# Barriers Militating Against the Social Inclusion of Low-Income Pakistani Minority Groups in Hong Kong

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Research findings from an ethnographic study into low-income Pakistani families in Hong Kong indicate the existence of significant barriers in society militating against social inclusion. Racial discrimination contributes to marginalization, reducing life opportunities. Identified problems include educational, linguistic, and employment issues. These factors lead to social exclusion and weakened social capital.

**Key words**    Pakistani, Hong Kong, social inclusion, discrimination

## Introduction

This paper discusses research findings from a qualitative study into low-income Pakistani families living in Hong Kong, with regards to barriers that militate against social inclusion. Coping strategies using a social work strengths perspective formed the overall focus of the project (Saleebey, 1992; Thrasher & Mowbray, 1992). However, the discursive nature of ethnographic research permitted participants to discuss a variety of topics illuminating their perspectives and life problems, including financial and employment concerns, together with housing, health and educational issues. Thus, a number of themes were developed from the data that were directly linked to the wider topic of social inclusion.

In order to provide a broader context for a discussion of poverty and social inclusion of minority groups in Hong Kong, some comparisons are drawn with the situation in Britain, where research indicates similar levels of marginalization of Pakistani minority ethnic (ME) groups. The rationale underpinning the comparisons lies in the close historical link between Hong Kong and Britain, which has influenced the migration of ethnic minority groups from the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, Hong Kong and Britain hold a shared legacy of similar legal frameworks and evolving social policies toward racial discrimination and social

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exclusion agenda. These have led to the development of legal frameworks such as the Hong Kong Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO). Accordingly, insights drawn from one region serve to some extent to contextualize and illuminate the circumstances surrounding Pakistani ME communities in Hong Kong.

Despite perceptions that Hong Kong is almost entirely ethnically homogeneous, ME groups can be found at virtually every level of society. It was reported in the 2006 Population Bi-census that ME groups constituted 5.0% of the whole population in Hong Kong. These figures comprised Filipinos, standing at 32.9%, Indonesians (25.7%), white Caucasians (10.6%), Indians (6.0%), Nepalese (4.7%), and Pakistanis, at 3.2% (Census and Statistical Department, 2007a).

Yet, although there is a small corpus of research into ME groups in Hong Kong, particularly among the Indian community, there is scant information on Pakistani communities. Both groups are well established in Hong Kong, and those from the Indian subcontinent have enjoyed a long historical connection with the region, mostly related to trading entrepreneurship, which goes back to the nineteenth century (Plüss, 2005). Prior to Partition in 1947, North Indian Muslims came to Hong Kong to work under the British Authorities in a number of capacities. Like the hugely successful Parsi and Sindhi communities in Hong Kong, entrepreneurship in trading and banking was by no means unknown for these North Indian Muslims (White, 1994). However, their wealth-generating activities did not supersede their predominance in certain vocations, such as security and correction, for example, as military men, police officers, prison wardens, and security guards (White, 1994).

Migrants from Pakistan in contemporary times continue to arrive in Hong Kong, of which the vast majority are employment-seeking males. Although in the past some of their forebears mixed with the local Chinese population through marriage, the modern Pakistani community tends not to contract marriage outside of their own ethnic group. They also appear to be more marginal than their Indian counterparts, in terms of socioeconomic disparities and living conditions, although a detailed sociological inquiry into this phenomenon lies beyond the scope of this paper (Lee et al., 2007). Additionally, Pakistani families do not share many of the characteristics of the prevalent ME groups in Hong Kong, such as that of domestic workers from the Philippines, whose right to remain in Hong Kong is normally inextricably linked to explicit short-term contract work. Although Pakistani families are often dependent on casual labor, many Pakistani families have resident rights in Hong Kong and may have lived in this region for some generations.

