Introduction

Debates of social control functions of social welfare are an age old study in social policy and sociology of social welfare. Their duality and contradictory roles in relieving the suffering and controlling of the poor have been a central concern since the 1970s marked by the classical book of Piven and Cloward (1972): Regulating the Poor. Social welfare used by the state to maintain social order and affirm collective interests against the “marginal” population has been criticized as imposing too much control on citizens (Trattner, 1983; Cousins, 1987; Hillyard & Percy-Smiths, 1988). The political functions of social welfare to legitimize governance and arrest social unrest are the major focus. Debates revived along the social security reform in the last decade, but it is said to have been the other way around: there is not enough control on the welfare dependants, resulting in moral hazards and ever welfare expansion. “Over-generous” social security policies are blamed for bringing about increasing social disorder by undermining work disciplines and subsidizing the lifestyles of an underclass that are socially deviant (Blakemore, 2003). Since the late 1980s, “how to activate the unemployed” has shaped political discourses, research agendas and legislative reforms of social security in the US and OECD countries. Close monitoring to achieve control of welfare recipients who are unmotivated to work is accepted across nations as essential for the benefit of society and individuals.

Hong Kong has followed this trend closely and changes have been introduced to social security policies since the late 1990s. Prominent dimensions of changes in policy reforms in the west include restricting entrance and accelerating exit, segmentation of participants, introduction of contractual obligations and formulation of work-oriented measures. Work-oriented measures can be divided into four major types, including: (1) expanding work opportunities through creation of public employment, providing incentives for employers and supporting the unemployed to create new enterprises, (2) strengthening the readiness of individuals for work by providing education, training and work-experience programmes, (3) providing incentives to the very low-paid workers, such as child tax and working tax credits to maintain their living, and (4) heightening the cost of non-participation in work-related activities (Gilbert, 2005). Most of these are also evident in the social security reform of Hong Kong. The reform started with the CSSA review conducted in 1998 followed by changes imputed into policies among which differentiating recipients more precisely according to degrees of capacity/incapacity for work was the first step. Recipients are segmented according to age, able/disabled, length of unemployment and years of residence. The able-bodied aged 15-59 has been the major target of work-first programmes and similar to many other places, among which are the single
mothers.

In regular press releases from the Hong Kong Social Welfare Department (SWD), the number of families receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA), the cash assistance scheme serving as a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially, is reported and also the number and trend regarding single parent cases (http://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubpress/). It was reported that the number has been on the rise in the past ten years from 6.5% of the total number of CSSA cases in 1986, 9.6% in 1996 to 13% in 2007, while the number of single parent families on CSSA increased from 3,740 in 1986, 13,824 in 1996 to 38,278 in 2007 (SWD, various years). In fact, the increase correlates with the rise of the divorce rate in the past few decades with the crude divorce rate increasing from 1.6 in 1996 to 2.54 in 2006. The number of single parents has increased from 42,309 in 1996 to 72,326 in 2006, representing an increase of 71% in twenty years (Census and Statistics Department, 2007). The sex ratio is 297 single fathers per 1,000 single mothers in 2001 and 255:1000 in 2006. However, contrary to the general public impression, the employment rate of single mothers is higher than that of married women living with children under 18, 61.4% compared with 56.5%, but the opposite is found for single fathers: 78.4% and 91% (Census and Statistics Department, 2008). It is biased that single mothers, as a community, have been portrayed as welfare dependents who lack work motivation, but this has become popular knowledge in the local context.

The impact of social welfare is always mixed: providing opportunities for liberation and controlling the recipients to conform to social expectations defined by the “comfortable” majority. Social control is exercised by the state on behalf of the majority on the minority. This paper sets out to examine changes in the welfare-to-work programmes targeted at single mothers. As an exploratory study that examines the experiences of welfare-to-work participants and operators, interviews of 3 single mothers on welfare and 3 social workers who are delivering the Enhanced New Dawn Project, the latest welfare-to-work programme targeted at single parents, were conducted. This is different from the “official” evaluation studies which were commissioned by the provider; the government, because it is believed that the neutral position of the researchers can provide them with a better position to tap the experiences and views of the welfare recipients and operators. The possible areas for further examination will be identified.

