

CENTRAL POLICY UNIT
HONG KONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

A STUDY ON THE SOCIAL NETWORKS OF
RESIDENTS IN TIN SHUI WAI

HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

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Executive Summary

Recent reports of family and social tragedies taken place in Tin Shui Wai have caught extensive public attention to the social disadvantages experienced by the residents there and the social integration of the community. This project is thus commissioned to investigate the social networks in Tin Shui Wai North. Social networks are examined at both the individual and organizational levels.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted between July and October 2008 to collect information from 21 residents and eight community organizers. The resident includes eight working respondents, eight non-working respondents, and five new arrivals residing in Hong Kong for less than seven years. The sample of community organizers consists of four former and current members of Yuen Long District Council, two representatives of community organizations, and two social work officers from the Social Welfare Department (Yuen Long District).

The major findings are summarized as below.

1. Tin Shui Wai North was found to be a loosely-integrated community. The respondents indicated superficial relations with neighbors, a low level of community trust, a strong sense of self-protection, and passive community participation. The short duration of residence and complex population mix were reported as major barriers against building close social ties in the community.

2. Respondents generally considered family members the only people they could trust and share their innermost feelings whereas neighbors and community friends were merely social companions and sources of emergency help to them. The family thus seems to be the ultimate stronghold in a fragile community.
3. The remote geographical location and poor transportation infrastructure of Tin Shui Wai North are found to have reduced the face-to-face contact and level of intimacy with family and friendship ties.
4. Respondents with few economic resources, for example, welfare recipients and unemployed individuals, had a tendency to withdraw from their social circles and community life due to their inability to afford the expenses of social activities and the feeling of inferiority.
5. The building design was perceived by respondents as an obstacle to interactions with neighbors, which reduced the opportunities of meeting neighbors on the same floor and the incentive of neighbors to visit one another.
6. Social networks play an important role in the dissemination of community information and mobilization of residents for community participation.
7. Women, especially housewives, were found to be better connected to the

community than men and working people. The housework and childcare routines provided women with more opportunities to meet people in the community, better access to community information, and more time to participate in various kinds of community activities.

8. The local people and new arrivals in the community were found to hold stereotypical views of each other, which contribute to an invisible barrier preventing the two social groups from associating with each other. As a result, in-group friendship was common among the respondents.
9. The respondents were generally passive and submissive in community participation. They preferred to be participants rather than organizers of community activities or advocates for the community. The submissive attitude may be linked to the feeling of personal inefficacy that was commonly expressed by the respondents.
10. The respondents generally perceived low efficacy of mutual-aid committees and district councilors in effecting positive changes in the community. General distrust was also expressed towards district councilors' genuine concern for the community.
11. The respondents with extensive social connections in the community tended to be more satisfied with and attached to the community. Particularly, the respondents with family and friendship ties in the community, and linkages to community organizations were more likely

to have positive perceptions of the community and less likely to show an intention to move.

12. New arrivals in the sample generally reported greater attachment to the community than the locals. Compared to their local counterparts, new arrivals tended to report more friends, have greater community involvement, hold positive views towards the community, and indicate a weaker intention to leave the community in the near future.
13. Due to different political views and resource competition, community organizations in Tin Shui Wai North generally work independently with minimal collaboration among them. The government was criticized for making limited efforts in promoting resident-oriented community groups.

Several policy implications are derived from the findings, including:

1. More direct transportation from Tin Shui Wai North to other parts of the city is needed to cut down the traveling time so as to facilitate the residents' contact with social ties outside of the community. Transportation fares to and from Tin Shui Wai may also be lowered or discounted fares may be offered to Tin Shui Wai residents so that the socially disadvantaged groups can afford to go out of the community to enjoy social life.
2. To prevent social isolation of the economically-disadvantaged residents,

the local economy should be developed to provide employment opportunities for these residents. When people have jobs in the community, they would be able to spend more time with their families and have more opportunities to meet friends locally.

3. As Tin Shui Wai North has a diverse mix of population, a necessary step to promote community cohesion is to cultivate social tolerance and acceptance of people from different social and cultural backgrounds, particularly those from the Mainland China. Programs that would facilitate inter-group exchanges and enhance mutual understanding should be encouraged.
4. To make the community information more readily available, community groups may consider delivering the information directly to the residents, for example, putting up posters at the lift lobby and other public areas of the building, and distributing information flyers into the residents' mailboxes.
5. Existing community activities tend to attract mostly women (particularly housewives) and children. Men, young adults, and working people either do not have the time for these activities or do not find the activities appealing to them. To attract and facilitate their participation, more creativity and flexibility should be introduced in the design of community activities.
6. To empower the community of Tin Shui Wai North, social programs

may be developed to raise the level of personal efficacy among the residents by giving them proper encouragement and support.

Resident-oriented self-help groups should also be promoted and supported so as to enhance the sense of ownership and commitment in the community.