Life Story: Mr. Chan's new life after depression

Approaching his fifties, Mr. Chan Ji Wong had worked in the accounting field for 18 years and made steady progress in his career during that time. In the 1980s he earned a monthly salary of HK\$15,000 and was promoted to head the accounting section of a firm. In time, ever-increasing responsibilities and a stressful work environment exacted a tremendous emotional toll on him. Becoming more and more fatigued from work, he was compelled to resign to take a long rest.

Later when he again tried to find a job he failed in all his attempts. When he finally found a job, Mr. Chan found that he could only earn a meager salary compared with his previous highly paid accounting post. He even worked as a librarian assistant for over nine months. Already feeling dejected, his depressive situation got even worse and he was eventually diagnosed with depression. Prone to self-destructive behaviour, he tried to commit suicide on several occasions.

His wife said, "I strongly believed that he would recover eventually." She had held a few jobs during the six years of hardship. Not only was she the sole breadwinner of the family, she also had to look after their three children and handle family chores, not to mention shouldering the burden of trying to encourage her depressed husband.

Support from Guardian Angel

Mrs. Chan candidly expressed her great fear and fatigue she felt in her body and mind, saying: "At that time, I comforted him (her husband) by saying that it didn't matter if he couldn't find a job. I would back him up. I told him, it was no use getting impatient, things would improve!" With the encouragement and support of his wife, Chan decided to pull himself together and start a new phase of life.

With proper medical treatment and superb care from his wife, Mr. Chan has recovered from his depression and is thriving in his new post. He also participates in voluntary welfare services for the aged. He often expresses his great gratitude towards his wife. She has been his guardian angel throughout all these years. Now he is more than willing to become the guardian angel for other people. He advises all people that they should always value the people around them, including themselves.

Copied with permission from an article in the
Ming Pao Daily News and Life Angel Education Centre:
Ngai Wing Yan 22/09/2002



MANAGING UNEMPLOYMENT

• Practical Tips in Managing Unemployment

Based on data from the Census & Statistics Department, the unemployment rate has dropped to 7.2% for the period between December 2003 to February 2004. There are now 245 000 people unemployed and about 114 000 underemployed with a rate of 3.3% as of February 2004.

According to the data from the Coroner's Court, among the suicide deaths associated with debts in 2002, the unemployment rate of these deceased was 43.6%, which is substantially higher than that of the general population, which is 7.6%.

Loss of income has its impact on the financial situation of the middle-aged and their families. Yet the psychological impact of unemployment is just as significant. The sense of worth for many unemployed people diminishes drastically when they lose their job¹⁰⁻¹² and many people feel depressed.¹³ Those who have experienced multiple rejection in their job-seeking efforts often feel helpless and hopeless. Moreover, many who worked in technical fields in the past often find it difficult to look for a new job again. As great changes take place in the local economy, workers are shocked to realise that their skills have become replaceable. Many also end up attending occupational training to enhance their skills in other sectors like transportation, customer service, security and other fields.

If you know someone who is unemployed and is feeling suicidal, it is important to refer this person to a doctor right away.

Here are some practical tips to cope with unemployment:

1. Find someone who will understand and talk with you about your experience.
2. Be aware of the negative things that you might say to yourself, "I am useless." "I am not good." Try not to fall into a state of self pity.
3. Stay mentally healthy. Say to yourself, "I am okay even when I am not working" and "I am valuable and a worthwhile individual."
4. Maintain a daily schedule that is meaningful to you. Engage in activities that make you happy. Take a walk, do some exercise, spend time with your spouse and children.
5. Attend job training programs or volunteer work to increase your skills and knowledge. This will enhance your ability to get hired.
6. Carefully plan your finances to give yourself time to look for work. Start checking out information on public assistance such as CSSA before you use up all your savings.
7. Look for work by going to the Labor Department, and read the classified post.
8. Bear in mind that drinking and gambling will only provide temporary relief, but they have extremely harmful and long-lasting effects.

AM I FEELING DEPRESSED?

Am I feeling depressed?

The National Institute of Mental Health has devised the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D),¹⁴ which is a quick self-test that measures a person's level of depression over the prior week.

For the following 20 items, please select the choice that best describes how you have felt over the past week:	Rarely or none of the time (<1 day)	Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)	Occasion-ally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)	Most or all of the time (5-7 days)
1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.				
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.				
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with the help from my family and friends				
4. I felt that I was not as good as other people.				
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.				
6. I felt depressed.				
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort.				
8. I felt hopeless about the future.				
9. I thought my life had been a failure.				
10. I felt fearful.				
11. My sleep was restless.				
12. I was unhappy.				
13. I talked less than usual.				
14. I felt lonely.				
15. People were unfriendly.				
16. I did not enjoy life.				
17. I had crying spells.				
18. I felt sad.				
19. I felt that people disliked me.				
20. I could not get "going."				