Welfare-to-work measures targeting at single mothers

Theoretically, all work-first programmes are relevant to single mothers while some are specifically provided for single parents and child carers who are assigned to different programmes mainly according to the age of their youngest child. The first welfare-to-work programme, Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme, was introduced in 1999 and has been implemented until now, introduces casework, contractual responsibilities and sanctions into the CSSA. It requires able-bodied unemployed recipients and those who are not working full time to sign a contract agreeing to receive employment assistance services provided by the SWD which include developing personal job-search plans, job matching, referrals to Intensive Employment Assistance Projects (IEAPs), and community work (unpaid work of 3
months at three days per week). Single mothers who have their youngest child aged 15 and older are treated the same as other adults and required to join the SFS Scheme. In addition, those who have the youngest child in full day kindergartens have to join the Scheme as well and are expected to work full time at 120 hours per month, earning not less than $1,450 each month (recently increased to $1,550). They are no longer identified as single parents, but able-bodied unemployed who are divorced/separated/widowed. Single mothers who have children under the age of 12 can also join the projects on a voluntary basis.

IEAPs introduced in June 2003 were contracted out to non-governmental organizations which were targeted either at the unemployed recipients generally or specific groups. With respect to the effectiveness of IEAPs, a research study revealed that they are effective in helping the welfare recipients (Tang & Cheung, 2007). For the long-term unemployed, that is, the most difficult cases, District Employment Assistance Trial (DEAT) Projects of a two-year term are launched in three intensive “problem areas”, including Kwai Chung/Tsing Yi, Tung Chung and Tin Shui Wai since October 2006. Those who have completed IEAPs, but unsuccessful in moving into work and those on CSSA on grounds of unemployment for three years or longer are requested to participate. According to observations of service providers, participants are mainly the ex-drug addicts, ex-convicts, and single mothers who are suffering from illnesses, physically and/or mentally, that are not medically proven.

The first scheme that targeted exclusively at single parents and child carers with the youngest child aged 15 and below was introduced in 2002, the Ending Exclusion Project which invited participation on a voluntary basis (LegCo Panel on Welfare Services, 2001). The study commissioned by the SWD to the City University of Hong Kong and Chinese University of Hong Kong provided proof for the effectiveness of the Project in terms of number of job search activities and part-time jobs secured. The future direction to move single parents on welfare to work was affirmed (SWAC, 30/1/2004). Upon its completion, due to a low participation rate (about 3,500 participants in total), it was replaced by the New Dawn Intensive Employment Assistance Projects (ND IEAPs) in 2006 which made it compulsory for single mothers with the youngest child aged 12-14 to participate. They were required to sign a job seeker’s undertaking to state that they were willing to actively seek paid employment and participate in employment counseling, job matching, skills training and post-placement support services delivered by NGO project operators. In order to secure welfare benefits, they had to work for not less than 32 hours per month. Those who refused to participate or failed to do so would have their monthly CSSA payment reduced by HKD200 as penalty. The evaluation report from the University of Hong Kong on the ND IEAPs suggested that all parties involved, including the participants, their family members and children, employers and operating agencies, all provide positive feedback on the project and that the project can effectively assist single parents and child carers in seeking employment (LegCo Panel on Social Welfare, 2007). However, the statistics revealed by the Government, which will be discussed later, revealed the limited achievement of the projects. Also, the report further recommended lowering the age of the youngest child to 6, lengthening the hours of work and increasing the penalty proportional to monthly benefits despite the weak support found in the study results (ibid). These recommendations were not accepted by the Government at that time perhaps not so much due to objections from advocacy groups, but the change of the top personnel in the Department. Nevertheless, the tone
was set that the welfare-to-work programmes targeting single mothers in Hong Kong are “overly generous” when compared with many other places.