Pakistanis are one of the most impoverished groups in society. In relation to gender differentials, according to the 2006 Population Bi-census of ME groups in Hong Kong, Pakistani women have the lowest female labor participation rate, at 16.7%, compared to Indian women (47.2%) and Nepalese women (65.1%) (Census and Statistical Department, 2007a). Furthermore, most Pakistanis are in general largely involved in unskilled labor, with 31.1% working in elementary occupations (including street vendors, domestic helpers and cleaners, messengers, security guards and watchmen, freight handlers, construction laborers, hand packers, and agricultural and fishery laborers). Notably, only 15.6% work as managers and administrators. This stands in striking contrast to their Indian counterparts, where 19.3% are

elementary workers and 32.0% managers and administrators. Moreover, the monthly (main) median income for Pakistanis is HK$9,000, while the figure for Indians is HK$15,000. This stands in interesting comparison with the median income for the whole working population in Hong Kong at HK$10,000 (Census and Statistical Department, 2007a).

It has been argued that racial discrimination is an engrained problem in Hong Kong that serves to limit the life opportunities for individuals (Ku et al., 2003). This in turn impacts not only the immediate quality of life for such people but is likely to have serious repercussions to the successful integration of the Pakistani community into the mainstream Hong Kong society, resulting potentially in generational cycles of deprivation.

However, the deprivation and discrimination faced by ME communities in general, and Pakistanis in particular, have not received much attention from mainstream Hong Kong Chinese society. Instead, the Hong Kong government tends to adopt a "color blind" attitude towards racial discrimination issues. For example, the government previously opposed individual legislators' efforts to introduce the Racial Discrimination Bill. Although racial discrimination in the public sector has been prohibited by the Bill of Rights Ordinance (BRO) since 1991, it is an ineffective tool, as the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has no power to enforce the BRO or to investigate complaints under it. It was not until 2004 that the Hong Kong government finally agreed to legislate against racial discrimination and consequently issued a Consultation Paper describing the approach. Hong Kong's Legislative Council (LegCo) duly enacted the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) on 9 July 2008, although the HKSAR government has yet to set a time when it will become fully operational. Despite the bill being passed unanimously, it was accompanied by strong complaints and protests from the lawmakers themselves, together with NGOs. Members of LegCo and the NGOs were left with a serious dilemma over the choice between a weak, ineffective and sometimes counterproductive law and none at all. The RDO, for example, does not fully cover all government activities. Many of these activities, such as those that relate to the police, immigration, correctional services, and central school place allocation, remain immune from challenge. The NGOs complain that the Hong Kong government has opposed the adoption of a scheme of Equality Plan to mainstream racial equality within all government policy-making activities, thus demonstrating its intransigence and unwillingness to ensure that its own activities are free from racial discrimination (HKHRM, 2008).

## Conceptual background to the study

Poverty in Hong Kong is a serious social issue, where social and economic polarity is generally regarded as expanding rather than contracting (Lee et al., 2007), and where poverty levels for some are described as at "subsistence" level and even "abject" (Wong & Chua, 1996, p. 21; Wong, 2000. p. 86). Poverty is also regarded as likely to impact heavily on migrants—those from the mainland and those from other countries, including Pakistan (Lee et al., 2007).

Marketable skills in relation to education and professional qualifications are less likely among the migrant population as a whole, although this study indicates that it may be a particular problem for the Pakistani community (Lee et al., 2007). Commensurately, Ku et al. (2003) note that in relation to the Pakistani participants in their survey, 81.9% regarded

employment as constituting their most serious problem. Many Pakistanis are involved in casual labor, an observation borne out in this study. According to Lee and Wong (2004), the construction industry absorbed 69.3% of casual workers in 2003. Additionally, Lee et al. (2007), citing Frost (2004), indicate that ME migrants (specifically the Nepalese) employed in the construction industry experience long working days. Lee and Wong (2004, p. 261) argue that, in general, "marginal workers," such as those that might typically belong to the Pakistani community, "have to work for long hours, with very low pay, uncompensated over-time work, appalling working conditions and under strict employers' surveillance." Consequently, xenophobia and discrimination appears to be an endemic feature of Hong Kong society, so far as the social inclusion of some ME groups are concerned.

