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**Lone Mother Families in Hong Kong: Perceptions of Risks and
Their Coping Strategies**

By

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ABSTRACT

From a taboo to a new family norm, the lone mother issue has become a reality in Hong Kong since the latter part of the last century. Lone mothers, especially the divorced ones, have been placed in disadvantaged positions by traditional views reinforced by past discourses. Functional, pathological and victimized perspectives prescribe women's roles in the family to uphold social stability, blame the women for choosing to divorce, and portray the women as victims to elicit sympathy for charity. The surge of lone mother families coincided with rapid social changes resulting from political and economic changes. With hindsight, we see the drawback of the past discourses lacking a gender perspective, and reference to the changing social and economic environment, thus deeming the lone mother issue as an individualized one. In other words, the lone mothers were left to fend for themselves and their children with only individual resources to tackle a collective social problem. To address this imbalance, this research pioneered new perspectives from the risk society theory and post-structuralist feminism to examine the lone mothers' risks, their perceptions and coping strategies. The application of the concepts of detraditionalization and individualization reveals that the lone mothers in Hong Kong were in a transitional process at the gate of emancipation due to the traditional patriarchal belief in gender roles in motherhood and the ethics of work and care. Another force at work here is the ideology of capitalism which emphasized individual responsibility. Despite a common belief in conservatism, the women showed various degrees of detraditionalization and individualization, roughly pointing to two groups, familial and individualized, with overlaps and fluidity between them. The research found that in the perception of risks and their coping strategies, class still matters. In addition, the lone mothers' social location, including their access to knowledge, resources and network support also plays an important part in determining their disadvantaged position. Subsequently, the lone mothers' responses to risks are heuristic amidst the constraint of a socially constructed status. In conclusion, it is necessary to study the lone mother issue with updated perspectives, and dispel the notion of rational choice so that society as a whole will bear the collective responsibility.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Wendy, 30-something, married for 3 years, divorced with one child, tried to jump off of a building after her husband left her to meet other women in compensated dating (a type of transactional relationship). Bobo, in her 40s, a housewife for 18 years in her first marriage and for a further 8 years in the second one, divorced with one son from the first marriage and another son from the second one, ate only one meal a day so that her sons could be fully fed. Vanessa, 40 something, divorced with one child, a part-time domestic helper, saved to enable her daughter to take part in extracurricular activities by walking several miles each day (to save HK\$4 in bus fares). Teresa, in her 40s, married for 10 years, divorced with three daughters because of her husband's extramarital affairs, an ex-factory manager now part-time cleaner, shopped at a market at closing time to hunt for bargains and bought discounted frozen meat. Her daughter, a high school student, shared a fast food restaurant job with her mother, 7 days a week, to avoid the term 'Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) kid' among her peers at school. Yanki, 40 something, married for 10 years and divorced with a son, an air conditioner installation technician on construction sites, left her husband because he forbade her to work outside the home. Lara, in her 30s, divorced with a son after her husband had incurred a seven figure investment debt, felt that she had to relinquish custody and chose to become a weekend mother to focus on her job. Emily, 40 something, divorced and a once CSSA recipient, struggled and chose to relinquish custody to turn a new page in her life.

This research is concerned with the lives of lone mother families, whose voices are rarely heard in social risk research and public discourses in Hong Kong. The focus is on the interplay of subjectivity and social construction under patriarchy and capitalism. The experience of the lone mothers reveals the reality of risks which require more equitable and appropriate measures to tackle. In the unique hybrid situation of Hong Kong, where tradition and capitalism coalesce, women tend to take on more risks than men since they assume the traditional gender role of carer, and are charged with the

continuous caring of children even beyond marriage. In the meantime, families are faced with the hyper capitalistic ideology of Hong Kong, with a heavy emphasis on the production of wealth, resulting in long working hours which deplete family life. In addition to the shrinking of family support network and society's constant reinforcement of the ideology of self-reliance, which results in the absence of supportive policies such as childcare subsidies and incentives, many lone mothers in Hong Kong bear the double burden of becoming the bread winner of the lone family as well as being the carer.

The traditional society was harsh on divorced and separated lone mothers and responded with individualized, pathological and workfare discourses, ignoring the fact that there is some collective responsibility caused by rapid social changes. The lone mother issue calls for a more equitable approach by placing their problems in the context of social responsibility, so that social support will be provided instead of passing it off as an individual responsibility.

In the past, the study of women and the family in Hong Kong focused on traditionalism. Functionalism, based on the idea of consensus over traditional perspectives on women, without a critical gender dimension, was the dominant approach emphasising the maintenance of social solidarity through women's role in achieving harmony in the family. Women played a distinct gender role to keep the family together, to maintain stability, so that men could work outside of the home and contribute to society without having to worry about their family. These distinct gender roles in the family worked on a utilitarian mode under which women were viewed from a traditional patriarchal perspective, which inevitably placed them in a disadvantaged position. Women were expected to tolerate this inequality, and eventually the idea became internalized as a virtue to adhere to. In the society lone mothers were regarded as deviants and blamed for their status. Divorced women with children were regarded as deficient, raising problem prone families and problem children. Society's lone mother phenomenon was thus individualized and the structural factors behind it neglected. Pressure groups arose to fight for welfare and argue for resources for the lone mothers. However, the problem was not solved since the focus was still on welfare needs caused by self-deficiency, and the drawback of the movement was welfare dependency. In some ways the welfare discourse did alleviate some of the difficulties and suffering of the lone

mothers. But the overly enthusiastic fight for resources inadvertently portrayed the lone mothers as a vulnerable group, stigmatized and viewed as welfare dependents. In order to avoid stigmatization, many of the lone mothers tried to resolve their problems by using their own individual resources.

Subsequently, there was a call for workfare to help the women move away from welfare and join the labour market facilitated by retraining. Unfortunately, there was a mismatch between the training available and demands in the job market, and most lone mothers were still unable to find suitable work. The emphasis on financial independence neglected the genuine needs of the group, such as childcare and employment support, so that they could take care of their children and work as well. Such related policies and programme further exacerbated the problems when lone mothers tried to resolve them with individual resources.

During the 1990s Hong Kong scholars (Chan 1997, 2004; Leung 1999; Leung and Chan 1998, 2006; Leung and Ho 2002; Chan and Chan 2003) piloted a paradigm shift, with a gender dimension, to challenge the previous pathological construction and welfare and workfare approaches. Instead of asking who was to blame, the focus was on looking at the process of the negative social construction of lone motherhood through the discourse of the happy marriage and happy divorce, which was intended to rethink the whole issue of lone mothers.

This social construction perspective, however, does not take account of the rapid social changes in Hong Kong. Risk society theory looks at the generation of risks for vulnerable groups with the development of capitalism and the transformation of all aspects of society. A micro theory of new social risk goes further to look closely at these risks in an endemic context. In the hope of providing a balanced approach, the current study of lone mothers in Hong Kong employed the new social risk theory to take into consideration the impact of social changes. Furthermore, it was essential to include a feminist perspective in the study, to reveal the undermined position of the lone mothers caught in the interplay of motherhood, traditional gender roles, the ethics of care and paid work.

By informing a feminist critical perspective, it helps to reveal the risks produced and

distributed as a result of social changes leading to family breakdown, divorce and separation. The research further explores the risk distribution and two discourses around risks, which concern the ethics of care and work, and how they impact on the lone mothers' perception and coping strategies. It is hoped that this more equitable approach will serve to pioneer a new academic perspective and become a reference point for future policy makers, but, most importantly, to affect public perspectives on the still taboo subjects of divorce and lone mothers in Hong Kong.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Amidst rapid social changes, new family units are formed, and one of them is the lone mother family. To understand the risks divorced or separated lone mothers in Hong Kong are exposed to, it is necessary to explore their situation and status under structural social constraints and discursively constructed beliefs, how individual experiences affect the perception of and responses to risks, and also the government's potential role in steering the society towards accepting the lone mother family unit so that these families will gain a more equitable position in Hong Kong.

Three main research questions guided this study:

1. What is the current situation and status of the lone mothers in Hong Kong who are divorced or separated in relation to three dimensions namely, marriage, family and social and economic environment?
2. What risks are the lone mothers facing and how do they perceive and respond to them?
3. How effective are the policies implemented by the Hong Kong government in tackling the problems faced by lone mother families?

Three main methodological paradigms were reviewed - the positivist, interpretivist and critical - and the critical paradigm was chosen to conduct the research because of its approach to reality as socially constructed. Under this ontological position, reality is shaped by individual experiences while the epistemological position points to subjectivism, whereby knowledge is the result of power embedded social construction. Similarly, the perceptions of risks held by the lone mothers in Hong Kong is influenced by discursive practices with embedded elements of traditional values and

ideology of the capitalistic and patriarchal society. Subsequently, qualitative methodology was employed to engage in extensive dialogues with individual lone mothers with diverse experiences to explore the differences in structural and discursive practices. A feminist approach provided a critical perspective to counter the traditionally gender biased research approach in the study of lone parents, overwhelmingly a women's issue. The post-structuralist feminist approach further revealed the extent of the subjectivity in discursive practices leading to widely differing perceptions of risks. As the lone mothers in Hong Kong are sporadically scattered throughout the community, the research relied on referrals from friends and NGOs which provided services for this particular group of clients who fitted into the research criteria. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, data were then collected from individual semi-structured in-depth interviews and eventually analyzed according to key themes.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Research is a process of building knowledge, adding to a field of knowledge that grows along with the changing of time and situations. The new perspective this research has added to the risk society framework is a gender perspective, gendering the study of risk. Past research based on the risk society framework has focused on risks generated by social changes using the concepts of detraditionalization, individualization and destandardization of the labour market, and their impact on society in general in terms of family and work, but without a gender mainstreaming perspective in the conceptualization. Despite the fact that the observation of women's double burden is often made, the main focus is usually on individual experience and responsibility. Furthermore, the risk society theory relates the individual's experience to the perception and generation of risks. In other words, subjectivity is an essential element in risk, but the theory stops short of elaborating further to acknowledge gender based differences contributing to the experience of risks. As women have been greatly affected by social changes in the family and 'emancipated' in the labour market, it is of the utmost importance to understand women's role in the construction of risk. Nevertheless, by adding a gender perspective to the risk society framework this study contributes to understanding the gender subjectivity of the lone mothers.

Viewed in scholarly research under the functionalist, pathological, welfare and workfare perspectives, lone mothers in Hong Kong are seen in individual problem terms. Anchored in risk theories under a post-structuralist framework, this particular research adds a critical approach to explore beyond the phenomenon to expose the inequitable position lone mothers are in. In addition, the critical post-structuralist feminist perspective accentuates the feminist nature of lone motherhood, which highlights the relationship of the discourses around risks in two dimensions - ethics of work and care, to the lone mother's perceptions and coping strategies. The case studies also add new knowledge about the problems confronting lone mothers in Hong Kong.

Individuals' unfavorable position in society has been the subject of various research studies under the risk society framework which links the issue to social changes. In sum, they explain the impact of social changes on individuals and observe the double burden on women and the issue of lone parenthood separately. In reality, lone mothers occupy a huge percentage in statistics on lone parenthood. Indeed some researchers go so far as to equate lone parenthood to lone motherhood. Yet, there have not been any studies conducted on lone motherhood under the risk society framework. Thus this research is a first step in the application of this framework in the study of lone motherhood and thereby, linking the problems faced by lone mothers to social changes so that we can gain a richer understanding of the causes and consequences of the risks facing this particular group of women.

Another theoretical contribution of the study is to point out that class still matters in the experience of new social risks. With old risks, class is the main determinant of inequality affecting the lower classes but, with new risks, individuals in all classes are affected. In the areas of work and caring, we see new risks being generated by the liberation of women in the labour market. Both women in the lower and the middle class are confronted with risks generated through the destandardization of work and the lack of support for the working mothers by welfare security and/or retrenchment and dwindling family size. Women with low education do not have much choice about being exploited by long working hours and the casualization of work. At the same time, women in the middle class are under immense pressure to compete and maintain a certain status in the job market. On the home front, with government retrenchment

and the disappearance of large family support, women with few resources shoulder the double burden of work and caring duties, while the middle class women outsource their caring duties. In doing so, the working mothers have to work hard to secure sufficient income to pay for hired hands, and suffer the guilt of not caring for the child herself. In this respect, this study of lone mothers in Hong Kong has contributed a specific case study of the embeddedness of old risks in new risks.

