

Press Release

For Immediate Release

**Latest Figures show Youth Suicides are on the Rise  
CSRP together with SPS Propose Four Initiatives  
Urging Society to “Co-Create Hope” through Action**

Photos and Data (provided by HKU) for download:



(Hong Kong · September 8, 2023) Everyone can make a difference in suicide prevention by working together. In order to promote awareness for suicide prevention around the world, the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) has designated September 10 of each year to be World Suicide Prevention Day. The Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP) of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), being an IASP member, held a joint press conference with the Suicide Prevention Services (SPS) today (September 8) under the theme of “**Co-Creating Hope**” to release the latest suicide figures in Hong Kong. “**Four Initiatives**” were proposed at the press conference to appeal to stakeholders from different sectors to work towards better mental health among Hong Kong youths.

**Latest Suicide Figures and Trends**

With data provided by the Coroner’s Court, CSRP estimated that the 2022 suicide rate<sup>1</sup> in Hong Kong was 14.5. This is a 17.9% increase over the figure for the previous year, showing an upward trend. As recommended by the World Health Organization, suicide rates are standardised and adjusted according to the age structure of the world population. After adjustment, the age-standardised suicide rate in Hong Kong is estimated at 10.6 for 2022, which is slightly higher than the global rate of 9.0 for 2019 (World Health Organization, 2021).

## Youth Suicides are on the Rise

Youths committing suicide has become a matter of heightened public concern in recent years as the suicide rate among 15- to 24-year-olds saw a drastic increase from 6.2 in 2014 to a historical high of 12.2 in 2022. Among people in this age group, the less educated and the unemployed are at the highest risk of committing suicide: the suicide risk for the unemployed is 15.5 times higher than that for those with employment, whereas the suicide risk for the less educated is 4.37 times higher than those better educated.

Suicide prevention has become a critical issue in public health around the world. You are cordially invited to join us in “**Co-Creating Hope**” through action for people in need. Against a backdrop of rapid changes in society and a local economy still mired in uncertainties, people are under invisible stress. In view of this, CSRP will, as always, undertake to look out for those in need, stand by them as they overcome life’s challenges with courage in a shared effort in bringing about a better Hong Kong.

**Mr Vincent Ng Chi-kwan, Executive Director of SPS**, said, “Suicide is a worsening problem in Hong Kong. This is especially so because the world underwent radical changes in the past few years. These changes, which have created challenges for people in terms of livelihood and the economy, have dealt a heavy blow to their mental health. This has led to a sharp increase in the demand for SPS services – over 10,000 calls are received in a month on average. Among the youths who have called our hotlines, 16% of them were facing employment difficulties and under economic hardship (including unemployment). This warrants attention.”

Personal experience was shared by an SPS service user at the press conference. Due to being a childhood victim of domestic violence and abuse, the user suffered from depression. Facing difficulties in job search on account of modest levels of education only added to the user's plight. After getting in touch with SPS and receiving counselling from caring social workers, the user's depression stabilised gradually. The user would later start working part-time in the organisation and restore to normal life. The user said, “For people recovering from mental problems, having the opportunity to work and receiving acceptance enable us to put our strengths to work. Self-esteem returns and hope is restored.”

## **Four Initiatives to facilitate Hong Kong Youth's Mental Health**

CSRP and SPS urge government, industry, academia, and family to join hands to save Hong Kong youth's mental health, details are as below:

### **1. Provide Training Programs to Develop Skills for Hopeful Prospects**

Stepping into the post-pandemic era, Hong Kong's unemployment rate has decreased as the economy is recovering. Meanwhile it leads to negative emotions among young people who remain unemployed, especially for the group with low education levels and limited skills, seeing their friends and peers moving forward in their careers while they are still unemployed; in addition, realising their lack of competitiveness, bleak prospect may trigger mental health issues among the unemployed youth.

We recommend the Government to provide the less-educated youths with more measures to improve their skills, such as continuing education opportunities, vocational training programs and employment support, so as to create hope by increasing their upward mobility.