Enhanced New Dawn Projects have been launched since October 2007. The target groups, content of service and requirements for participants remain the same as that of the ND IEAPs, but new changes are introduced to the funding mode and terms of responsibilities. The funding mode is changed from lump sum to “piece-rate” and also, the providers are assigned responsibilities that were previously undertaken by the Department, that is, regular interviews with recipients to monitor their job search obligations. There are now 20 NGO operators providing 20 projects.

Applicable to all welfare recipients, the provision of “disregarded earnings” (DE) are introduced under the CSSA Scheme to increase work incentive. Monthly earnings from employment can be partially disregarded. The first $800 of the monthly earnings from employment will be totally disregarded and the next $3,400 half disregarded, making up a total of $2,500 should a recipient be able to earn $4,200 or more.

Single mothers as a group, require special attention and this is clearly evident in the initiation of successive welfare-to-work programmes targeting exclusively at them. However, advocacy groups have argued that single mothers are not a homogenous group. Differences among them are more than the ages of their children. A significant portion are new arrivals from mainland China, which are a strongly stigmatized group and this further erodes political support for welfare for single mothers. Single mothers are also diverse in human and social capital which is greatly affected by their age, educational background, employment history and immigrant status. Those who come from rural parts of mainland China may not have any employment experience. There are also single mothers who are victims of spousal abuse or suffering from emotional or mental illnesses. Unless medically certified to be unfit to work, they are treated as able-bodied with work abilities and requested to participate in New Dawn projects.

Social inclusion or social control?

The welfare-to-work programmes for single parents and child carers are using languages of empowerment (to overcome work barriers), social inclusion (to become a member of the workforce), capacity building (for self-help), social participation (through work and work-related activities) and self-reliance (to support oneself financially) which are all directed towards the goal of employment. Despite the evaluation studies which prove the effectiveness of these programmes, there are voices from the recipients which tell the other side of the story, particularly about the oppression that they experienced through social control during the process. The relationship between social policy and social control can be discussed in three main ways: at political, individual and community levels. This paper focuses on the impact of these programmes on individual single mothers and them as a community. Social control will be examined in light of changes in the welfare-to-work programmes, according to the definitions of social control which include both directly coercive and subtly oppressive (Blakemore, 2003, p.96), and along the dimensions of work, mothering and interaction between workers and clients.
Work for inclusion?

Direct coercion can be exercised by setting conditions for entitlement to welfare and imposing sanction against violation. The morality of self-reliance defined as work for income is superior. A single mother is judged according to her motivation and ability to take up employment. While policy makers consider the virtues of personal empowerment, independence, social inclusion and self-realization being intrinsic to paid work, experiences of “work first” programmes in the west suggest that many paid jobs taken up by single mothers are unlikely to achieve these objectives. Questions about who wants to work, what counts as work and who can work are raised (Saunders, 2005).

Similarly, statistics provided by the Hong Kong Government revealed that jobs secured by the ND IEAPs participants are mainly low in income and skills. From April 2006 to May 2007, 2,640 (32%) out of 8266 who were ND project participants have secured jobs. 38.8% of them accepted full time paid employment while 61.2% are engaged in part-time work. Jobs secured are mainly service workers, shop attendants, cleaners, domestic helpers and work in other low skilled occupations. The average monthly wage is $4,400 for full-time and $1,600 for part-time employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>No. of jobs</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Average hourly rate</th>
<th>Average monthly salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers &amp; professionals</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>$47.4</td>
<td>$4,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>$28.8</td>
<td>$3,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction &amp; craft related workers</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>$27.3</td>
<td>$3,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plants/machine operators and drivers</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>$25.7</td>
<td>$3,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services workers and shop attendants</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>$23.2</td>
<td>$2,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaners</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>$24.4</td>
<td>$2,701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic helper</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>$30.8</td>
<td>$2,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other elementary occupations</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>$24.6</td>
<td>$3,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>$25.5</td>
<td>$2,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average:</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>2640</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Adapted from LegCo Panel on Welfare Services, LC Paper no.CB(2)2522/06-07(01)]