Empirically, this study has been conceptualized in an understanding of the endemic social risks in the lives of lone mothers. Taking off from Beck's (1992) grand theory to conduct an empirical study, and further drawing on other scholastic discussions such as Talyor-Gooby (2004) and Bonoli (2003) on new social risks, topics which entail an endemic element, the study confirms the fact that risks are socially constructed and each society basically is the same but with endemic nuances. Hong Kong is a unique society, a thrust of the west into the east; the new into the old, resulting in an apparent acceptance but, deep down, there is apprehension about the changes taking place. Key elements of the objective social and economic environment contributing to the subjectivity of the lone mothers are the notorious housing market and the elite education system, which create major risks for the lone mothers. Thus this research focused on empirical studies to complete the application of the risk framework.

In a practical sense, it is hoped that this study will encourage new perspectives on lone mothers in Hong Kong which might help them to attain a more equitable position. The issue is not static; it will evolve beyond the scope of this group. Therefore, new approaches must be encouraged in future studies in the endeavor to encourage policy makers to respond with more appropriate and enlightened solutions.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

Chapter Two sets the scene for the thesis by looking at the increasing number of lone families in Hong Kong due to rapid social changes. This study focused on divorced and separated lone mothers on account of the drastic rise in their numbers and the unfavourable position they are placed in by society.

In Hong Kong, concern about lone mothers surfaced in the 1980s as indicated by census data from the Census and Statistics Department. The numbers of divorce decrees and marital status and lone parent families are examined. Divorce decrees granted between 1991 and 2017 more than tripled. With custody granted mostly to the mothers and the relatively low rate of women remarrying, the number of lone mothers as a result of divorce also escalated. These changes coincided with various social changes in Hong Kong society.

Besides earning an income from employment lone mothers' main source of financial support comes from alimony and the very basic level CSSA Scheme. The data show that the majority of lone mothers reject alimony for two reasons. First, there is no law enforcement in these payments, and the only recourse to non-payment is via the civil court, which can easily turn into a long drawn-out and potentially humiliating experience for the women. Secondly, the entitlement to alimony jeopardizes an application for CSSA. Some of the stay-home lone mothers found it especially difficult in the process of their divorce as they were aware of the fact that their only source of financial support would be terminated and the prospect of going on CSSA was grim. For one thing, CSSA pays the bare minimum, and they would be kept under the poverty line; plus the fact that there would be stigma attached to the CSSA recipient welfare status. The lone mothers who tried to support themselves and their lone family with employment income had problems accessing the labour market. The list of problems included a shortage of job opportunities, long working hours, low pay, no job security, no prospects, a lack of protection of the Mandatory Provident Fund, and last but not least, time constraints in the conflict with their caring duties. In general, the lone mothers were turned into the working poor, working long hours but often not making ends meet.

Not only do lone mothers face such structural constraints, social norms also contribute to their difficult situation. Traditional views on gender roles place physical and psychological demands on women to remain carers beyond the marriage. Data show that only a small percentage of men participate in housework duties, with the women's consent that the family is their domain and responsibility. This view is overtly reflected in mainstream society in the Hong Kong. The gendered assumption of the division of care labour is carried beyond the marriage.

Lone mother status is physical and psychological demanding on the women affected. Society prescribes traditional gendered views on the 'complete family' with its distinct gender roles. Anything outside the norm is regarded as problematic and even viewed pathologically. Women who have made the decision to divorce are regarded to have deviated from the norm, and since divorce is seen as a personal choice, the lone mothers would have to bear the consequences themselves. The lone mothers often internalize and submit to the socially constructed ethics of care and further construct their moral rationality. Another force present is the ethics of work stemming from the highly capitalistic society deeming an individual worthless without paid employment. The lone mother who stays at home to look after her children because she thinks it is her duty to do so risks the negative image of welfare dependency, while the lone mother who works to provide for herself and the family also risks the negative image of an irresponsible mother.

The lone mothers in Hong Kong would have fared better if there had been kinship, childcare and social support. With socio-demographic change in family size, family support diminished along with the shrinkage of large families. The divorced lone mother can no longer count on support and help from her family to look after her children or cook the occasional meal when she has to work late. On top of that, amidst retrenchment, the government has outsourced childcare support to commercial organizations. As a result, there is a shortage of childcare facilities and the cost of childcare is becoming more and more unaffordable for lone mothers. Finally, the aversion of the stigma and negative image of the lone mother status stands as a barrier to normal social connections, which leaves the lone mothers with a lack of support from friends and neighbours.

Chapter Three is the first of two literature review chapters. This chapter discusses the existing literature on lone mothers and related topics, including both western and local studies. In advanced industrial societies in the west, the 1960s' discourses of functionalism have been critiqued for labelling lone parent families, lone mother families in particular as problematic. In the 1980s, collective welfare was advocated for vulnerable groups including women, but met with repercussion for welfare dependency which burdened the society. Welfare groups such as lone mothers were also labelled as pathological and problematic. In the 1990s, the workfare discourse

such as the Giddens's Third Way (1998), emphasised work over welfare with the intention to induce welfare recipients, including the lone mothers, back into the labour market. Giddens's concept (1998) plays a role in government policies to avoid 'lazy' welfare recipients in becoming threats to the society. During the mid-1990s, there was another paradigm shift towards critical perspectives under social constructionism to rethink the lone mother issue. Instead of blaming the victim for self-deficiency and posing as a threat to society, Foucauldian discourse analysis was applied to view the power relationship of language and social practices, in an attempt to dispel the negative connotation of the lone status. Meanwhile, Beck's (1992) risk society theory was explicated, and subsequently, the new social risk theory was adopted to spell out the disadvantaged groups affected by social changes. In this case, one of the groups put at risk due to welfare retrenchment is women and lone families. One of the characteristics of new social risks is endemicity in viewing risks in context, and in areas of work and family, an added view informed by feminist perspectives will further illuminate the lone mother issue.

In the Hong Kong context the discourses on women and lone motherhood have been in line with the western world, with functionalism in the 1970s, pathological in the 1980s and workfare in the 1990s. At the turn of the century, some scholars in Hong Kong caught on to the critical post-structural perspective and started a paradigm shift to rethink the issue of lone mothers. At this junction, the number of lone mothers in Hong Kong had more than tripled. The new social risk theory provides a befitting paradigm to look at the lone mother issue triggered by rapid social, political and economic changes in Hong Kong in the past decades. Alongside these changes in the highly capitalistic society, lifestyle, outlooks on marriage, family, relationships and work have changed as well. Divorced women with children are increasingly at risk when social problems are individualized and leaving the lone mothers to bear individual responsibilities without social support. Indeed, social changes have become a dominating factor in the experiences of lone mothers. To make things worse, the lone mothers are caught in a disadvantaged position because of the fact that Hong Kong is a unique society heavily steeped in traditional gender and social practices. A framework of analysis was developed based on the theory of new social risks in conjunction with feminist perspectives to elucidate the power relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. The two systems and practices share a protean and

oppressive nature especially to women, and appear in many forms amidst social changes. The feminist perspectives highlight the subjectivity of the lone mothers' perception and coping of risks. The two perspectives will help to reveal the disadvantaged position of the lone mothers and the interaction of structure and agency.

Chapter Four contains a discussion on theory and methods. The research adopts a critical paradigm, after reviewing the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, to represent the subjective social reality of the lone mothers in Hong Kong. The ontological and epistemological positions under the critical paradigm are examined. Subsequently, the broad philosophical underpinning to the qualitative research method used in the study is explained. Mainstream studies on lone mothers have been based on gender-blind epistemology until more recent critiques (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004a). Acknowledging the fact that positing a feminist approach is an epistemological act in itself, the aim of the study is to add an analytical angle in providing the missing link in the research of a women's issue, the lone mothers in Hong Kong. The subjectivity and value judgements from a feminist point of view add new dimensions to the understanding of women's unique and contextual experience without sacrificing objectivity and receptivity to social reality.

From the mainstream feminist debate on the three principal feminist positions, the post-structuralist position was employed in this study to add substance to the empiricism and to emphasise standpoint feminist positions. The post-structuralist feminist perspective sheds light on the core of the lone mother question - gender, a social and linguistic construction, which is contextual, shifting and problematic in nature. In order to depict the diversity and multiplicity of women's unique and distinct experiences, the in-depth qualitative research method with semi-structured interviews was used to capture the individual lone mothers' experiences in terms of their diverse perceptions and coping strategies negotiating between motherhood and social realities. The research design entailed certain criteria, such as age and socio-economic status for the selection of interviewees, and these and the approach taken to the 31 interviews are discussed in this chapter. The findings are analysed with a qualitative thematic approach whereby data was collected and identified by themes and concepts to draw out similarities and diversities of the lone mothers' lived experiences. Other topics discussed in the chapter are the research ethics and methodological difficulties. Being

aware of the possibility of emotional breakdowns to painful memories, the researcher was sensitive and acquired different ways of handling such situations. High observance of standard practice was also applied to assure the confidentiality of the interviewees and data collected.

Chapter Five, marriage and family, is devoted to the findings from the in-depth interviews organized according to key themes. The findings point to the fact that the lone mothers in Hong Kong were basically conservative in view, and they could be further distinguished as the familial and individualized types for easier analysis. In this chapter, their views on marriage, remarriage and family are analysed in terms of their beliefs and approaches to these topics. As far as marriage is concerned, the themes revealed are grouped under traditional beliefs and influence from parents and friends, and dependency. Remarriage themes range from attempts to restore the complete family for the children, and dependency to the apprehension in repeating the experience, and the consideration of the children's reaction.

The findings are related to the perceptions of marriage and remarriage. Then, we look at the perception of family in the themes of complete family, measures taken to maintain the complete family status, financial help, tolerating extramarital affairs, domestic violence and overbearing patriarchal behaviour. Next, the topics of division of labour and gender roles in the family, prioritizing work or family, and lastly, coping with the conflict of work and caring are analysed.

Chapter Six, on coping with the social and economic environment, discusses findings about risks and the social and economic environment. The familial and individualized lone mothers identified three dimensions in their perception of risks and coping strategies, which are finance, employment, and housing. Common themes reveal that the lone mothers' responses to risk were directly linked to their view on motherhood and their social environment. On the one hand, the lone mothers were bounded by the restraints of their social positions; on the other hand, each seemed to negotiate these with their own agency such as access to resources and support which may serve to alleviate this constant negotiation process.

Chapter Seven is a discussion of the lone mothers' responses to motherhood in two main areas. The discussion focuses on the lone mothers' perceptions of engendered new social risks and their coping strategies. Detraditionalization and individualization are added perspectives in viewing the degree of conservatism of the lone mothers, and the result shows a spectrum of familial and individualized types lingering in the process under the capitalistic society and individual experiences. In the areas of endemic social risks regarding marriage, remarriage and family, there are no clear cut responses between the familial and individualized lone mothers. There were overlaps in some areas but there was also a distinction between their perceptions and coping strategies. The familial lone mothers displayed inherent subordination in marriage, equated caring to work, regarded gender roles as guiding principles and the complete family as the norm to the extent of considering remarriage as a means to achieve this end. At the other end of the spectrum, the individualized lone mothers tended to have a bottom-line towards subordination in marriage, question and redefine gender roles, regard work as a priority and as important as caring. As to the family, the complete family was not necessarily a norm to be aspired to, and they viewed remarriage apprehensively as there are inhibitions to break through. The discussion also expounds on the daily reality the lone mothers experience in the areas of finance, employment, parenting and competitiveness of their children, housing, stigmatization, and the lone mothers' self-perceptions. The discussion is then directed to the issue of class, how it still matters, and how it has cut across class due to the all-encompassing nature of social risk and its unintended consequences and uncertainties. The discussion continues in looking at the social location of the lone mothers, as their access to resources and support can serve as added factors in mediating their negotiation process. Ultimately, the decisions both the familial and individualized lone mothers made were not rational choices but continuous negotiations, heuristic responses and moral decisions harnessed by their views on gender roles.

