

## Letter to the Editor

Dear editor,

### Filicides in Hong Kong

Filicide is an intentional act of murdering one's own child.<sup>1</sup> There are very few medical reports on this tragic crime in Hong Kong and no accurate and up-to-date local statistics on filicide. It appears that cases may appear in clusters from time to time. According to the reports of social media, limited information about the physical and psychosocial well-being of the children involved was found (Table 1).

We have summarised cases involving filicide and possible risk factors pertinent to the city of Hong Kong in 2017-2018. These cases involved children of parents of both sexes and mostly under the age of 12. It is believed that these cases would be attributed to multi-dimensional factors; nevertheless, psychosocial risk factors are often described in social media and may be clues for interventions.<sup>1-7</sup> According to the media record in 2017-2018, psychosocial factors such as psychiatric morbidity of parents, postpartum depression and adverse life situation such as marital discord, single parenthood, unwanted pregnancy or financial strain appear to be the presenting issues for filicide in Hong Kong (Table 1).

Filicide is not rare in developed countries. Indeed, it is the third leading cause of death amongst American children 5 to 14 years old; and parents were responsible for 61% of children murders under the age of 5 years.<sup>5</sup> There have been scanty Hong Kong data on filicide in the literature. Modes of filicide included predominantly jumping from height, charcoal burning, poisoning, dumping the baby corpus into rubbish bins and occasionally stabbing or strangulation. Unlike overseas, none of these cases involve firearms in Hong Kong.

Nationwide systematic collection of data on filicide with suicide may bring new insights to the problem. There have been escalating numbers of PubMed publications on the subject matter. Depression in terms of loneliness, helplessness or hopelessness might be one of the psychological conditions that the parents or caregivers who committed filicides, as they might perceive that nobody would be able or trustworthy enough to take care for the children if they committed suicide.<sup>1-3</sup> In a densely populated city, people are physically close but emotional distant. Mental health support remains thin in Hong Kong and is no substitute for a strong social support network.

Meanwhile, most of the people in Hong Kong are not highly aware of their own and others' mental health, especially for parents and primary caregivers. Further, it is uncertain if they may be concerned about social stigmatisation of help-seeking in times of need. In general, many choose to deal with emotional disturbances through suppression, distraction and avoidance. It is advisable for the medical professionals to work hand in hand with the social workers and psychological counselors for the best interest of the children and families by adopting a systemic perspective in healthcare settings.

An official registry can be set up to understand local factors and changing patterns pertinent to filicide, and to enable and implement preventive measures. A multi-dimensional and systemic screening tool for filicide risks is called for to better characterize cases for preventive purposes.<sup>6,7</sup> It would be helpful if health care providers could be vigilant of the emotional state of parents or caregivers and address their psychosocial needs in order to prevent future tragic incidents.

**Table 1** Cases of filicides reported in social media in Hong Kong in 2017-2018

| Date              | Case  | Link   |
|-------------------|---|--|
| August 7, 2017    | A 34-year-old Hong Kong father jumped from the balcony of a flat high in a Macau residential block with his two-year-old daughter in a suicide-murder case. The man is suspected to have stabbed his partner, the 30-year-old mother of the young girl, before he jumped holding the child.       | <a href="http://www.thestandard.com.hk/section-news.php?id=185953&amp;sid=4">http://www.thestandard.com.hk/section-news.php?id=185953&amp;sid=4</a>  |
| October 18, 2017  | A corpse of new born baby girl was found inside of a garbage can in Wanchai. On November 6, 2017, a corpse of a new born baby in a public restroom of North Point Java Road Market.   | <a href="http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201710/18/P2017101800973.htm">http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201710/18/P2017101800973.htm</a>  |
| December 18, 2017 | On, a 37-year-old mother was arrested after murdering and dismembering her 12-year-old daughter in a Hong Kong flat. The mother was found mentally confused, and suspected to be under the influence of drug.   | <a href="http://www.wikiwand.com/zh-sg/%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%91%BD%E6%A1%88%E5%88%97%E8%A1%A8#.E5.8F.82.E8.80.83.E6.96.87.E7.8C.AE">http://www.wikiwand.com/zh-sg/%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%91%BD%E6%A1%88%E5%88%97%E8%A1%A8#.E5.8F.82.E8.80.83.E6.96.87.E7.8C.AE</a><br><a href="http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-crime/article/2124706/mother-arrested-after-12-year-old-daughter-found">http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-crime/article/2124706/mother-arrested-after-12-year-old-daughter-found</a> |
| January 12, 2018  | On, an Indonesian domestic helper gave birth to a baby girl secretly. She killed the baby and put her into a bin of rubbish collection station.   | <a href="http://www.wikiwand.com/zh-sg/%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%91%BD%E6%A1%88%E5%88%97%E8%A1%A8#.E5.8F.82.E8.80.83.E6.96.87.E7.8C.AE">http://www.wikiwand.com/zh-sg/%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%91%BD%E6%A1%88%E5%88%97%E8%A1%A8#.E5.8F.82.E8.80.83.E6.96.87.E7.8C.AE</a>  |
| January 14, 2018  | A 42-year-old Korean woman and her 6-year-old son were cut in the throat by knife and found dead on a bed in a hotel room of Austin Road. Her husband was a businessman and failed in his business. He was found drunk and arrested at the hotel room.  | <a href="http://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20180115/bkn-20180115033016013-0115_00822_001.html">http://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20180115/bkn-20180115033016013-0115_00822_001.html</a>  |
| February 26, 2018 | A 45-year-old woman whose husband killed himself the month before was found dead along with her 9-year-old son in a murder-suicide from inhaling charcoal fumes in a car.   | <a href="http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-crime/article/2134888/hong-kong-woman-and-son-9-found-dead-murder-suicide-after">http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-crime/article/2134888/hong-kong-woman-and-son-9-found-dead-murder-suicide-after</a>  |
| June 29, 2018     | A corpse of new born baby girl was found out the rubbish collection station of Yau Oi Estate.   | <a href="http://www.wikiwand.com/zh-sg/%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%91%BD%E6%A1%88%E5%88%97%E8%A1%A8#.E5.8F.82.E8.80.83.E6.96.87.E7.8C.AE">http://www.wikiwand.com/zh-sg/%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%91%BD%E6%A1%88%E5%88%97%E8%A1%A8#.E5.8F.82.E8.80.83.E6.96.87.E7.8C.AE</a>  |
| July 24, 2018     | A two-year-old boy was thrown out of a window by his 35-year-old mother who was found on the ground next to the toddler on a public housing estate. The single mother was later certified dead. Police found a suicide note, blood and three knives in the only bedroom in the fourth-floor flat. | <a href="https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/hong-kong-law-and-crime/article/2156630/mother-dies-toddler-unconscious-after-fall">https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/hong-kong-law-and-crime/article/2156630/mother-dies-toddler-unconscious-after-fall</a>  |
| August 7, 2018    | A 44-year-old clinic nurse was found dead together with her 7-year-old daughter at her home in Tai Kok Tsui. She left a letter and stating that she was disturbed by love affair issues and did not want to continue her life.  | <a href="https://hk.news.appledaily.com/breaking/realtime/article/20180807/58535487/">https://hk.news.appledaily.com/breaking/realtime/article/20180807/58535487/</a>  |

## References

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