### **2. Regulate Money Lenders to Stop Predatory Lending**

Borrowing money has become increasingly convenient for young people, there are advertisements deliberately targeting them which encourage the spending of "future money"; Some second and third-tier financial institutions are using ploys like "simple application procedures" and "instant approval" to attract young consumers, while charging ultra-high interest and fees. This has left young victims buried in unaffordable debts and led to the tragedy of suicide.

We urge the government to strengthen the regulation of money lenders, implement measures to support responsible lending and raise the bar for young people to borrow money so as to crack down on predatory lending. We also suggest the Government conduct public education programs to promote proper financial management concepts as well as messages of responsible borrowing to improve financial literacy in Hong Kong.

### **3. Create an Inclusive Workplace Culture to Reduce Stigma**

Society has stigmatising attitudes toward individuals with mental illness, ex-mentally ill persons as well as those with Special Education Needs (SEN), leading to fewer opportunities for work and discrimination in the workplace, which in turn can pose negative effects on their mental health.

We call on businesses to address the social pillar of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) by providing more job opportunities for disabled youths. We encourage businesses to ease job criteria (e.g., education levels and skills requirements) for jobs that may require special skills, and provide the disabled with on-the-job training, to ensure they can perform their duties and elevate their competitiveness in the job market.

We also suggest employers and managers build an inclusive workplace by developing anti-discrimination policies and measures, as well as offer reasonable work accommodations to disabled employees, and providing training for employees to debunk common myths and misconceptions to promote respect and inclusion in the workplace.

### **4. Cherish Non-Academic Achievements and Support Students' Mental Health at Home and School**

Hong Kong's education system places too much importance on academic performance which poses immense pressure on students, and indeed, less-educated young people face more challenges in job seeking.

To promote youth mental health, we propose that the education sector establish a diverse and healthy learning environment by introducing more non-academic assessment methods in schools, in addition encouraging universities and employers to take non-academic performances and achievements into consideration, so as to allow young people with different talents to play to their strengths.

We also suggest schools promote mental health awareness amongst students, ensuring that they can recognise warning signs and know how to seek professional help for mental health; schools can organise various events to build resilience in students, as well as training workshops for teachers and parents to enhance their skills to identify and support students with mental health needs.

Photo Captions:



Photo 1 and 2: The Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP) of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), held a joint press conference with the Suicide Prevention Services (SPS) today (September 8) under the theme of “Co-Creating Hope” to release the latest figures in Hong Kong. Attended guests including: Mr. Leon Yue Lee-on (first from left), Senior Program Manager of SPS, Prof. Yip Siu-fai, Director of the HKJC Centre for Suicide and Prevention, HKU (second from left) and Mr. Vincent Ng Chi-kwan, Executive Director of SPS (first from right).



Photo 3: HKJC Centre for Suicide and Prevention, HKU together with SPS propose “Four Initiatives” at the press conference to appeal to stakeholders from different sectors to work towards better mental health among Hong Kong youths.



Photo 4: Prof. Yip Siu-fai, Director of the HKJC Centre for Suicide and Prevention, HKU recommend the Government to increase the upward mobility of the less-educated.



	<p>Photo 5: Mr Vincent Ng Chi-kwan, Executive Director of SPS said suicide is a worsening problem in Hong Kong, creating challenges for people in terms of livelihood and the economy, have dealt a heavy blow to their mental health.</p>
	<p>Photo 6: SPS service user shared personal experiences.</p>

### **About the HKJC Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP), HKU**

Founded in 2002, CSRP has established its worldwide reputation in suicide research and prevention and extended its scope of research to the well-being of individuals and the whole society. CSRP believes that empirical research would optimize practices and contribute to the improvement of society.

### **About Suicide Prevention Services (SPS)**

Founded in 1995, SPS is a registered charitable organization committed to serves people who are suicidal, despairing or distressed by means of befriending and other services supporting them to regain control of their emotions and the will to live on. SPS has been helped more than 1,000,000 people, providing services including: 24-hour Suicide Prevention Hotline Service, Suicide Prevention Service for the Elderly, Services for Family with Elderly, Services for Survivors of Suicide Loss, Community Education and Life Education for Youth.

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<sup>1</sup> All suicide rates are calculated as per 100,000 people. Taking the overall suicide rate in 2017 (13.0) as example, it means there were 13.0 per 100,000 people in Hong Kong died by suicide.