Chapter Eight, the conclusion, reviews the main findings of the study. It explores the current situation and status of lone mothers in key aspects, two groups of lone mothers have been distinguished, the familial and individualized, for easier analysis. The perceptions and responses to the risks they are facing based on their social positions and accessibilities of resources and social support in the negotiation process are discussed and analysed. The effectiveness of the Hong Kong government policies has

also been reviewed. There are also discussions on the limitation and some reflections on the research. Regrettably, there are several groups of people not represented in the research.

In sum the post-structuralist feminist perspective in this thesis attempts to re-balance conventional research methods on lone mothers and compensate for the gender blind tendency. The feminist point of view provides women's subjective experience beyond structural constraints, with objectivity. It is hoped that this new knowledge will serve as a reference point for future policies regarding lone mother families in Hong Kong.

CHAPTER TWO

LONE MOTHER FAMILIES IN HONG KONG

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the general situation of lone mothers following divorce and separation is presented. They are viewed in various aspects: the changing pattern of the family in Hong Kong, work and employment opportunities, family relationships, and social support. Apart from reference to prior studies by Hong Kong scholars a statistical background will be provided to position lone mothers in relation to the mainstream society. The changing structure of the family in Hong Kong is depicted through various Censuses. Census data and the Women's Commission further highlight the change in family size leading to lone mothers' role as the principal carer in the family.

With regard to the discussion of work and employment opportunities, lone mothers' median household income, their age range and educational background, focuses on extracts from various periods of the Hong Kong Census. This shows the mismatch of the lone mothers' education level to the demands of labour market in Hong Kong, forcing them into relatively low-paid jobs. Most lone mothers, regardless of their income bracket, fall into this work centered mode and experience long working hours. In addition a review of the limitations of the alimony system is carried out. In sum, a new category of working poor has emerged.

As far as the family is concerned, lone mothers are viewed firstly in terms of the social construction of negative images versus the value of their labour to the family. The division of labour in the family unit underscores a patriarchal gender bias, with men as the bread winners and women restricted with regard to career development. Paying jobs are imbued with values such as 'worth' whereas the housewife role is unpaid and without recognized economic value. Nonetheless, the majority of women are unpaid carers for children, disabled and older people in the family, taxing them both physically and psychologically, what has been termed a 'labour of love' (Finch and Groves, 1983). Despite their negatively construed image lone mothers' contribution to society as a whole should be valued.

As for the social support aspect, there is a review of kinship support as well as government policies. The dwindling family size makes it difficult for lone mothers to secure assistance from relatives. Meanwhile, Hong Kong government policies have been sluggish in providing the necessary support for this socially disadvantaged group. In particular childcare and retirement policies are explored to determine their impact on lone mothers.

LONE MOTHER FAMILIES IN HONG KONG

The social standing of women in Hong Kong has undergone immense changes in recent decades. The fact that women are now a major part of the workforce seems to have narrowed the gap of gender discrepancy as they are also making financial contribution to the family. However, women in Hong Kong are far from being liberated because traditional thinking in regard to gender hierarchy is deep-rooted in the Chinese society, especially in the area of the female carer role which extends beyond marriage. Assuming the role of a carer, a woman suffers from the double burden of physical and psychological demands, having to work and take care of the family, after a divorce. This double burden is further exacerbated by the capitalistic society which advocates self sufficiency, and in turn working mothers are forced to work long hours to maintain stable employment, which is the reality for high income earning lone mothers, but for the less educated and skilled, many still choose to take up low paid long hours of work to meet financial difficulties aggravated by the inadequate alimony system and the minimal government assistance. In some cases, without the network of kinship, neighbourhood and public childcare support, some lone mothers have to turn to CSSA for financial support if they so decide to sacrifice their job to stay home to look after their children. Such decisions are often met with repercussion from society due to the neo-liberal government policies and discourses labelling them as pathological and problematic. Not only are they left to fend for themselves but they are also deemed welfare dependent for relying on CSSA. The stigma stems from ambiguous policies and accusatory messages through the media using dismissive rhetoric against this newly emerged family unit. On the whole, the society lacks a sense of collective responsibility to embrace the repercussions of rapid

social changes, leaving the lone mothers marginalized and their problems individualized.

CHANGING STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILY IN HONG KONG

DIVORCE DECREES AND LONE PARENT FAMILIES

Divorce rates in Hong Kong tripled between 1991 and 2017. Despite the rise of decrees from 6,295 in 1991 to 19,394 in 2017 (Table 2.1), the number of divorced woman is higher than their male counterparts as indicated by the numbers in the 2017 census. Divorced men were more likely to remarry than women, as indicated in Census 2017, the number of remarried men rose from 3,616 in 1996 to 13,331 in 2016, while remarried women rose from 3,487 in 1996 to 12,217 in 2016 (Table 2.2). Census statistics reveal that there have been an increasing number of lone parents from 2001 to 2011, with the number of lone mothers rising consistently from 47,215 in 2001 to 64,040 in 2011 (Table 2.3). However, after the peak in 2011, the total number of lone mothers was 56,545 in 2016. The statistics clearly show that lone mothers are a dominant proportion in the total number of lone parents. The number of lone mothers was 56,545 (77%) whereas the number of lone fathers was 16,883 (23%) in 2016. In most cases, women are left alone to assume the role of caring and providing for the children. However, most lone mothers do not fare well as shown by the survey conducted by the Women's Commission in 2011 indicating that the average happiness scores (a 1 to 7 point scale) of women in Hong Kong who are 'divorced/separated or widowed' is the lowest (4.65) when compared to the cohorts of never married and married or cohabited with children (both are 5.03). The scope of this research is limited to lone mothers and the study of lone fathers should definitely become a worthwhile research topic at a later date (see Chapter 8).

Table 2.1:
Number of Divorce Decrees and Marital Status

	1991	1996	2001	2011	2016	2017
Number of divorce decrees by the courts	6,295	9,473	13,425	19,597	17,196	19,394

Sources:

Census and Statistics Department (2018) *Women and Men in Hong Kong Key Statistics, 2018 Edition*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government: Table 2.5 p.48.

Table 2.2:
Number of Remarriages by Sex

Sex	1996	2001	2006	2011	2014	2015	2016
F	3,487	4,347	10,472	11,556	12,999	11,992	12,217
M	3,616	4,783	12,006	13,881	14,769	13,463	13,331

Sources:

Census and Statistics Department (2017) *Women and Men in Hong Kong Key Statistics, 2017 Edition*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government: Table 2.7 p.49.

Table 2.3:
Number of Lone Parent Families

	Sex	2001	2006	2011	2016
Number of lone parents	F	47,215 (76.9 %)	60,675 (79.4%)	64,040 (78.4%)	56,545 (77.0%)
	M	14,216 (23.1 %)	15,748 (20.6%)	17,665 (21.6%)	16,883 (23.0%)
	Total	61,431 (100%)	76,423 (100%)	81,705 (100%)	73,428 (100%)

Sources:

Census and Statistics Department (2018) 2016 Population By-census, *Thematic Report: Single Parents*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government, Table 3.1 p.21.

Census and Statistics Department (2012) *Women and Men in Hong Kong Key Statistics, 2012 Edition*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government: Table 2.10 p.48.

UNDERESTIMATED NUMBER OF LONE PARENTS

At first glance at the statistics in Tables 2.1 and 2.3 from the Census and Statistics Department 2018, the number of divorce decrees granted by the courts was 19,394 in 2017 (Table 2.1), out of which a certain number of the divorcees may have children and therefore contributed to the total cumulative number of 73,428 in 2016 lone parents in Table 2.3. Chan (1997) confirms that the number of lone parents is underestimated by the Census for the following reasons. First, the respondents are reluctant to disclose a stigmatised divorce or lone parent status as it is taboo for Chinese people to speak of divorce. In the tradition laden society of Hong Kong, stigmatization of lone mothers is serious since traditional beliefs sticks to the notion of the ideal marriage, casting negative perceptions on divorced lone mothers. Furthermore, women struggle to stay in a marriage even when they are separated. Some think that being a lone parent is abnormal, and a normal family should have a husband. Thus, it is unacceptable not to have a husband or father in the family. Consequently, the woman will not necessarily consider herself a lone mother in an 'informal separation' where the man has disappeared and is no longer returning to the family home. In this case, a woman would describe herself as married in the Census interview, distorting the true numbers in the lone parent statistics.

CHANGING FAMILY SIZE, CHANGING ROLE

In large size families, duties and support used to be shared. Since small families of 2, 3 and 4 members are on the rise (Figure 2.1), and the average domestic household size shrinks from 3.1 in 2001 to 2.8 in 2016 (Table 2.4), which indicates less family support. Research conducted by the Women's Commission (2011a) shows that women are clearly seen to be the principal carers in two-parent families with 71% of them takes care of their children, 64% cleans the house and does the laundry, and 63% buys groceries. Without family support, most working women, including lone mothers, need to bear the double burden of taking care of both family and career, even if they suffer great pressure at work. In the end, they still need to be responsible for taking care of the family (Lau and Ma, 2011; Cheung, 1995; Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association and Hong Kong Shue Yan College, 1982a and 1982b; 1984). The radical change of family size to lone family forces the lone mothers, regardless of

class, into the dual roles of primary caregiver and breadwinner for the family. It is very challenging for a lone mother to fulfil these dual roles, which is as demanding as holding down two full time jobs (Weiss, 1976).

Figure 2.1:
Family Size 2001-2016

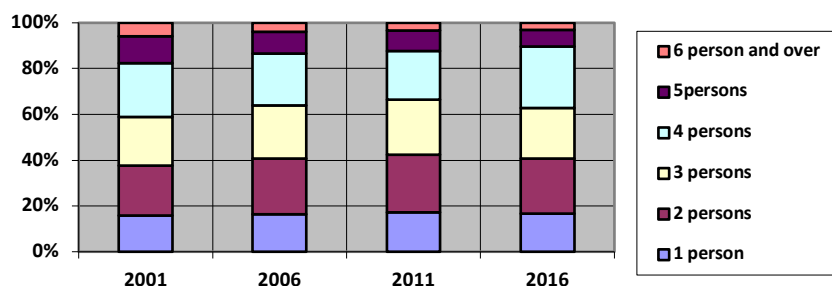


Table 2.4:
Average Domestic Household Size

2001	2006	2011	2016	Average Domestic Household size
3.1	3.0	2.9	2.8	

Sources:

Census and Statistics Department (2011) *2011 Population Census: Summary Results*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government. Chart 23, p.65.

Census and Statistics Department (2017) *2016 Population By-census: Main Results*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government. Table 4.1 p.75.

WORK AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

INCOME AND ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

In the 2016 census, 82% of non-working lone mothers were home-makers and their median monthly household income was \$11,250 (Table 2.5). Only 65.2% of the lone mothers were working compared to 75.6% of the lone fathers, with medium monthly household income of HK\$13,880 and HK\$18,000 respectively (Table 2.6). Apart from the relatively low monthly income, whether the lone mothers were working or not, they were below the HK\$13,000 median monthly household income of the whole population. These figures point to the financial constraints facing lone mothers. In addition, there are barriers of age and education for lone mothers in the current jobs

market. According to the census in 2018, 40.1% of the lone mothers were aged between 30 and 39 while 44.1% of them were aged between 40 and 49 (Census and statistics department 2018, p. 22). In terms of educational background, 12.1% of the lone mothers had either received only primary education or below, 29.6% lower secondary education, and 36.9% upper secondary (Census and statistics department 2018, p. 36). Thus, the majority of lone mothers in Hong Kong are middle-aged with a secondary educational background; over half of the lone mothers (52%) (Census and statistics department 2018, p. 43) are in the service and sales sectors or elementary occupation, leaving the lowest spectrum in the janitorial, security or domestic helper sectors. A risk of poverty is thus created due to the lack of education and skills placing the requirements of the skilled and professional job markets beyond their reach. Meanwhile, the number of establishments in the manufacturing sector has reduced from 13,443 in 2007 to 9,553 in 2017 (Table 2.7). In contrast, the number of establishments in finance and insurance, real estate, professional and business services, and social and personal services has increased from 15,705 to 25,792, 10,828 to 16,486, 32,054 to 47,591, and 32,597 to 51,005 respectively from 2007 to 2017 (Table 2.7). The Census further shows that the Hong Kong market practises high-value added labour under a knowledge based economy, but the job opportunities which enable lone mothers to enter the labour market again is inadequate and ineffective (Wong and Lee, 2001). Therefore, 24.9% of all lone mothers in 2016 worked in the import/ export, wholesale and retail trades (Census and statistics department 2018, p. 46). Working lone mothers in Hong Kong have to labour especially hard to secure their jobs to cover the household expenses (Chan and Lo, 2016; Chan, Yu and Lo, 2012).