The figures suggest that the majority of single mothers and child carers are employed in part-time work, entering jobs which are low in skills and pay. The hourly pay rate is extremely low, mostly at or below $25, which is much lower than the rate of $33 recently proposed for minimum wage by labour organizations. The average monthly salary of $4,000 represents around 40% of the median income of the year (Census and Statistics Department, 2007). It is highly likely that these recipients are not able to leave welfare, but moved into the low-income category. For the 318 recipients (12% of participants who secured paid work or 3.8% of the total participants) who have successfully left social welfare completely, the sustainability is not known because the rate of returning to social welfare is not available.
Examining the types and contents of training provided by the IEAPs and ND IEAPs, work attitudes and soft skills, such as job readiness and job search, rather than education or vocational skills, were provided. Retraining programmes offered by the Retraining Board may, in fact, reinforce existing gender stereotypes. Women are trained for “women’s work” in female-dominated fields, such as cleaning and domestic help, with low pay and job instability. Effective education and training, which are fundamental solutions to unemployment and poverty, are never addressed (McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; Bok, 2004). This echoes with findings of western studies that single parents who are looking for higher-level jobs and special training are poorly served in the welfare-to-work programmes (Millar, 2005). Also, specific to single mothers is the need to cope with divorce and single parenting. According to an interviewed social worker, training provided by IEAPs and the New Dawn projects have to be job-related which may not be able to deal with the more fundamental barriers to work.

The difficulties are compounded by ethnicity as the newly arrived women from mainland China have low levels of human capital attributes, including education, work experiences, training or even health. They are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market and also in the welfare system. For those who are new immigrants and resided in Hong Kong for less than 7 years, they are not eligible for CSSA although discretion may apply to special cases. For those who are approved, they are required to join the SFS Scheme and referred to IEAPs irrespective of the age of the youngest child. However, joining the projects has not moved them away from welfare. Ms Lau is an illustrative case:

Ms Lau is a new arrival from Mainland China. Her husband passed away one year after she was granted the right of abode to reside in Hong Kong. Her daughter is now ten years old and studying in primary four. She was approved CSSA on discretionary grounds and required to join the IEAP project. She is working part-time as shop attendant and cleaner. Unfortunately, she is not able to earn $1,450, the required amount, after fulfilling the required 120 work hours due to low pay. In order to meet the target amount, she worked more hours. She asked her mother to move from mainland China to help with childcare because a child care centre placement costs $64 per day or $16 for each two-hour stay. Even if she is willing to pay for the service, there is a serious lack of occasional child care places in the district where she resides. She is very stressed and has started to worry about ways to fulfill the requirement for next month.

Low salary is the crux of the problem. Ms Lau has been accepting extremely low pay employment, that is, at an hourly rate of $12. The work requirement of the project has compelled her to perform poorly paid jobs. It is unlikely that she will achieve economic independence and self realization as stated in the objectives of the projects. In this way, the imposition of the value of paid work as superior becomes the primary goal of the welfare-to-work programmes to be achieved when recipients are of low level of human capital. Unless there are comprehensive policy packages, such as working families tax credit, integrated child credit and minimum wage, single mothers cannot work for independence (Lewis & Campbell, 2007; Siegel & Abbott, 2007).
Compe\textcolor{red}{