The contemporary debate surrounding social inclusion has developed from both the concepts of social exclusion, as well as that of social capital. Accordingly, a brief review of relevant social policy in Britain has raised some interesting points concerning the situation in Hong Kong. Poverty, as a social exclusion issue, was targeted by New Labour in Britain after decades of divisive social policy under former governments. These had reduced the country to poverty levels that had brought it close to the bottom of the international league tables for developed countries (Craig, 2002). The issue of ethnicity and social exclusion is one that had yet to be fully addressed by New Labour, according to Craig (2002). However, certain ME groups, including Pakistanis, along with Bangladeshis and people of African Caribbean origin, are up to four times more likely to live in poverty than the general population (Craig, 2002). The social exclusion issue also explicitly links poverty levels and health inequities in society (Campbell & McLean, 2003). In Britain, social exclusion has increasingly been reframed as a "social inclusion" agenda. This in turn connects closely with the concept of social capital, which is partially measured by general levels of trust in society and the social participation of marginal groups (Dahl et al., 2007).

Social capital as a concept stems from Bourdieu's original conceptualization, where "capital" encompasses material, cultural, and symbolic resources (Lynam et al., 2007). Capital can include embodied phenomena, such as pronunciation, which resonates with the issue of class, as well as ME status and second language abilities. Bourdieu, however, has been critiqued for not sufficiently engaging with the issues of ethnic diversity and difference (Garrett, 2007). Thus, in drawing insights from Bourdieu, these aspects must necessarily be highly qualified, although subsequent critiques have developed the theory to encompass the concepts of ethnicity and globalization, as will be discussed further.

Capital is used to negotiate the individual's path through the field of structured networks of "social space" (Gatrell et al., 2004, p. 245). This field includes elements of the social and physical context and are linked to that of habitus, which encompasses that which corresponds to our personal view and interpretations of the world, including cultural knowledge and values (Lynam et al., 2007). Power, as a field in Bourdieu's analysis, is a terrain of contestation and struggle by individuals with competing sources of capital (Parker, 2008). Empowerment strategies for marginalized communities therefore serve to equalize imbalances in the power fields of the status quo, which otherwise conforms to a condition of social exclusion. This idea is often viewed primarily in terms of poverty, but can also include discrimination.

Nonetheless, Garrett (2007) following Parker (2000), has developed Bourdieu's original conceptions to include "disapora habitus" in order to analyze the issues of migration and displacement, and the attitudes, responses, and perceptions of those affected. This is a useful framework from which to consider the position of the Pakistani community in Hong Kong, in which arguably they have experienced a number of cultural displacements, with related adjustments, in terms of migration to Hong Kong, firstly, under colonial rule and then during the handover period to China, and Special Autonomous Region (SAR) status.

Social exclusion, as limited social capital, can be alleviated by social networks that operate within certain spheres of influence. These can be personal support networks and bonds that tie individuals and families together; and those that lead to further opportunities for social participation. Gaining greater autonomy and power therefore enhances social capital. However, social exclusion is shaped by many factors, including ethnicity, gender, and class issues, such as is the case for Pakistani communities in Hong Kong (Lynam et al., 2007). Finally, social capital is not viewed as a personal asset solely but as a collective one, providing a conceptual benchmark by which to measure well-being in society (Saracostti, 2007).

Correspondingly, the underprivileged status of the Pakistani community in Britain has been analyzed in association with the weak levels of social participation for this minority ethnic group. It is consequently argued that the "unequal distribution of social capital is one of the key mechanisms whereby social inequalities are perpetuated" (Campbell & McLean, 2003, p. 249).

Social capital is also viewed as forming a buffer to health inequities as a result of the complex schema of intermeshing systems that form a cohesive, benign whole, which combines both structural and cognitive elements (Pridmore et al., 2007). Although Pridmore et al. (2007) point out that many forms of social capital can be found globally, Wong (2008) argues that it exists at a very weakened and impoverished level in Hong Kong, and even that social bonding is at "crisis" level in this region. Citing the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (2002), Wong states that almost

> 80 per cent of respondents are not involved in community-related activities and 64% report that not even one neighbour can be trusted. This study warns the government that weakening social networks will create strong reliance of the government in the long run (Wong, 2008: 1418).