Table 2.5:

Non-working Single Parents' Economic Activity Status and Median Monthly Household Income

		2001	2006	2011	2016
Home-makers (%)	F	95.0%	89.4%	81.1%	81.5%
	M	7.6%	9.0%	16.6%	18.4%
Median monthly household income (HK\$)	F	8,300	7,000	7,000	11,250
	M	8,000	7,000	7,440	10,750

Sources:

Census and Statistics Department (2013) 2011 Population Census, *Thematic Report: Single Parents*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government, Table 5.6 p.39, Table 5.7 p.40.

Census and Statistics Department (2018) 2016 Population By-census, *Thematic Report: Single Parents*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government, Table 6.7 p.55, Table 6.8 p.56.

Table 2.6:

Working Single Parents' Economic Activity Status and Median Monthly Household Income

		1991	2001	2006	2011	2016
Economic Activity Status – working (%)	F	64.1%	52.8%	54.2%	55.1%	65.2%
	M	86.5%	71.2%	71.0%	70.2%	75.6%
Median monthly household income (HK\$)	F	7,750	10,500	9,500	10,000	13,880
	M	8,600	14,000	12,500	13,410	18,000

Sources:

Census and Statistics Department (2003) *Women and Men in Hong Kong Key Statistics*, 2003 Edition. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government, Table 2.9 p.25, Table 2.10 p.26.

Census and Statistics Department (2018) *Women and Men in Hong Kong Key Statistics*, 2018 Edition. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government: Table 2.14, p. 54, Table 2.15, p. 55.

Table 2.7:

Number of Establishments (other than those in the civil service) by Industry Section

	2007	2014	2017
Manufacturing	13,443	11,056	9,553
Financing and insurance	15,705	22,723	25,792
Real estate	10,828	15,296	16,486
Professional and business services	32,054	44,484	47,591
Social and Personal Services	32,597	47,791	51,005

Sources:

Census and Statistics Department (2018) *Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics*, 2018 Edition. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government. Table 2.9, p.31

A NEW CATEGORY OF WORKING POOR

Working lone mothers are vulnerable to becoming victims of economic exploitation. Many are socially excluded due to their job types and the wage levels of the dead-end jobs with minimum wages. In addition, strategies to counter high and rapid inflation boil down to spending as little as possible, which means no entertainment and no personal adornment. Subsequently, this new category of working poor falls through the social net and becomes excluded. Twelve lone mothers were studied by Chan, Yu and Lo (2012) and they all demonstrated the experience as described by Atkinson (1997) that employment is not necessarily a means of social integration. Although unemployment can lead to social exclusion, jobs, especially dead-end jobs, cannot guarantee integration into society (Chan and Lo, 2016). Only jobs with reasonable wages, working hours and security can help the processes of reintegration and social inclusion (Atkinson, 1997; Wong and Lee, 2001). With ample social security and welfare support, unemployment does not necessarily lead to social exclusion. Women, especially lone mothers facing poverty, are in need of public attention.

LONG WORKING HOURS

Hong Kong is a turbo-charged, intensive economic environment, not only work-centred but with very long hours. The number of women participating in the labour force in Hong Kong has been increasing steadily from 2001 (53%) to 2016 (around

65%) (Table 2.6). As disclosed by the Census conducted in the same year, the median working hours are 50 and 47 for men and women respectively in retail, accommodation and food services, averaging 48 hours per week (Table 2.8). Workers in Hong Kong do not enjoy any exemptions from long working hours or get paid overtime; even the meal time allowance for working continuously for 7 hours has been bypassed in the minimum wage scheme (Hong Kong Catholic Commission For Labour Affairs, 2011). Long working hours have thus become the norm while family time and communication between couples are not practised. Marriage breakdown is inevitable in many cases, resulting in lone parenthood and, under the predominant gender division of labour, usually the women would undertake the caring of children and enter lone motherhood. The norm of long working hours penetrates to all facets of society especially for lone mothers who have to sacrifice child-caring time to work harder in order to secure their job (Chan and Lo, 2016; Chan, Yu and Lo, 2012). At the same time, there is a severe feelings of guilt for not spending enough time to take care of their children. As physical labouring jobs continue to increase, they need to face more health and work-related injury problems; whereas the high income lone mothers are worried that their skills and education may lag behind and are unable to catch-up with cut-throat competition from the younger people. Consequently, they also opt to work overtime to secure their job position, often paying a heavy price of mental and physical pressure (Chan, Yu and Lo, 2012).

Table 2.8:
Median Hours of Work of Employed Persons by Industry of Main Employment and Sex, 7/2018 – 9/2018

	Male	Female	Both Sexes
Retail, accommodation and food services	50	47	48

Source:

Census and Statistics Department (2018) *Quarterly Report on General Household Survey from July to September 2018*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government. Table 5.1, p. 72

PROTECTION OF MANDATORY PROVIDENT FUND

The Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) is not open to women including lone mothers who perform non-paid housework, as they are not paid workers. In 2000 when the labour insurance welfare policy and medical insurance were introduced in the MPF scheme, housewives were not included. MPF has been criticized as insufficient as a mandatory retirement protection system for being gender blinded which fails to protect unpaid domestic workers. In other words, housewives are unable to enjoy equal access to the social resources provided by the society. This is supported by the 2013 research conducted by the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres, which states that almost 60% of women do not have a Mandatory Provident Fund account, 45% more than that of men. Moreover, 18% women are dependent on their partners after retirement compared to the 1% of men. As a result of the lack of stable retirement protection, women in Hong Kong are dependent on their partners or other family members. As far as the lone mothers are concerned, they are neither covered by MPF nor protected by spousal benefits, thus are more unlikely to avoid the fate of being poor and financially dependent even when they reach retirement age.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

ALIMONY

The current mechanism for receiving alimony depends greatly on the paying party's initiative. The judicial authorities will not be involved with the alimony order unless the party entitled to receive the alimony applies to the court to enforce the order. However, the application process and procedures are complicated and potentially distressing the applicant. In fact, according to social workers, many alimony payers deliberately make things difficult and humiliate the receiving party so as to make them lose their dignity. Many of the alimony payers avoid fulfilling their responsibilities (Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, 2000). For example they conceal facts to avoid taxation resulting in declarations of no fixed income, disappear or leaving the city in order to avoid paying alimony. Since most alimony receivers are women, such treatment from their ex-husbands makes it hard for them to go after the alimony. Also, many divorcees understand that obtaining alimony is very hard, and applying for

CSSA on the grounds that they are not able to receive alimony is also very difficult, so to make sure they have a stable monthly income, they would choose to give up alimony and apply for CSSA. Therefore, despite the 200 cases of women who applied for CSSA on the grounds that they are unable to receive alimony and therefore have to face financial difficulties, there are many other CSSA cases whereby the applicants, knowing the difficulties of chasing alimony, decide to forego their entitlement to it in the divorce negotiation process (Concern About Alimony Problem Joint Committee, 1997). Consequently, alimony is only a safety net for the few lucky divorcees whose ex-spouses act honestly and own up to their responsibilities. However, according to a survey conducted by the Concern About Alimony Problem Joint Committee (1997), among the informants who applied for alimony, only around a quarter of them received the exact amount and on time. Those that are behind with payments are generally 'not on time'. Most informants (84%) faced financial difficulties because their ex-partners were behind with payments. According to the estimation of the informants, only 14% thought that the payer did not have sufficient money as the reason for being behind with the payment. Almost half of the cases that were behind with payments were because their ex-partner had money but did not want to pay (48%). One third of the informants that had experienced late payments, did not know whether the other party was financially capable to pay or not. Therefore, in general for lone mothers who have to stay home to look after their children, their only alternative is to rely on CSSA when they are not able to receive alimony.

COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE (CSSA) SCHEME

The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA) is a social security scheme intended to support lone mothers. This scheme is for deprived groups encountering financial difficulties including lone mother families. To subsist on CSSA means to be given the bare minimum, often effectively a plunge into poverty. For a lone mother with an able-bodied child, the total standard rate for two persons is \$3,500 per month plus a rental allowance. Compared to the median income of \$13,000, the meager amount obtained from the government can only cover basic needs. In view of the recent high inflation rate, most lone mothers on CSSA are forced to live under the poverty line. Unfortunately, there are few resources available from their

communities to relieve them from poverty (Leung, 1998; Leung and Ho, 2002). Besides, the bureaucratic processes that lone mothers have to go through strips them of their dignity both by the unreasonableness of the rules and the attitude of the civil servants administering the scheme (Leung, 1998).

STATUS OF LONE MOTHERS IN THE FAMILY

THE CONCEPT AND REALITY OF THE DIVISION OF LABOUR IN THE FAMILY

The patriarchal nuclear family model is based on a clear division of labour along gender dimensions. In the Chinese family, the traditional values require females to possess ‘three obediences and four virtues’, to obey the father before marriage, the husband in the marriage, and the son when widowed. This shows that women are expected to obey men at all stages of their life. In addition, traditional Chinese family ethics promote the value of ‘a dominant husband and an obedient wife.’ In 2011 the Women’s Commission conducted a survey to study the division of labour in the household. Almost half of the public (48%) agreed that men should be more involved with the household duties; and of the 48%, 52% were female and 44% male. Women are usually sole care givers in the family in that they have to take care of family members, old and young. The normative prescription of ‘women as homemakers’ is still prevalent and men’s willingness to share household and childcare duties is rather low (Women’s Commission, 2011). This situation shows that the society still generally thinks that it is the women’s responsibility to take care of family members. The gender division of labour still exists with regard to household matters (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2012). Women are mainly responsible for daily living matters (such as taking care of children, cleaning and washing clothes, doing the groceries and preparing meals, and taking care of the elderly, the disabled or family members with long-term illnesses) and are regarded as the carers in the family, while men are mainly responsible for small-scale maintenance and financial matters (Chan and Lo, 2016).

In addition, men need to be a role model and lead the family, as they are idealised as leaders and as the dominant sex, thus they have to play a financial role as the

breadwinner, the symbol of authority and the decision-maker in the family. On the other hand, women have their expressive and care giving roles to play in the family. They need to become 'good wives' by 'taking care of the husband and educating the children'. 'Men focus externally, women focus internally' are the basic rules in the family. In the Women's Commission (2011) survey on the status of women at home and in society, over half (50%) agreed that 'females should stress more on the family than work' while 39% felt that men are responsible in earning a wage and women, taking care of the home. In general, women are stereotyped as the family carer although 79% of the public acknowledge their contribution to the family as equal to men's. Therefore, in the case of a divorce, with the male breadwinner out of the picture, the division of labour can turn into a double burden of both carer and financial supporter for the divorced woman with children.

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEMANDS ON WOMEN

The duties women perform in the family as carers are invaluable to society, but society has suppressed the value of such unpaid work. The Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres conducted a 'carers' lifestyle survey' in 2011. Out of the 301 carers who take care of children, the disabled or elderly interviewed, 93% were women and 7% men. The type of people under their care were: 36% (107 carers) children; 25% (74) healthy elders; 16% (48) long term patients, disabled people, the psychotic, or the mentally retarded; while 24% (72) took care of more than two people. On average, each carer took care of 1.91 people. Live-in carers were faced with both physical and mental health problems as 42% (123 carers) worked 72 hours a week compared to the average of 44 hours. Among them, there were complaints of tiredness (57%), annoyance (48%) and back pain (45%). As for the out-of-house carers, the added anxiety of traveling elevated this physical and mental stress.