tency of mothering and value of caring

Welfare-to-work programmes have shifted the roles of single mothers from primarily as mothers towards both mothers and labourers. Although the government has been very careful not to be accused of undermining the significance of parenting, the implementation of the welfare to work programmes for single mothers places a disproportionate emphasis on work to the exclusion of parenting. The position of single mothers on welfare has been changed from being “deserving” responsible mothers in the past to “undeserving” irresponsible citizens/mothers who have not taken sufficient measures to solve personal problems and benefit their children. However, it is not in tune with the aspirations of single mothers. Although a great majority of single mothers aspire to work for income and personal development, they identify themselves as “primarily mothers” and will only accept jobs that fit their childcare and domestic work duties (Kilkey, 2000; Lewis, 2001). In the Hong Kong context, studies revealing the difficulties of single mothers returning to work also suggest that balancing work and child care is difficult for single mothers (Hung & Lai, 2001). Under the welfare-to-work programmes, their attitudes and forms of mothering are subjected to scrutiny by workers delivering the programmes. While committed mothering is good, “over” commitment is considered problematic and not conducive to the healthy development of children. They are blamed for indulging in child care which is not only unnecessary, but may create dependency of their children. They are either incompetent or using child care as an excuse to escape from work. Comments on child care are made by service providers during the interviews evaluating the competency and styles of the recipients in mothering:

“They always treat their children as if they are very small. Helping them to take a shower at the age of 12, tying shoe laces.” (Social worker A)

“Some always think that leaving children to their own care is impossible. For those who are more compliant, they can try to settle the meals for their children or ask their children to return home from school on their own. Then they can work for a few more hours. It all depends on how they perform as a mother.” (Social Worker B)

“They always think that it is impossible for them to work because of child care and domestic responsibilities. The first thing we do is to change their mind set. Full time mothering is not necessarily good for their children. Children will respect them more if they work for income.” (Social worker C)

With regards to domestic work, there are comments, such as: “they won’t train up their husbands [to do domestic work]”, and “they quit the job or were fired two days after…cannot be scolded, cannot be blamed…their mindset is only on the family”. It is subtly oppressive when people are encouraged to fit into accepted roles and give up individual styles. When parenting attitudes and skills are measured in relation to facilitation of work, choices are not justified. One social worker showed her empathy towards single mothers, observing that they may have real difficulties in child care because of the “problems” with their children, such as being extremely rebellious or emotionally too attached to the mother. The perspective of needs is adopted rather than choice.

A double-bind message is received by single mothers in welfare-to-work programmes when they are either penalized by the welfare system (penalty of reducing payment) or by the wider society when they are charged of child neglect. This is illustrated by an experience of Ms Fong:
Ms Fong has been receiving CSSA since her divorce three years ago. Her son is 12 years old, studying Form One in secondary school. In order to fulfill the requirement of 32 hours of paid work, she usually accepts part-time work as referred by the ND IEAPs. She is always troubled by problems of childcare when she has to work on school holidays. On a school holiday during the Chinese New Year, she was asked to work as a cleaner for four hours in the afternoon. Fear of offending the worker and also because the targeted number of work hours had not been fulfilled, she left home for work after arranging lunch for her son. In the evening after work, she received a phone call from the police that her son was put under custody in a public hospital, her previous place of employment. He was found loitering around the hospital area and was not able to explain why he was there and where he was going. Ms Fong learnt later that her son was actually looking for her. The son was “detained” for more than a week and Ms Fong was not allowed to see him. She was further notified by the police that she might be charged with child abuse because of her negligence of the safety of her son. She was very much worried at the time of the interview and raised an important question on the double-bind message; to work for welfare and to be an attentive carer. She gained awareness through this incident.

Ms Fong is treated as an incompetent mother who jeopardized the safety of her son. Western studies have discussed the costs to young children when single mothers exchange welfare for work which suggest that availability of child care services that is reliable, of good quality and deliver services during non-standard work hours are vital to the employment of single mothers (Cabrera & Peters, 2006). Shortfalls and gaps remain in childcare services in Hong Kong. Social workers working with single parent families share a common observation that for those who are eager to work due to various types of motivation or simply because of the need to be compliant with requirements, leaving their children unattended at home is common. In the Shamshuipo district, for example, which occupies the top position among districts in terms of poverty and number of families on CSSA, there are only about 33 places of occasional child care and 290 places of after school care services (LegCo Panel on Welfare Services, 27/7/2007).