Such reliance on the government, however, may not be well placed since Chan and Chan (2003: 527) identify three discourses relating to social exclusion, following Levitas (1998) and Giddens (2001). The first of these is redistributive discourse (RED), which describes how poverty militates against citizen-based social inclusion. The second discourse is the social integrationist discourse (SID), where social inclusion is realized through wage earning roles. The final discourse is the moral underclass discourse (MUD), which adheres to the notion of moral and/or cultural reasons for social exclusion (Levitas, 1998). In Hong Kong, this latter discourse tends to prevail. The Minimal State of capitalist ideology that Hong Kong strongly adheres to places the responsibility for welfare dependency firmly on the shoulders of claimants, rather than on any structural disadvantages that impose such exigencies. The

"culture of poverty" critique is conveniently displaced in favor of individual and, in this case, cultural pathology, in terms of the perceived failure of the Pakistani community to adequately thrive in Hong Kong society, according to prevailing social norms. Accordingly, it would seem that to some extent the ideology of MUD is one that has not been challenged by social work in Hong Kong (Chan & Chan, 2003).

The discourse of disapprobation surrounding welfare dependency, such as the term benefit "scrounger" so commonly bandied about in British society, has its parallels in Hong Kong, where claimants are apparently regarded as "being 'lazy' and/or 'greedy' people" (Chan & Chan, 2003, p. 532). Needless to say, in both societies, but more particularly so in Hong Kong, claiming social security benefits is regarded as a stigmatizing condition relating to personal inadequacy and lack of worth. These attitudes impact heavily on the Pakistani community in Hong Kong, where, according to the survey by Ku et al. (2003), the number of unemployed participants in their study stood at 19%, which is considerably higher than the average Hong Kong unemployment rate of 8%.

## Methodology and methods

The participant sample was largely a homogenous one, comprising solely Pakistani families living within close proximity of each other, and beneath an income threshold of HKD$9,500—50% of the median household monthly income. The ethnographic approach was deemed the most appropriate means of studying the lived experience of this group. Ethnography is used to gain an in-depth insight into the culture-bound environment of the participants, in which not only are the influences of ethnicity and religion taken into account but also the intermeshed systems of interpersonal relationships, interaction, values, knowledge, and behavior.

Ethnographic research normally comprises a variety of data gathering methods and in this study, which took place over a 14-month period, semi-structured interviews formed the dominant form of data gathering, where the largest majority of respondents were adult women. These were supplemented by fewer unstructured interviews using opportunistic sampling methods. Individual interviews were all carried out in the participants' homes in the midst of family activity. Thus there were many opportunities for the use of critical observation, in addition to interview work.

Although this predominance of female respondents had not been part of the intended research design, it was viewed as a contingency relating to *habitus* in informing gender norms prevalent in the Pakistani community under study. Consequently, a focus group discussion was held at a later date with male participants and facilitated by a male research assistant in order to gain some new perspectives on the topic (Hammersley, 1990). Data gathered from these different methods have been synthesized to form a discussion of research findings in this paper.

The intensive nature of ethnographic interviews restricts the number of participants to a smaller sample group. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, 17 families were finally recruited for participation. Most of these families included a main breadwinner (invariably male) who had lived in Hong Kong for several years, and, in some cases, this

included decades. The situation was different in relation to female kin where residency could span periods of a minimum of three years and up to several decades. These differences in residency between male and female respondents were connected to marital unions and family issues. A commonly emerging pattern was that of Pakistani males establishing themselves in Hong Kong prior to seeking a bride from Pakistan or, otherwise, where wives spent a large proportion of their time in Pakistan accompanied by their young children.

Recruitment of participants and research assistants was facilitated through liaison with the Lady MacLehose Centre, a community-based enterprise that has close connections with Pakistani families in the Kwai Chung district of the New Territories area of Hong Kong, where most participating families lived. Accordingly, recruitment took place through the use of "snowballing" techniques, where one family introduced the researcher to others. Finally, since few of the participants were familiar with English or Cantonese, interviews were conducted in Urdu through the use of community interpreters, both female and male.

Data analysis was embedded in ethnographic procedures in which raw data was subjected to coding at multiple levels. These form nested concepts, through which the relationship between codes was made apparent. To assist analysis, dedicated software (Ethnograph) was used, although this was a purely mechanical aid: the coding and interpretation of data forming the analytical process was controlled by the researcher. Through these means, single and recurrent instances were noted in which recurrent phenomena form the basis of thematic findings.