Psychologically women face various degrees of depression regardless of their employment status. The 2010 survey on women's psychological health conducted by the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres included both working and stay-home women. The findings indicated that all the women are at risk of suffering from depression resulting from work and household pressures. For the full-time working

women, 45% of them suffered from depression (22% with minor depression, 22% with serious depression). While 44% of the women working part-time suffered from depression (19% minor, 25% serious). Most unemployed women suffered from depression (22% minor, 46% serious). Of the stay-home women performing non-paid housework (housewives) 35% suffered from depression, (minor depression and serious depression were 16% and 19% respectively). Divorced, widowed, separated, and new female immigrants had even higher rates of depression.

The 2010 and 2011 surveys conducted by the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres reflect the physical and psychological demands on both working and non-working women in general. A further conclusion can be drawn to portray the demands made on lone mothers who carry the double burden of wage earners and carers at home. Stay-home non-working lone mothers are in the same predicament as they perform non-paid caring work in the family and suffer the same physical and psychological effects.

CARER OR CAREER?

There is a strong traditional Chinese belief in women being the care-givers (The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, 2003; The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2001). As far as the female carer at home is concerned, the added 'e' in the word career simply denotes an extra burden of having to deal with the demands from employment. In the traditional family, men are relieved from the care giving duties to focus on their careers while women look after the family. With social changes opening the labour market to women and the prevalent trend of two income families, women are faced with a double burden, family and career. The irony is that the women's position at home remains unchanged. They still have to undertake the entire caring duties and be subservient to their husbands. Career women with a family in particular have to juggle limited hours between work and family. When it comes to their children, most women will set their priority with the family, which will not only hinder them from entering the job market, but it will also jeopardize any chance for individual professional development even for those who have the potential to do so. In 2018 Census showed that women's participation rate in the labour market is (55.1%) lower than that of men (68.5%) (Census and Statistics Department, 2018, Table 6.1

p.39). The labour force participation rates of married women (49.3%) and lone mothers (59.2%) in 2016 Census are lower than lone fathers (92.5%) (Census and Statistics Department, 2018, Table 4.5 p.111). A survey revealed that the percentage of women (8%) doing part-time jobs (working less than 30 hours per week on average) is higher than that of men (3%). Amongst the married/cohabiting women who do not have a job, 31% said that the main reason for not working is the 'need to take care of family members'. This shows that family responsibility is the main hurdle for women in wanting to work outside the family (Women's Commission, 2011).

Without emotional and financial support from men, lone mothers face an even more challenging situation. To start with, many lone mothers are confined to the role of carer of their children at home and they do not have the skills necessary to find a well-paid job. Moreover, even for the working lone mothers, they are not empowered to develop their potential in the job market. As a result, they are placed in a dependent position.

NEGATIVE IMAGE OF LONE MOTHERHOOD

The lone mother status resulting from divorce is invariably associated with social stigma of personal failure and underachievement (Leung, 1998). The term 'lone family' was originally neutral in nature. According to the genealogy in Hong Kong of lone parents as mentioned by Chan and Chan (2010), before the 1970s the term 'broken family' prevailed instead of 'lone parents'. In the 1980s, the public responded with sympathy to members of fatherless and widowed lone families. In the 1990s, this vulnerable group was perceived in terms of individual misfortune and assistance was provided. However, since the turn of the century, 'lone mother family' has become a term that describes a social and gender issue mainly caused by individual inadequacy. Moreover, lone parents are associated with problems and the negative connotation is reinforced especially for those lone mothers who rely on CSSA. Often, such messages are spread by the media. Not only are fraudulent lone mother welfare cases highlighted, but even success stories about lone mother struggles receive condescending reports as individuals overcoming individualized problems (Chan and Chan, 2010). The public's perception of CSSA receivers, including lone mothers, is that they are lazy and they have no intention to work. This exacerbates the stigma of lone mother

families who are dependent on welfare (Leung, 1998, 1999; Leung and Chan, 1998; Chan, 1997; 2004). Commonly, people are under the impression that the problem should be solved by individuals not by help from external parties, still less by welfare payments.

Subsequently, the lone mothers are led to believe that they are the cause of the problems and it is up to them to find solutions. To a certain extent, the social stigma of lone mothers further undermines their willingness to disclose their lone status. Therefore, they seldom seek help from their family members or neighbours for problems they encounter. Lone motherhood is a taboo in the traditional Chinese society. This negative image puts them in further distress resulting in avoidance of external links such as meeting relatives and friends and even job hunting. The exclusion from daily social activities tends to marginalize the lone mothers in society.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

KINSHIP AND NEIGHBOUR SUPPORT

Some lone mothers in Hong Kong do receive kinship support from their biological families. However, distance becomes a physical obstacle when there is a need to move into public housing in remote new satellite towns, which leaves them isolated and results in a weakening of kinship support (Chan, 1997).

Besides the kinship system, lone-mothers also believe that they can find support and a channel to vent their feelings through their own informal support system. This system may consist of housewives in the neighborhood or women's organizations. However, in traditional Chinese culture, it is a taboo to discuss marital problems with neighbours. The fear of discrimination keeps lone mothers from interacting with neighbours. In previous research (Chan, Yu and Lo, 2012), a lone mother even went as far as putting a pair of man's slippers at the entrance landing to cover up the 'man has left' status. Feeling the 'shame', most lone mothers tend to hide their status in fear of being treated as social outcasts. Gradually, the relationship between the lone mother and her support network may be weakened. On the other hand, the fellowship support network is able to give mutual encouragement and support as they share the

same or similar situations. However, it depends on the willingness of the lone mother to participate in these groups. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) observed that in the US, even after 15 years of being lone parents, many still felt lonely and found it hard to take care of children and carry out financial responsibilities simultaneously. This also describes the situation in Hong Kong.

CHILD CARE SUPPORT

The study on Child Care Services for Low Income Families in Hong Kong (Chan and Hung, 2015) reported on the percentage of the main carer in the household and the child care difficulties encountered in Hong Kong. 55.7% of the respondents were mothers as main carers at home, 26% of households rely on foreign domestic helpers and 13.5% on grandparents. The report also pointed to the high percentage of mother as carers at home in poverty households (81.2%) and the percentage drops in low income households (69.2%), whereas mothers as carers drops to 42.4% in the high income households as they relied more on foreign domestic helpers to take care of their children.

The common concern shared by the three groups was the difficulty in finding someone else or child care service to take care of the children temporarily (49.2 %, 39%, 23.4% respectively). Poverty and low income households share in common in encountering difficulties in teaching children to do homework (59.3%, 42.2%). The low income and high income households both suffered from respondent or spouse working long hours and unable to take care of the children (41.9%, 43.9%). Finally, the poverty and high income households experienced conflict in time allocation to meet their children's different needs (32.3%, 30.9%).

The findings of various studies also pointed to a severe lack of childcare services in Hong Kong (Leung, 2016, Leung and et, al, 2013, The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2015) due to the fact that Hong Kong government emphasises 'the importance of the family unit as the primary provider of care and welfare' (1991 White Paper of Social Welfare Department on Social welfare) and 'the responsibilities for taking care of their young children are parents' (The Five Year plan for Social Welfare Development in Hong Kong – Review 1998). The population below age 3 was around

132,000 (2009), 136,000 (2010), and 142,000 (2011). However, according to the Social Welfare Department's 2013 data, there were only a total of 1003 subvented day care places for infants between 0 and 2 years, and the fees vary from about \$3000 to over \$5000. There were 29,242 subvented full-day places for children aged between 2 and 6 in kindergarten-cum-child care centres (GovHK: Residents, 2013), which normally charge about \$2000 to over \$5000 (Leung et al., 2013). As a result of supply and demand, many dual-income and lone mother families cannot afford to enroll their children in day care (Leung, 2016, Leung and et, al, 2013). Despite the fact that the Social Welfare Department subsidizes various child care support services, including the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, Home-based Childcare, Occasional and Extended Hours Services, many families are reluctant to use their service due to the fact that the childcare providers are untrained (Leung, 2016, Leung and et, al, 2013; Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre and Tin Shiu Wai Community Development Alliance, 2013). There are other drawbacks such as conflicting hours and the mismatch of demand to the distribution of services. Consequently, the deficiency becomes so severe that it affects all families requiring childcare services, especially the lone mothers, who have a more pressing need for placing their children somewhere and have someone with training to look after them if they are to maintain a full time job to support the family.

The same goes for after school childcare services. The lone mothers with children going to primary school from the age of six to twelve are still faced with childcare problems. On the one hand, many lone mothers work long and inflexible hours. On the other, there is no public after school child care facilities (Leung, 2016; Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre and Tin Shiu Wai Community Development Alliance, 2013). Privately operated ones are costly and have very rigid hours, leaving the lone mothers searching to place their children after school, on weekends and holidays when they have to work (Leung et al, 2013; Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre and Tin Shiu Wai Community Development Alliance, 2013). For those holding low-paid jobs, part-time, roster or casual work, much hardship is encountered. In one case, a lone mother would sneak off work to make sure her child was on the way home in fear that she would wander onto the streets and lead to potential juvenile problems (Chan and Lo, 2016; Chan, Yu and Lo, 2012). In three other cases, lone mothers risked breaking the law leaving their children home alone. Another lone mother left her job

during the summer holiday to take care of the child (Chan and Lo, 2016). Regardless of the job situation, the lack of child care service creates much stress among lone mothers. In effect, the responsibilities of caring for children are charged to the individual lone family leaving the society out of the picture.

CONCLUSION

This Chapter has described the lone mother family in Hong Kong through various statistics taken from the Hong Kong Census and other non-governmental organizations. A factual general picture of the situation of this particular group is provided. As the progress of time also brings inevitable changes, external factors affecting the livelihood of lone mothers which fail to accommodate their needs while internal values stay traditional within the family setting, taxing on lone mothers in general and further pushing them into tribulation. The persistent traditional highest social value still adheres to the two-parent family, discounting the existence of lone parent families. Not only does this adherence to tradition assign women the role of unpaid carers in the family, it also jeopardizes the status of lone mothers. At the outset lone mothers struggle in the labour market under an unfavorable employment environment. A new class of working poor emerges as lone mothers, regardless of their income bracket, suffer from long working hours, job insecurity and guilt associated with the perception of neglecting their children. Despite their plight, the threadbare safety net, in the sense of kinship and society, fails to safeguard the welfare of lone mothers. The downsized modern family no longer serves as a social buffer forcing them to turn in vain to the government for affirmative support, a normal function of any responsible government. Indeed, lone mothers in Hong Kong face a lot of problems, many of which arise not from individual inadequacy, but from inadequate social support, gender blind social policies, and traditional gender social practices.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUALIZING LONE MOTHER FAMILIES AT RISK

INTRODUCTION

Bauman's (2003) discussion on the frailty of human bonds puts forth a spectrum of circumstances of relationship breakdowns resulting from the upheaval from agrarian society to industrial society in respect to ties to family, class, religion, marriage and love. Decades before Bauman's book, Marsden (1973), part of Townsend's huge 'Poverty in the UK' project, published *Mothers Alone*, which analysed housing conditions, diet, family relations and the shortfall of social support. However, government's downplayed lone mothers' plight and largely ignored the calls for policy change. The rationale behind this poor response was a traditional gendered approach, a two-parent model with men in the public sphere as breadwinners with women in the private sphere as carers in the family. Women were considered less capable of fulfilling the role of the breadwinner in a male dominated society. Lone mothers, never married, divorced or widowed would not fit into the gendered model. Without the support of the head of the family, women were associated with the problem category of dependency, shifting their reliance from the husband to the state. Lone mother families were socially constructed as being in poverty, and ultimately damaging to society. Policies targeted at resolving a social and moral problem based on conventional thinking failed to realize the process of social changes and the value of individuals, including lone mothers. Subsequent scholars have studied lone mother's under various theoretical perspectives - functional, pathological, welfare needs, citizenship and workfare. Yet, these studies often focused on the subordination of women's role and lone mothers were blamed for their status. Lone motherhood was regarded as a matter of choice rather than a by-product of rapid social changes. It was not until the mid-1990s that scholars began to adopt a social construction perspective but still fell short concerning the analysis of structural inequality.