What counts as work as defined in the welfare-to-work programmes has been criticized as narrow: only paid work and work outside the home. This is of special relevance to female recipients and particularly, single mothers who are more likely to join mutual help groups, committing to volunteer services and offering childcare support to others in need. Unpaid care work for one’s family or other families is devalued. Advocacy groups have complained about the absurdity of recognizing a woman’s work as paid work when she takes care of small children as a child minder, but not so when they take care of their own children of the same age or helping care for children of neighbours.

The micro process of client-worker interaction

Subtle oppression can be exercised in the micro process of interaction between clients and professionals which is structured by policies on welfare-to-work programmes. A single mother, Ms. Chu, when interviewed, accounts her experience of being challenged for accepting volunteer work. In her words:

“I have been bringing my cell phone with me because if they [the social security
office] cannot find me, it is troublesome…they ask where I have been, why did I not answer the phone calls. Last week, I told them that I was doing volunteer work. I was helping a service centre, doing childcare, and so missed the calls. She said ‘So, you have time to do volunteer work, why not paid work?’ I was very angry. Am I not working? Am I not making a contribution? I did not say anything. It’s better not to go against them… too troublesome…”

Ms. Chu was asked to report to the officer in the following week which was earlier than usual. She felt that she was penalized for being a committed volunteer.

The typical work flow of a New Dawn project is after receiving the referrals from the SWD, a letter is sent to invite the clients for an interview. If there is no response from the client, two letters are sent or if s/he refuses to participate, the project will inform the SWD to cut $200 from the monthly payment. During the first interview, the client will be asked to sign an agreement or if s/he refuses to participate, s/he will have to sign a declaration stating that s/he was present in the interview, but is not joining. A participant is required to meet the worker once a month for about half an hour to “hand in” two completed job applications, whether they are referred by friends, advertised in newspapers, street notices etc. If a client fails to meet the worker once a month, the project will inform the SWD of non-compliance and $200 will be deducted. In order to facilitate successful employment, the projects have established networks with employers in the district. When clients are referred to these employers, project workers will accompany them to attend interviews. “Feeding to her mouth” is considered more effective as clients feel that they are being cared. For successful job placement, the project workers will provide post-placement support by making a phone call each week for six months.

However, in most cases, the interaction is not overtly coercive. Social workers that were interviewed are all committed workers who show a genuine concern to the well being of their clients. One worker shared that she does not tend to encourage clients to accept jobs of unreasonably low pay. Clients will be more “compliant” if they feel that the social workers care. More needs to be explored about the ways that social workers relate to users when they are monitoring them in order to satisfy the funding agreement. A research conducted by the Coalition of CSSA Review revealed that there are operators of ND IEAPs who mislead the clients that they are required to earn a monthly income of $1,600 and suspected their motivation is receiving a bonus of $75,000 for helping 48 recipients in earning this amount (CSSA Alliance & JPCHKCD, 2007).

Two changes that were introduced to the Enhanced New Dawn Project are likely to result in increasing micro level monitoring of recipient choices: the “piece rate” funding mode and adding the role of control alongside providing assistance, which calls for further studies. Welfare-to-work programmes, including the IEAPs and ND Projects, were funded by the lump sum mode. Following their termination, they were replaced by Integrated Employment Assistance Scheme (IEAS) and Enhanced ND Projects. The funding mode links the amount of subsidy to the output measured according to the number of service users, types and quantity of activities that they join and rate of successful employment. The NGO providers are keener to achieve the targets set in the service specifications provided by the government which may create a result of greater control of individual recipients or better quality service. An Enhanced ND project has a term of 30 months which is required to serve 870 cases in
total. All cases referred by the SWD will be interviewed for a minimum of 30 minutes once a month, funded at $28 per interview. Three hundred cases of the total (the O-cases) have to be intensive cases (I-cases) with participants who are required to complete 50 hours of training. The operator will receive $3,000 for each case that meets the requirement. For each recipient who manages to find a job and stays in it for 6 months (the placement period), the operator will receive a bonus of $800.