## Findings

### Employment barriers

Of the participating families, most were reproductive, cohabiting, nuclear unions, with several families having up to four or five children aged below 12 years. The majority of families were in employment, with ten wage earners currently engaged in casual or temporary work, punctuated by days and weeks of unemployment. Wage earning appeared to be a strictly male activity for these particular families and all, bar one, were employed in blue-collar work, with construction being the most common form of labor. This was followed by delivery and loading jobs, with two wage earners employed in security work. Some families in this group were in receipt of social security supplementary benefits through the Comprehensive Social Security (CSSA) scheme, which operates on a sliding scale of benefits. However, the rest were entirely dependent on this scheme for a subsistence income.

As stated earlier, all the participating families were in the low-income category, although in reference to Hong Kong Chinese male wage-earners, the average monthly salary for this group salary at $12,000, which falls to $8,000 in the case of Chinese females (Census and Statistics Department, 2007b). In this respect, the family wage for Pakistani participants of between $8,000 and $12,000 stood in close comparison with their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts (Lee et al., 2007). However, dual earning is common among couples in Hong Kong, where the presence of women in the workforce is an entirely accepted social norm. For Pakistani families in this study, however, there were a number of barriers preventing Pakistani women from contributing a wage to the family budget.

The first of these revolved around the kinds of jobs that were regarded as available to such women. Laundry work was one of the very few that participants identified as being open to Pakistani women. Yet this was not regarded as a desirable job, as the working conditions were considered to be poor. A couple of other female participants made a small, irregular income from dressmaking, but since this was for other impoverished Pakistani families, little revenue could be raised through these means.

The main barriers to improved employment opportunities for all the participants in this study were identified as primarily educational ones. Individuals did not regard themselves as being as marketable as most Hong Kong Chinese employment seekers, mostly owing to their poorer educational levels. However, women participants regarded themselves as significantly less likely to find work. As one individual said,

If the Chinese won't employ a Pakistani man, what hope do I have?

Some of the women did not receive schooling past primary school level and even those who had gone on to achieve secondary school education were not proficient in English, the second most important language in Hong Kong. Additionally, very few were able to speak the dominant language, Cantonese, to any functional degree whatsoever. Daughters of Hong Kong-based Pakistan families had in theory an advantage over their mothers with regards to language proficiency, due to a greater exposure to Cantonese. However, in practice, owing to cultural reasons regarding gender propriety, daughters could be sent home to Pakistan for their education, which perpetuated many of the linguistic and educational problems their mothers had experienced. In one case, a participating family had withdrawn their adolescent daughter from education altogether because they could not place her in a single-sex school.

## Accessing services

Language barriers do not only militate against more equal employment opportunities, they were also seen as a significant problem for participants attempting to access health and social care services. This is of particular significance for Pakistani low-income families where health problems are prominent. Of the 17 families participating in this study, ten were involved in the care of at least one member of the family with chronic health or disability problems. One participant recalled how a Cantonese-speaking nurse exasperated by the communication problems posed by the lack of a common language scolded her, saying, "You need to learn our language!"

Additionally, female participants regarded themselves as particularly at a disadvantage due their biology, in which frequent pregnancies and gynecological concerns required medical attention. However, responses from study participants identified two constraints imposed on equal access to health services: language issues and cultural issues prescribing gender norms. In terms of access, non-Cantonese or non-English speakers were at a significant disadvantage, since the Health Authorities in Hong Kong have yet to implement the regular use of interpreting and translation services.

Cultural barriers relating to the notion of *habitus* and cultural capital could also be erected in relation to the unease Pakistani women felt about medical examinations carried out by

male medics, particularly those working in obstetrics and gynecology. This was clearly due to the intimate nature of examinations, to the extent that one female participant admitted to feeling unable to attend these kinds of medical appointments.

Access to housing and social services departments was hampered by the same language obstacles and lack of formal facilitation of communication strategies. In terms of housing issues, all the participants in this study lived in privately rented accommodation that, with the exception of one family only, was comparatively expensive, although substandard in quality and desperately overcrowded. Most participants were eager to move into the superior government-owned social housing but demand for such housing in Hong Kong far outstrips supply, leaving families with no choice but to remain in the private housing sector, accessing the cheapest and least desirable of accommodation.