In this chapter both Western and Hong Kong literature are reviewed to examine the situation of lone mothers. There is striking resemblance in the perspectives employed

by both worlds, functional and problem focused perspectives which point to individual problems leading to a victim blaming situation. Furthermore, the lone mothers are viewed as victims requiring welfare support which results in a welfare dependency under the welfare entitlement perspective. Subsequently, the debate shifts to the workfare perspective which emphasizes the importance and obligation of work to avoid welfare burden and threats to the society. The review on related policies reveals inadequacies and inability to address the roots of the problem, which leaves lone mothers in a disadvantaged position as policies do not reflect the new risks caused by rapid social changes, subjectivity, diversities and gender norms. A critical approach is necessary to equitably reveal the social situation of the lone mothers beyond the individualized and victimized perspectives. As a result, the risk society and post-structuralist feminist perspectives are introduced to study the underlying issues surrounding the risks confronting the lone mother family including the construction of the ethics of care and work. Consequently, a framework of analysis is designed on the basis of the new social risk and post-structuralist feminist perspectives.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON LONE MOTHERHOOD

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

Abundant literature has been written on lone mothers in the west in the past decades from various different theoretical approaches. During the 1960s, lone parent, especially lone mother families, became labelled as a key social problem, and were initially met with sympathy as fatherless families with children whose mothers were unsupported and needed help. Lone mothers did not fit into the traditional gendered model, and were considered incapable of fulfilling both roles as breadwinner and carer at the same time, resulting in their children suffering both emotionally and financially. The association of lone motherhood with problem children and poverty inadvertently spread negative connotations of lone motherhood and upheld the traditional gendered model, underscoring the prescribed functions of women in the family.

The family functions as the core unit of society in structural functionalism, and is responsible for reproduction and the socialization of children. Within the family unit,

the division of labour prescribes each family member a function based on the gendered model. Any changes in the structure of the family unit would not only affect the members in the family but the society as a whole (Glasser & Navarre, 1965; Mueller & Pope, 1977; Ambert & Saucier, 1983). Glasser and Navarre (1965) discussed the tremendous impact of a family breakdown on individual family members, especially the children, in four fundamental dimensions – task, communication, power, and affectional structures.

To start with, the task structure would be affected since the lone mothers have to undertake the tasks of both the breadwinner and the carer. It is unlikely that they would be able to handle both tasks without neglecting their children. It would be worse for women with low socioeconomic status as they are less likely to be able to get a well-paid job after the divorce (Glasser and Navarre (1965). As far as communication is concerned, parents are regarded as the medium to transmit social norms and values to their children. The absence of a parent may restrict children's understanding of social norms. Another impact on the lone family children in the power structure is that they may not be able to demonstrate democratic decisions. The lack of a mediation role performed by one of the parents may lead the children to perceive power as personal rather than consensual. As women are charged with the role of carer and nurturer for their children, the breakdown of the family will upset the affectional structure. When the lone mother has to take up the double burden of work and caring, it was assumed that she would be unlikely to be able to provide the affection to nurture the children's emotional state. Consequently, the children may not find a safe outlet to express their needs resulting in emotional stress, and in turn society may have to bear the cost of their distress. Subsequently, such traditional gendered model has been questioned and refuted (Gittins, 1985; 2004; Segal, 1983; Leonard and Hood-Williams, 1988). In particular this critique challenged the functional family relationship for hiding the unequal power relationship between men and women in the family. Women alone have the duty to cooperate, seek balance, or foster consensus to maintain a harmonious family at the expense of women making sacrifices.

Women are charged with the natural role of carer to nurture a harmonious atmosphere providing love, warmth and care in the family at any cost in order to maintain stability of the society as a whole. Critiques focused on structural functionalism for taking

woman's carer role for granted as 'natural'. The 'taken for granted' functionality of the form of the family as a normative institution deems those outside the norm as deviants, harmful to their family members and the society at large (Eshleman & Clarke, 1978; Lamanna & Riedmann, 1988; Sprey, 1969). A normative construction that overshadows the subjectivity of the agents. Once deemed deviants the lone mothers are categorized as problematic, policies are derived to contain the problem instead of tackling the inequalities they face which are exacerbated by rapid social change.

PROBLEM FOCUSED PERSPECTIVE

In line with the functionalist perspective, further studies of the negative effects on the children of lone-parent families, especially lone-mother families, were conducted with a problem focused perspective, looking into the pathological effects on children in these families. Subsequently, scholars like Ambert & Saucier, (1983); Mueller & Pope, (1977); Glasser & Navarre, (1965) and Pitts, (1964) conducted studies with findings pointing to the fact that children from lone-mother families had problems of delinquency, a sense of rejection, and poor academic performance. Bernard and Nesbitt (1981, p.40) concluded that lone-mother families were 'an unreliable predictor of mental illness, achievement, delinquency, and emotional predisposition' for children. Frankie (1984, p.166) added that 'boys tend to take the failure of their parents' marriage harder than girls, take longer to adjust and show far more disruptions in behaviour' as mentioned by Sever (1992). The rationale behind this line of thinking lies in the traditional gendered model whereby married women are subordinate to their husbands, and they are deemed not capable of fulfilling the breadwinner role after divorce, let alone carrying out a dual role of breadwinner and carer.

Once women with children are divorced the lone mothers are categorized into a group with the presupposition that they are a social problem. Lone mothers are deemed neither capable of supporting themselves and the family nor of performing the carer role satisfactorily. Consequently, lone mother status became a social problem as a result of the fact that they no longer 'fit' into the traditional gendered model (Lewis, 1992), and resulting in lone mothers being put into a second class status in society (Lewis, 1998). The second class categorization diminishes the importance of lone mothers as contributing members of society, ignores the emergence of new family

units due to rapid social changes, and places them in inequitable positions. In fact, the traditional gendered model reinforces the negative stereotyping of lone mother families as broken and incomplete by emphasizing that only men can be successful as heads of the household, while women are downgraded as supporting roles of the family. As a result, lone mother families are often automatically associated with poverty, a social problem calling for extra support. In order to allow for a certain degree of 'normalization' to two-parent families, policies to provide extra support to lone families have been put in place in recognition of their extra needs. The proposition of 'normalization' creates the sense of the lone mother family being 'abnormal'. Therefore, in the end, such a logic behind policies is bound to fail in addressing the causal factors.

Adding to the problem focused views, the 'underclass' concept referring to lone mother families proposes that welfare improvement has compromised recipients' incentives and initiative to work, resulting in a 'dependency culture' of the inability for self-help in the community and the reinforcement of poverty forming non-progressive and unmotivated value systems (Murray 1984, 1990). The 'underclass' concept was heavily challenged as the personalization of poverty (Walker 1990). It was argued that the surge of lone mothers was a by-product of rapid social changes, a social problem that should be resolved socially. To curb dependency, not only did the tyranny of the welfare state endorse policies and red tapes in cutting childcare, housing and employment support, a far fiercer tyranny of various unfettered corporations was unleashed in terms of employment conditions such as working hours, job security and wages (Walker 1990). These pathological, second class categorization and underclass problem-focused views skewed public opinion to blaming the victim and left the lone mothers' problems unanswered.

WELFARE ENTITLEMENT PERSPECTIVE

In the later part of the 1970s, campaign groups, under the positive influence of social democracy and equality, advocated welfare concepts based on social entitlement. Under such arrangements individuals are guaranteed a stake in society, entitled to be incorporated into the health, education and labour systems, and consequently, encouraged to undergo personal development. This perspective focused on the lone

parent's plight in the structural social system. In the 1980s, studies were conducted with findings pointing to the fact that lone fathers had higher earning power than lone mothers (Townsend, 1979; Hartmann, 1979; Land, 1983; Millar, 1992; Evans, 1992; Lister, 1992), and also lone mothers were marginalized from paid work (Siltanen and Stanworth, 1984; Stacey and Price, 1981) due to structural inequality of a strong male breadwinner model in the labour market (Pascall, 1986; 1997; Millar, 1989). As a result, women were in a disadvantaged position, and lone mother families were more likely to live in poverty than lone father-lead families. This was one element in the feminization of poverty (Daly, 1989; Scott, 1984; Glendinning and Millar, 1992).

Another advocate for welfare entitlement to lone mother family was Townsend (1970), a follower of Fabian Socialism. He conducted large scale empirical research which linked poverty to class and gender (lone mothers and older people). He supported the feminization of poverty concept combining findings from various studies. In the private sphere, women were poor without incomes of their own. In the public sphere, they had no access to good jobs. Consequently, women's class location was dependent on their husbands' class. Once divorced from the men, women were stripped of their class, and placed in the predominantly female underclass category along the unemployed, disabled, the low paid, lone parents, and the older people (1984, p17-23) subsisting on inadequate state income. Townsend (1984) proposed radical social changes for massive welfare entitlement especially for women to compensate their unpaid work in the private sphere. One of Townsend's team was Marsden (1973) who researched fatherless families depicting the experiences and resilience of the lone mothers, among other things to try to combat the skepticism of the public. Marsden was a formidable defender of one-parent families in many public debates including the 1974 Royal Commission on the same subject. One of the NGOs supporting lone mothers in the UK context is Gingerbread which provides childcare, employment and family services aiming to improve living standard and welfare reform.

Walker (1984) went further and argued for a democratic form of social planning which makes economic policy subservient to meeting needs through social policy, and not vice versa, as historically has been the case. Walker (1983) also saw the sexual division of labour, in which it is women who are expected and obliged to do the most of the caring, whether low paid or unpaid, as a central problem in the development of

community care policies (Walker, 1982). The reorientation of professional attitudes and changes in the relationships between the statutory, voluntary and informal sectors was suggested by Walker (Williams, 1989). This work made recommendations on radical action on employment, the labour market, housing and income as the key to changing the fundamental assumptions about who does the caring and where.

Contemporarily, socialist feminism has been the prominent voice for women advocating changes to the unequal status of women imposed by the patriarchal and capitalist systems in social structural restraints. Indeed, credits are due for their effort in raising women's issues with legislators who responded with welfare measures and changes in structures to help women. The rationale behind the socialist theory is that patriarchy and capitalism are inter-related and mutually supportive systems of oppression (Mandell, 2001). It also pointed to the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty with women being the majority of the poor due to gender biases and roles which create barriers for women to earn a decent independent income. Their advocacy for welfare entitlement focused on the impact of welfare policies on women, the effect of women's movements and gender role ideologies on welfare policy formation and maintenance (Baker 1990; Gordon 1990; Jenson 1990). Furthermore, they advocated for greater recognition of employment rights (the public sphere) and the unpaid responsibilities of women (the private sphere) resulting in the restrictions of women's development in the labour market. Thus, the strategy is to protect the rights of women through advocating changes in the labour market and labour laws, advocating changes to the social welfare system to improve child care services (Millar, 1987; Bradshaw and Millar, 1991), advocating the replacement of women's role in the family by collective services to enable women to break away from family restrictions. It was not until then that the lone mother issue became visible and policies were made conducive to their predicament. Subsequently, an array of welfare policies were established for lone mothers. Despite the recognition of structural inequality and the need for welfare, the socialist feminist perspective has been criticized for shifting women's dependency from the family and dependence on men to the state (Gordon 1990) as welfare programs have been based on the family unit with a male figure head as breadwinner. The wife plays a subordinate role, contributing to domestic work as unpaid labour. It has been presumed that women should be excluded from the welfare system as they could find ways to get out of poverty by marrying a wage earner. As

a result, women have been put into a discriminatory position. As Jenson (1986, 1987, 1990) stated welfare policies facilitate women's role as mothers, or both workers and mothers, depending on the male breadwinners' income, and consequently, this reinforced gender dominance in the development of welfare policy. The existing welfare available to women recipients is minimal and the inadequacy of the safety net decreases the leverage of women who are economically dependent on men. Another critique of this perspective is structural determinism. In recognition of the inevitable structural inequality that exists, creating constraints for women within the social system such as the labour market and family, the inequality nevertheless exacerbates the lone mothers' plight. Having said that, lone mothers are not passive agents but individuals with subjectivity, and they also participate and contribute to social practice. In other words structure is not the only factor in the construction of lone motherhood, the lone mothers themselves play a crucial part.