According to the interviewed social workers, this new funding mode has put operators at the risk of financial deficit. The funding received will depend on the number of recipients referred by the SWD and their performance. One of the interviewers reported that the organization has lost $300,000 in the first half year of the operation. In order to achieve the targeted number of I-cases, some persuasion is needed:

“I will tell the client that the SWD requires them to attend 50 hours of training or otherwise benefits will be deducted. I am not telling lies. SWD does inform them the requirement to attend trainings in general although not the penalty. Or I tell them that attending class is happier.” (Social worker A)

“In the intake interview, I will identify those who can become an I-case. I will not let him/her know that s/he has a choice to stay as an O-case. If I let the individual choose, s/he will not go.” (Social Worker B)

These workers also talked a lot about the difficulties caused to project implementation by the funding mode and the micro management imposed by the detailed service specifications.

In the past, the monitoring plus sanctioning roles were performed by the Employment Assistance Coordinating Office (EACO) of the SWD which was responsible for checking the compliance with job search requirements while NGO operators provided employment assistance services. The EACO was disbanded recently after shifting the task to NGO Enhanced ND Project and IEAS providers. The operators now have to assess the cases during intake and have the power to stop CSSA payment for 2 weeks should the clients be unable to comply with the requirements. The effect brought about by the changes waits to be explored. This exploratory study finds it quite mixed. Two providers being interviewed do not perceive that there is any conflict in the roles and observe that the practice is welcomed by recipients who think that social workers are nicer to them in comparison with the EACO staff who are not of social work backgrounds. Another social worker admits that the role of checking compliance with job search requirement has resulted in the exercise of greater authority over the recipients and increased tension in the relationship.

**Conclusion**

Other than evaluation studies of the various welfare-to-work programmes commissioned by the government, the experiences and views of the single mothers and operators have been understudied in the local context. The basic issues for welfare-to-work programmes for single mothers are whether they want to work, what counts as work and can they work. It requires the examination of the tension in the roles of mothers and labour experienced by the increasing number of divorced/separated women, most of whom identify themselves primarily as mothers.
Despite evaluation studies that have always proven the effectiveness of welfare-to-work programmes, work-first programmes are unlikely to deliver on the key objectives of “increasing monthly income of the family, improve their living, raise their self-esteem and sense of worthiness, build up a social network and set up a right model for their children”, as stated in the official policy paper of the Enhanced ND Projects, until these issues are put on the policy agenda. As long as work that is created is characterized by low status, boring, physically demanding and poorly rewarded, there is little incentive for single mothers who identify themselves primarily as mothers to accept paid work and become economically independent or self realized. The nature and quality of the jobs generated by welfare-to-work schemes, without providing basic education and vocational skills, are unlikely to allow single mothers to leave welfare. In light of this, welfare-to-work programmes will not be able to achieve social inclusion, but are merely a tool of social control sanctioning single mothers who cannot balance paid and care work.

The definition of work as only paid work and outside the home is too narrow. Social inclusion requires participation in meaningful activities. There have been calls to widen the definitions of work to include meaningful activities such as basic education, training, work preparation, job search and volunteer work (HKCSS, 2007). Family-friendly employment policies and work/family balance policies which legitimize the role of parenting and guarantee childcare places for single parents are required (Lewis & Campbell, 2007). The choices of care work should remain open while support given to allow them to be both mothers and workers.

This paper reveals that there is a danger in these programmes of exercising social control at the individual level and on the community of single parents in the guise of facilitating social inclusion. Areas to be further examined include types of work undertaken, child care arrangements, experiences and views of single mothers on welfare on mothering roles and paid work, their aspiration regarding these roles, the micro-process of interaction with service providers and for the operators, their roles vis-à-vis the funder and the clients, and their views on changes in the welfare-to-work programmes. It is significant that there is a bottom-up view to include the voices of recipients and operators in policy and programme evaluation (McPhee and Bronstein, 2003).

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