With regards to social welfare agencies, the attitudes of staff, including that of social workers, were also seen as alienating in the responses offered to the concerns and problems of Pakistani service users. Mothers in this study often presented themselves as burdened with the care of the young and the sick, as well as the needs of elderly relatives back in Pakistan. These women's requests for practical assistance from social work agencies to manage these competing commitments were often responded to unsympathetically, as the following account indicates.

> Mrs T has four children aged seven months, three years, seven years and eight years. The seven-year-old suffers from cerebral palsy. She has no informal help with the children apart from occasional help from her husband who works long hours. Upon requesting an interview with social services personnel to find out what help was available to her, she was turned away with the abrupt words, "If you can't manage so many children, why did you have them? You need to control yourselves!"

Interviews from participants indicated the fact certain requests for help were evidently not realistic. For example, one individual had run up a very large debt through the care of ailing relatives in Pakistan and entertained the hope that the CSSA or some other fund would help them to repay these costs. Another wondered if the Hong Kong government would pay for a domestic helper to assist in the care of a disabled child in the family.

It is not difficult to imagine how some of these requests were responded to in busy social work agencies. Yet largely, these unrealistic expectations by Pakistani families were formed through ignorance of what was available and under which circumstances. The lack of information in Urdu did not help to address these misunderstandings. They were, in fact, potentially injurious. One case illustrated this point graphically. Having been turned down for an inappropriate request, a young, Pakistani lone parent left her three small children alone and unattended overnight to stay with her sick baby in hospital, assuming that no social work help was available for this emergency either. Her greatest worry had been that during her absence one of the children would play with the faulty gas cooker and inadvertently turn it on. The concept of children at risk was clearly present for the participant in interview but, based on her experiences so far, she had no reason to believe that she had grounds upon which to appeal for formal help from government-run agencies.

## Interpersonal relationships and social barriers

Based on accounts from the participants, impoverished members of the Pakistani community in Hong Kong appeared to live not only a marginal existence in Hong Kong but also one characterized by insularity. Only one participant in this study described himself as enjoying friendly relationships with local Hong Kong Chinese people. The school streaming system in Hong Kong tends to separate non-Cantonese speaking children of former migrants from Chinese- and Cantonese-speaking pupils for educational convenience. Consequently, Pakistani children were regarded by their families of living a separate existence from their Chinese schoolmates. Moreover, two mothers disclosed that, in their experience, Chinese children were actively discouraged by their parents from playing with Pakistani children outside school, as they were seen as unsuitable playmates. Consequently, relationships between Pakistani (and other ethnic minority groups) and Hong Kong Chinese children do not yet appear to be developing cohesively enough to break down some of the social barriers that divide Pakistani families from mainstream society.

Given that social relationships between children are not being satisfactorily reinforced, the outlook for adults in this respect is even poorer. Seemingly, the conditions of mutual poverty shared by Pakistani and Chinese neighbors living in the same dilapidated apartment blocks do not serve to adequately overcome the ethnic and cultural divisions. However, in response to questions about relationships between ethnic groups, many participants were keen to emphasize that they had no particular grievances with the local Chinese people. Instead, it was felt that the Pakistani people were less tolerated, as well as misunderstood. Two participants described how local Chinese shopkeepers were reluctant to serve Pakistani families. One participant was refused service at a nearby haberdasher when she tried to purchase a uniform for her daughter. Another disclosed that a Chinese grocer regularly accused her family of "making a mess" when she went in with her children and had angrily asked them all to leave, saying, "No, don't want to sell to you!"

An interesting feature of this line of inquiry was that participants were anxious not to appear critical of Hong Kong Chinese people, being presumably very conscious of their marginalized presence in Hong Kong society. In fact, they were often surprisingly candid in acknowledging what they believed were the stereotypes that the local Chinese population held towards them, particularly in relation to the accusation of social security dependency and even benefit fraud. Several expressed hurt over the reserved and intolerant attitudes they felt surrounded them, but at the same time they identified that cultural and religious differences inevitably formed miscommunication and prejudice. One participant went so far as to explain that although she did have a friendly Chinese neighbor the fact that she was not a Muslim prevented a closer relationship from developing, from the participant's point of view.