WORKFARE PERSPECTIVE

During the 1990s, the advanced industrial society started to shift its attitude from pity to blame, the surfacing of a moral discourse towards the divorced and unmarried lone mothers on welfare. These two groups of lone mothers were regarded as undeserving to receive welfare assistance. At the same time widowed lone mothers were regarded as deserving of receiving assistance (Popay et al, 1983; Murry, 1984). The reasons why they did not deserve social welfare help was because the public thought that it was their obligation to work as a citizen, and that divorce was a personal choice. Consequently, welfare dependent lone mothers would need to face delegitimization and eventually stigmatization and labelling. In reality, even if the lone mothers were willing to work, abundant constraints, such as gender inequalities in the labour market (Brown, 1989: 15) prevented them from joining the work force on an equitable basis. Furthermore, some lone mothers chose not to re-enter the labour market because of gendered moral rationality (Edwards and Duncan, 1996a; 1996b), emphasizing their sense of responsibility to be a good mother. (The concept of gendered moral rationality will be discussed in the following section.) The idea of the good mother derived from the perspective of structure functionalism in the 1970s, and emphasized that the mother-child bond was important in maintaining a stable family and the successful socialization of the child (Lewis, 1986; Lewis and Cannell, 1986).

Following this line of thinking, lone mothers on welfare were then constructed as a social threat as they were draining social resources (Song, 1996). It was believed that motherhood and work should coexist, and the neo-liberal state emphasized this belief by welfare-to-work programs (WTW) to promote citizenship obligations. The lone mothers were coerced into taking up the dual role of carer and breadwinner. However, neither provision of childcare support nor assistance in lifting some of the constraints in the job market for women were provided, leaving the lone mothers to cope with only their own resources. The neo-liberal work-first principle had not only reinforced the strong ideology of masculine worker-citizen, but also marginalized maternal care (Lewis, 2002).

DECONSTRUCTION PERSPECTIVE

The focus of the deconstruction perspective is to reveal the processes whereby gender inequality is constructed in the social system, and further challenges the ideology behind the welfare policies of the state (Edwards and Duncan, 1996a; 1996b). It was believed that the negative connotation towards the lone mothers as a social threat was socially constructed in the 1990s due to the increasing number of lone mothers in the society requiring substantial state support, and viewed by the neo-liberal state as increased dependency and a financial burden to the government (Land 1989; Lewis 1992; Bussemaker and van Kersbergen 1994). Two moral discourses were socially constructed – good mother and ideal worker. Neither the government nor the tax payers should bear the responsibility as divorce was the choice of lone mothers and so they should bear the responsibility alone. For this reason, lone mothers should work and become ideal workers at the same time to be independent of the state. These discourses were not only promoted by the government and taxpayer representatives, but the lone mothers themselves also believed them. This perspective attempted to reveal the lone mothers' disadvantaged position through the power inequality between two sexes in the daily interaction of everyday social practice. However, the approach neglected the structural inequality in society, such as exploitation in the labour market including long working hours, low pay, and insufficient childcare support.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LONE MOTHER FAMILIES

RISK SOCIETY

Recognizing the need for welfare both socialist feminists and welfare groups advocated the need for material resources to support lone mothers in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the support dwindled in the late 1990s as society as a whole became more affluent and unconvinced that the lone mother group suffered from severe resource deprivation. Subsequently, the well-meant welfare discourse inadvertently led to the negative discourses of welfare dependency and laziness. On the issue of childcare responsibilities, the lone mothers and society mutually accepted the belief that it is the mother's responsibility, not a service to be demanded from the public purse. This thinking plunged the lone mothers into a further disadvantaged position. In the 1990s, there was a shift from the welfare discourse by critical post-structuralist scholars challenging the formation of the irrational belief and the formation of the discourses constructed over the lone mothers. Reflecting this shift, this research was conducted under the post-structuralist perspective and further examines the topic in a different light of the risk framework from a post-structuralist feminist perspective. The focus is on the risk distribution among lone mothers affecting their perceptions and coping strategies. In this research, Beck's (1992) grand theory on risk society is applied to open up the discussion of the unequal distribution of risks with the new social risks theory (Taylor-Gooby 2004; Bonoli 2003) to provide specific insights in two dimensions, work and care.

Theorizing Risks

The worldview of risk has changed from a mathematical calculability and statistics of the unforeseen to the concept of social construction, looking towards human responsibility in the generation and spread of risks (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn 2006). Mainstream sociological approaches to risks include two ideological approaches, socio-cultural and governmentality, and a critical approach, risk society. While the socio-cultural approach is criticized for oversimplification in its analysis, the governmentality approach is faulted in undermining individual responses to risk. The

risk society, on the other hand, despite various critiques on its model, has been viewed as a macro theory and further micro theories have been developing. This research employs new social risk theory in a Hong Kong context to explore the lone mothers' unfavourable position and experiences through their perceptions of risks and their responses to them.

The controversy of the socio-culture approach, initially informed by Douglas (1966, 1985, 1992) and Douglas and Wildavsky (1982), centres on the distinction of 'self' versus the 'other', and 'grid' versus 'group'. If applied to the lone mothers in Hong Kong, it tends to oversimplify the lone mothers' experience as a collective entity. When the cultural value and behavior of the group is not shared by the majority of society, fear and anxiety is generated, and the intruder is regarded as an outsider of the norm. The approach can be overly simplistic neglecting the diversity even within the two groups of the 'self' and the 'other', thus leaving the plurality and diversity of individual experiences hidden behind the division of groups.

The other ideological approach to risk, governmentality, centres on the modern state political goal to govern (Burchell et al. 1991; Barry et al. 1996; Dean 2010; O'Malley 2004). It assumes the individual's role in risk and response as a group, intertwined with culture and reinforces state authorities (Culpitt, 1999), for instance, the development of the welfare state to provide insurance for the responsible working class against risk (Ewald 1986; O'Malley 2000). However, the overreliance on the group stand fails to address the disjunction identified by the risk society in tackling the increasing diversity and complexity of the individual experience. The issue of lone mothers in Hong Kong is in fact characterized by individuals' diverse and complex experiences, and therefore the governmentality approach is too restrictive.

Risk Society Theory

This research set out to investigate the risks faced by lone mothers in Hong Kong and therefore utilized the risk society theory, one of the main practitioners of which is Beck (1992, 1999, 2014). A macro discussion on the formation of risks and how they penetrate all spectrums of society is provided. The framework also links risks generated from social changes and the emphasis on wealth production in the post

industrialized society to its uneven distribution affecting all members of society and the transformation into individual risks, especially among women (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006; Bonoli, 2005, Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006).

Individualization

‘Beck (1999) strongly warns that, we're condemned to be individualized. We cannot choose to not be individualized’ (Mads and Allan, 2013: p.47). Individualization implies institutionalized individualism, a do-it-yourself biography. Here, what Beck (1992) has depicted about the institutionalization of individualism is not narrowed in terms of rational choice but a voluntary compulsion whereby he has sharply analyzed the structural context in the individual’s choice and decision. In reality, the institution induces individualization and forces individuals to individualize their own choices and decisions. Hence, it will be more appropriate to describe such choices and decision making as socially constructed experiences rather than individual rational choices. ‘People are invited to constitute themselves as individuals to plan, to understand and to design themselves as individuals and should they fail, to blame themselves’ (Beck, 1999: 9). ‘Public problems are rewritten as individual failure... ‘that social inequalities remain hidden and collective responses as delegitimated’ (Kemshall, 2002: 8). The constraint on one’s own biography lies in the responsibility as a consequence of the freedom to decide one’s own fate. Subsequently, society views ‘failed biographies’ as the problem of individual. In other words, an individualized problem to be handled by individuals. The concept of individualization and do-it-yourself biography extended to not only the public sphere of work, but also to the private spheres of individuals, the family (Beck, 2014).

De-standardization of labour

Work and family used to be a form of security for individuals in the industrial era (Beck, 1992) as the wages earned were often able to sustain the basic needs of the family. In other words, a stable job would mean a stable family. This was probably true when the industrialized labour market practiced a system of standardized full

employment in three main areas, namely a labour contract, work site and work hours (Beck, 1992). An employed worker would feel assured in their occupation as the labour contract was legally binding with the terms negotiated and agreed by both parties. With large business organizations, the worker secured often life-long and full-time stable employment in standardized work sites. As for the working hours, employees had a clear idea of when to start and finish work. Therefore, engaging in an occupation allowed individuals to satisfy personal needs and establish socio-economic positions. However, during the post-industrialization era, individuals were faced with uncertainties due to the shift in the employment system towards flexible and pluralized mode of employment, which in turn causing underemployment. Moreover, the emergence of automation led to the weakening of the standardized full employment system. The three areas of changes were flexibilization, as the boundaries between working and non-working became unclear, so 'flexible and pluralized forms of underemployment were spread' (Beck, 1992: 142). The taken for granted lifelong full-time jobs with fixed working hours were replaced by different forms of working hours. Subsequently, the full-time contract type turned into a variety of working modes such as part-time, casual work, or temporary work contracts, of which the salary type was also altered by having hourly paid, daily paid, or project-based wages. Moreover, company structures and their respective product and service lines were decentralized and out-sourced, so work sites were no longer required to be physically available, and it shifted from large-scale organizations to small and decentralized organizations, or even a one-person company. As a result, work sites could be at home, in coffee shops, or any other location. The changes in redistributed working hours led to a collective decline in income, career opportunities, social and job security. In turn, it threatened the employees' prospects in the organization affecting workers in different occupations and specialized fields. Such forms of flexibilization of employment created new social insecurities and inequalities. In the meantime, the changes in various aspect of work destabilized the family as women were forced to participate in the job market to subsidize the household income. When both husbands and wives participated in the work in the public sphere, the clear cut boundary of public and private started to blur, and it became difficult to maintain a balance between work and family life. In order to strike a balance, some workers opted for the flexible forms of underemployment, accepting the responsibility of looking after their own health, physically as well as mentally, consequential to the

‘privatization of risk’ (Beck, 1992). Hence, the norms of protection would shift from the society to the individuals paving the path to the individualization of responsibility.

Detraditionalization of the Family

Individuals become at risk as a result of the ‘demise of tradition’ - ‘detraditionalization happens in a social surge of individualization’ (Beck, 1992: 85, 87), altering the conscience collective, the shared values industrial society relied on, while releasing the hold of social class, gender and family roles in society. The support networks from the traditional extended family have been replaced by individual wits in developing a personal support network. The traditional institution of marriage and the family support which modernity has relied on for its social and economic reproduction (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006) has been broken down by the process of individualization (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Jarvis, 2007; Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006; Zinn, 2010). Stress is the consequence of detraditionalization as people have to take up more responsibilities. One of the changes is in social institutions, for example the family and its break down. In the process of social changes, women who have been pushed to enter the employment market bear a double burden of family and work. Whilst the overemphasis on wealth production generates further risks threatening family break downs, lone mothers as result of divorce and separation are forced to deal with a double share of the individualized responsibilities (Beck with Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Gender Revolution and Escalating Risks for Women

With individualization in late modernity along with traditional social orders breaking down in class, gender role and employment patterns, women have been emancipated leading to diversified types of families. Although the two-parent family is still the norm, lone-parent families are inevitably becoming more prevalent (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994; Jarvis, 2007). As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 6) state ‘...men and women are released from the gender roles prescribed by industrial society for life in the nuclear family...they find themselves forced, under pain of material

disadvantage, to build up a life of their own by way of the labour market, training and mobility...’ While the gender revolution imparts strength into the process of individualization, women have been gaining more opportunities in education, the labour market, and personal choice amidst the destabilizing patriarchal society. Furthermore, ‘decentering’ of the nuclear family relieves men from their traditional fatherly duties – providing for the family, leaving the women to shoulder the entire responsibility of providing and rearing children, thus presenting them with escalating risks (Jarvis, 2007). According to Beck’s risk society, which proposes that individuals live in an age of expanding freedom and choice biographies (Beck, 1992), individuals would reflexively choose their own lifestyle and place themselves into categories relevant to them. In the case of families with lone mothers, they have to juggle career and family (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994), and are forced to come up with reflexive and calculating strategies to deal with risks which lead to various unintended consequences.