Scoring:

Step 1: For each answer, assign the following value:

- 0- Rarely or none of the time (<1 day)
- 1- Some or a little of the time (1-2days)
- 2- Occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
- 3- Most or all of the time (5-7days)

Step 2: Add the total scores

If the score is 22 or higher, the person may be suffering from major depression.

If the score is 15 - 21, the person may be suffering from mild to moderate depression.

If the score is below 15, this test does not indicate that the person is depressed.

If the score is 15 or higher, please consider seeking professional help.

AM I FEELING DEPRESSED?

Feeling depressed can be a very painful experience. 60%-80% of people with depression feel better after they receive therapy and medication treatment.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Call your doctor and schedule an appointment now. You can also talk to a social worker, who will work with you on this issue; there is no need to be alone. Like a common cold, depression is highly treatable and you can get better. The earlier you seek help, the faster you will recover. Call now and talk to someone about it. The numbers are listed on page 15-16.

One single **call**, one single **thought**
can **change the entire situation.**

Suicide

Not everyone who experiences depression wants to commit suicide. 15% of people who are depressed have had thoughts of suicide, according to a study conducted in the US.¹⁸ Some people become so depressed that they can no longer bear their pain and want to end their lives.

If you are **feeling suicidal right now...**

Find someone to talk to right away.

Pick up your phone and call the numbers on the next page.

Conclusion

After the Asian financial crisis, the economy of Hong Kong deteriorated as indicated by rising unemployment, failure in investments, and negative asset value. People with financial problems have to endure enormous amount of stress. The number of people with financial problems who committed suicide also increased.¹⁹

It is a complex and convoluted journey as you go through the process of repaying your debts. You might have to deal with the anxiety of your family members and your creditors. As you repay your debts, you might also live a very simple life. Actually, leading a simple life can be very satisfying and happy, too. You might also need a lot of patience and time to adjust to deal with the reactions of your family and friends. Yet you are not alone. Just like the man in the real life story, you can also find your way out of your financial problems. With the help of professionals and social worker, you can successfully repay your debts and start out a new life.

The most important thing is for you to seek help when you are aware of the problems you face, whether they are financial issues, psychological or family issues. There are many different government organizations, suicide prevention agencies, and professionals in the community who are willing to offer help. According to the research findings generated by our Centre, people with financial problems who are willing to seek help are already half way through in their process of repaying their debts.

SELF HELP NUMBERS

Crisis Hotlines

Family Caritas Crisis: 18288
The Samaritans: 2896 0000 (Multilingual)
Samaritan Befrienders: 2389 2222
Social Welfare Department Hotline: 2343 2255
Suicide Prevention Services: 2382 0000

Counseling Services

Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service: 3413 1500
Breakthrough Counselling Centre: 2736 6999
Christian Family Service Centre: 2861 0283
Hong Kong Caritas Family Service: 2843 4670
Hong Kong Christian Service: 2731 6316
Hong Kong Family Welfare Society: 2527 3171
Social Welfare Department Family Services Centre Hotline: 2343 2255 (push 1 and then 7)
Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service: 2388 7141
Ask your physician for a referral to a private practice psychologist, counselor, or psychiatrist.

Hotlines for Men

Caritas Hotline for Men: 2649 1100
Po Leung Kuk Hotline for Men: 2890 1830

Unemployment

To apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance at the Social Welfare Department: 2343 2255 (push 1 and then 1 again)
Christian Action: 2382 3339 offers job training on different skills
Christian Family Service Centre Hotline: 2787 1355
(Sat 10am-10pm, weekday 2-5pm)
Methodist Epworth Village Community Centre: 2558 3035
Hong Kong YWCA Counseling Hotline: 2711 6622
(weekday 2-4 for women, weekday 7-10pm for all)

Financial Debts Counseling Services

Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre
Debt Counseling Project
24 hour debt Hotline: 2382 2929
Hotline number: 18288
<http://fcsc.caritas.org.hk>

Christian Family Service Centre
Sunny Life Family Support Project for the Debtors
Tel: 2701 5592 / 2793 3573
Fax: 2304 7762
Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri 10:00-13:00, 14:00-18:15, 19:15-22:15

Official Receiver's Office
Tel: 2867 2448
oroadmin@oro.gcn.gov.hk

Tung Wah Group of Hospital
Healthy Budgeting Family Debt Counselling Centre: 2548 0803
Mon-Fri 10:00-22:00, Sat 10:00-18:00
<http://fdcc.tungwahcsd.org>

Extramarital Affairs

The Caritas Hotline services for EMA: 2537 7247
Treatment groups for women who experience EMA and divorce: 2498 0328
Time-out service is designed for people to have a safe place to go to calm down and tackle their crisis.
Hong Kong Anglican Church Sheng Kung Hui Counseling Service: 2713 9174
Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council: 2810 1104
Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres: 2386 6256

All of the above organizations are listed in alphabetic order

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The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust

Flat 3B, No.2 University Drive,
The University of Hong Kong,
Pokfulam, Hong Kong

Tel: 2241 5023
Fax: 2549 7161

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