## Discussion

Clearly Pakistani families living in Hong Kong have a considerable number of challenges to overcome in attempting to achieve greater social acceptance in this society. Prejudice and socioeconomic difficulties are currently relegating the Pakistani community in Hong Kong

to one of the most underprivileged groups in society, with significant barriers to overcome towards greater social inclusion. In addition, although this study did not focus directly on civic participation, it would seem that the social capital collectively shared by this community is weak. The relational networks within the community, although intimate at many levels, nonetheless seem insufficiently developed to assist individual families to overcome their underprivileged condition and lowly status in society.

Granovetter (1973) offers some interesting insights into this phenomenon, through an analysis of the strength of interpersonal ties and the benefits accrued. To briefly summarize a complex theory therefore: an individual's "strong" ties relate to that network of friends who tend to know and interact with each other; in addition to networks of "bridging weak ties" where contacts are looser and not necessarily tied directly to the individual (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1370). Although weak ties do not seem a promising scenario in terms of individual advantage, empirical evidence suggests that they can be important in relation to improving one's socioeconomic standing, such as finding employment. At the meso, community level, however, the very "strength" of a group that is also insulated from external weak ties is greatly disadvantaged in being unable to respond and adapt to change (or external threat) in the wider society. In relation to the Pakistani community, this throws up some interesting questions in terms of the strength of family and neighborhood cliques, but their relative ineffectiveness to create greater social mobility by being so self-contained that they have few bridging ties to "weak," external networks of influence in Hong Kong society.

In terms of reduced civic participation for the Pakistani community, this trend is unlikely to change unless the educational gap between many Pakistani migrant families and the majority Hong Kong Chinese population is bridged. The professions, such as health, social work, teaching, and law, to name but four, would be enriched by the greater participation of Pakistani professionals, given the small but significant multicultural profile of Hong Kong. Obviously, education that forms a springboard to professional standing in society needs to go hand-in-hand with concerted attempts to promote linguistic fluency in the dominant languages of society. Despite educational provision for ME groups, the needs of Pakistani families, particularly the conservative ones, may demand that greater efforts are needed toward the creation of culturally inclusive, gender-sensitive secondary level educational provision. Furthermore, pathways to further education for Pakistani individuals from traditionally, educationally excluded families may need to be negotiated in view of the largely monocultural tertiary landscape that has existed in Hong Kong to date.

Finally, while a more equal educational playing field may be readily achieved over time with the younger generation of Pakistani residents, there is a great risk that due to a lack of exposure to general society Pakistani women and older individuals will be left behind. They may therefore become increasingly isolated in solely Urdu-speaking enclaves, perpetuating the degree of ghettoization that already exists in Hong Kong.

The implications for health and social work are clear. Hong Kong is still governed by the self-sufficient ethos of the Minimal State combined with Confucian values. Thus, endeavors to promote social capital through government-funded initiatives (Kwok, 2004) are a logical extension of state ethos. Consequently, this means that the sick and the elderly

are regarded as primarily the responsibility of their families. Where relational networks are weak in a community, the pressure of a relentlessly competitive capitalist state, combined with employment insecurity and a high cost of living, means greater stress on family coping mechanisms, leading to fewer opportunities for social participation and self-actualization.

In conclusion, the needs of isolated ME groups with a history of weak participation in society, together with a lack of linguistic fluency in the dominant languages, will prove to be an increasing challenge to the health and social care sectors over time.

Meeting education goals for ME children through culturally sensitive, personalized strategies would facilitate the development of social capital for such communities collectively. However, the discrimination experienced by the resident Pakistani community cannot be successfully challenged without a series of measures, some of which relate to effective partnerships formed between marginalized families and social work, health, and education bodies. Funded community development initiatives remain an extremely important facet in the improvement of the social inclusion of the Pakistani community. Such alliances will nonetheless fail unless they are fully underpinned by effective government policy to holistically support marginalized families, with the aim of enhancing the social inclusion of underprivileged ME communities in society. Of critical importance must be the full implementation of legal frameworks that aim to tackle decisively discrimination across all sectors of society.

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