Logic of Risk Distribution

While the majority of previous studies and discussions on inequality have focused on structural analysis, the risk society theory goes beyond class and points to subjectivity (Beck, 2000; Curran, 2013). Not only do vulnerable groups in society, such as the lone mothers, experience inequality, the manifestation extends beyond class and structural force, underscoring and linking the disadvantage to the individual’s perception and the paradoxically unintended consequences of the coping strategies deployed (Beck, 2000). As the monistic class analysis pinpoints women only in one locale, focusing on economic positions, either in the family or the labor market, it fails to denote the diversity of the subject’s interpretation under the influence of discourses and lived experiences. In reality, there are diversified circumstances conditioning the position of women such as culture, ethnicity, power and status (Misra and Akins 1998). The risk society theory explores the issues faced by women in general in modernity from a different approach with emphasis on the distribution of risks instead of wealth, and in contrast to the logic of a vertical distinction pitching the upper vs. lower class. Instead, the logic of risk distribution is a horizontal netting mode reproducing and perpetuating capillary webs, transcending both spatial and temporal limitations (Beck, 2000). Under the risk society theory, the degree of risk is not only determined

by class in monetary terms but social networks from family and government, and by the unique and individual risk bearing factor. For instance, a low income lone mother earning a stable wage and nurturing a good mother and child relationship may bear less risks than her counterpart with a high income, but with unstable wages and with poor mother and child relationship. The determinant of risk is not of internal variance within class but diversity of individuals in connection to mainstream society, family relationships and life courses. More importantly, the individual's perception and coping strategies prescribe the distribution of risks. The way the individual looks at risks and her subjective response to them has an impact on the dimension of risks. Consequently, the distribution of risks the lone mothers bear is contingent on the individual's unique situation and responses beyond the distinction of class.

Risk Society Revisited

Grand theory, such as Beck's risk society, cannot be expected to be all inclusive, leaving gaps and fissures for future research (Dingwall, 2002; Wales and Mythen, 2002, Mythen 2005). Some of the critique of the theory centres on the lack of empirical support, neglect of class position and its stand on rational choice vs. structural experience.

Empirical Research

Subsequent to Beck's (1992) grand theory there has been extensive research conducted by both supportive scholars and skeptics in the examination of the concept. Some of the findings support Beck's theory while others question and challenge certain parts of his concepts when applied to specific localities (Lupton and Tulloch 2002; Quilgars and Abbott 2002; Taylor-Gooby 2001; Cebulla 2007). Many call for further studies to be conducted (Mythen 2005, Lupton and Tulloch 2003, Cebulla 2007, Taylor-Gooby 2001). In this respect, Beck's approach has served as a heuristic and universalistic device inspiring further studies and perspectives to delineate particular contexts (Mythen 2005). Hence, when the theory is applied to specific groups such as the lone mothers in Hong Kong, added analyses will be required to meticulously portray their experiences around risks, their perception and coping strategies (Taylor-Gooby and Cebulla, 2010; Lupton and Tulloch 2003).

The 'Neglect' of Class Inequalities

In analyses under the class framework inequality is commonly only revealed with regard to the position of the lower class. One interpretation of Beck's theory is the neglect of the significance of conventional social formation when he claims that new risks are 'democratic' - on a global scale, applying to everyone, including the rich and powerful (Mythen, 2005; Skelton, 2005; Atkinson, 2007). Beck also describes a 'Zombie' existence of class, adding that 'Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks. By contrast, the wealthy (in income, power or education) can purchase safety and freedom from risk (Beck 1992: 35)'. At this point, class has not been discounted but another dimension of risk distribution has been added to reveal inequality. The 'Zombie' existence also reflects a Chinese proverb, 'The centipede dies but the many parts of its body do not ossify'; class is not dead but continues to exist in a different state. Indeed, the very specific term 'Zombie' existence speaks for itself that Beck very much acknowledged the reanimation of class through various ways and it is by no means dead and gone. Thus, the inequality generated through wealth does not only manifest itself in class, but also through risk distribution, thus challenging the homogenization of the class application. Looking beyond the uniform and similar treatment of individuals in the groups within class, risk distribution entails the individual's perception of risk and the diversity of individual situations (Beck, 2000). Class inequality may appear subordinate to the alpha logic of risk in Beck's universalist thrust of his thesis, and even challenged in the 'exceptionality' of risks as features peculiar to contemporary society (Mythen, 2005), it is nonetheless a consideration voiced by Beck. Undoubtedly, the distribution of risks in Beck's risk society theories takes precedence over the distribution of wealth as the latter is not the focus of the risk framework.

Rational Choice or Subjective Lived Experiences

Under the risk framework, the interpretation of the term individualization can be stretched to extremes from conservative application of rational choice to Beck's (1992) involuntary individualism. Neo-liberalist rational choice assumes that individual choices are logical decisions, calculating and maximizing benefits to suit individual

self-interests. Beck was heavily criticized (Douglas, 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982) when he raised the concept of individualization that individuals, as ‘economic men,’ were capable of assessing and ‘calculating’ all the circumstances and risks within a market based economy. The word ‘calculating’ touches a raw nerve as it (inadvertently) implies that the individual has a totally freehand in decision making. On the contrary, targeting the capitalistic society, Beck highlights the concept of institutionalized individualism, through which the voluntary compulsion of individualization is tackled. With receding institutional responsibility, individuals are more at risk and become responsible of their own life projects (Beck 1992). Beck (1992) further argues on the individual’s personal experience and choice within institutionalized individualization as well as reflexivity. The major premise of the discourse about individual choice and decision making, not necessarily rational, is in fact underpinned by a diversity of social positions the individual is situated in depending on individual unique perception and coping strategies. (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005; Olofsson and Zinn et al., 2014; Taylor-Gooby 2004; Bonoli, 2005; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006). Under such premises of voluntary compulsion, individuals are then framed into making choices and decisions individually in face of risks based on a diversity of lived experiences.

The New Social Risk Framework

The different positions held by scholars under the risk framework have broadened the dimension of inequality. Focusing not only on the distribution of wealth, but with an added dimension of the distribution of risks it is necessary to understand the degree of risks taken by specific groups. When the family is at risk, this cuts across class and it is often that women are more vulnerable than men in bearing those risks (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006; Bonoli 2007). Class is still an important consideration in the analysis of inequality, driven by structural forces in society. The added dimension of the distribution of risks will allow a more comprehensive view of inequality. For example, the micro discussion of Taylor-Gooby (2006) becomes more practical with its specific risk framework against the welfare state of capitalism, as it will be difficult if not impossible to zero in on specific situations unique in terms of time and space under the broad risk framework.

Further to Beck's (1992) macro conceptualization, changes in family and gender roles, the labour market and welfare retrenchment were examined under the social risks theory (Taylor-Gooby 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006; Bonoli, 2007). The emphasis is on how welfare states respond to such changes and how individuals, especially vulnerable groups like women, perceive and cope. Furthermore, he identifies the endemic nature of perception and coping strategies to risks, inequality and risk of social issues affecting the individual's everyday life experience. As such risks are socially constructed, it is impossible to find solutions to all risks, but an acceptable level of risks, which is not determined by authorities or experts but by the perception of all those at risks, relying on their social identity and group membership endemic and unique in different societies and groups, for example, tradition and moral rationality. In turn, social identity and group membership will manifest in the individual's social experience, biography and identity.

To do so studies of particular groups have been conducted under the risk framework focusing on specific social issues, such as women at risk, lone parent families at risk, housing risks and health risks. Similarly, this study of lone mothers in Hong Kong also falls under the same category, aiming to look at a specific group, the unique circumstances surrounding it and the particular forces at play affecting its members' perceptions and coping strategies.

New Social Risks and Social Changes

In the transition from an industrial to post-industrial society, new social risks are generated because of rapid economic and social changes (Taylor-Gooby, 2001; 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006). New social risks were identified in three particular areas - family gender roles, the labour market and the retrenchment and privatization of welfare (Taylor-Gooby 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006). Despite rapid socio-economic changes encouraging housewives to take up paid work and become co-providers for the family, the fundamental role of carer did not change. In other words, women were charged with two roles, provider and carer, generating new risks as the change in gender roles in the family necessitates the reconciliation of paid work with family responsibilities for working women in their new role. The lack of childcare

services and the shrinking of family support often create an obstacle for female employment, and the income is often the determinant of poverty especially in low-income or one-income households. The lone mother risks poverty when she has to stay home to look after her children because there is no childcare support available from either the state or other family members. Of course lone mothers have always been prone for poverty but what is 'new' here is the expansion of the risk of lone parenthood.

In the rapidly and continually changing post-industrial labour market, workers require necessary skills to gain and secure adequately paid jobs, and continuous upgrading to prevent existing skills becoming obsolete. Without the means and time to upgrade, low-skill, low-income, workers are at a disadvantage to stay competitive in the labour market. Women who have recently participated in the labour market are also disadvantaged as many of them are unskilled workers while the rest finds it difficult to find time for learning new skills under the double burden of work and caring duties. Another factor adding to their disadvantage is the de-standardization of employment (Beck, 1992; Taylor-Gooby, 2004), whereby workers are no longer protected by collective contracts and pension because of the change from large company employers to atypical employment of contract, temporary and self-employed work. Without employment security, women with low-skilled are the first to become the working poor in the labour market.

Traditionally policies are gendered into male productive and female reproductive functions, male breadwinner and female homemaker, which is typical in industrial societies. Under liberal regimes like Britain and the US, women's entitlement as mothers and workers are secondary concerns. There is neither recognition nor provision for the increasing number of women participating actively in the labour market (Taylor-Gooby 2004). In the trend of privatization and outsourcing, childcare services become unaffordable commodity for most working mothers. As a result, many women have to shift from full-time to part-time employment, or withdraw from the labour market to fulfil caring duties at home. While it seemed natural and acceptable for women to return to caring duties at home and men to remain as the breadwinners, it is a different matter when lone mothers cannot afford the rising cost of childcare and have to either quit, take up less work or rely on welfare to look after

the children at home. They are labelled as lazy or welfare dependent. Not only does the inaccessibility of childcare service stand as a barrier for balancing work and family life, the stigma also creates a barrier for normal social connection for the lone mothers.

Policies from the government to deal with old risks were largely wage related, to provide for needs not met through paid work. As the welfare expenses were covered by the mass of the working class, who were under full-employment and contributed significant taxes to the revenue of the government. Solidarity was formed as workers realized they might require services when they could no longer work. The transition from an industrial to post-industrial society disturbed horizontal redistribution because the most of economic changes from the down-sizing of production to service industries weakened the economy as well as tax revenues. Governments had to justify cut backs to old risk programmes. In the meantime, in dealing with new risks, governments walked a tight rope of blame avoidance. Instead of providing money, it moved towards legitimation and moral values through encouraging equal access to employment, balance family and work, training and education to enhance competitiveness in the globalized market (Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

While old risks affect the aged, in particular, including healthcare and retirement protection, new risks tend to affect individuals who are at earlier stages of a job career and the building of a family. Individuals are more alert to the responsibilities to manage risks in relation to balancing work and family which requires strategic politics, which may include the redefinition of the public and private spheres. The ability to cope with the new risks becomes more and more important for individuals as failure to do so will lead to poverty, inequality, and loss of future life chances. Meanwhile, vulnerable groups deprived of education and training, government and family support including elder and child care become more at risk and more likely to fail in coping. Nevertheless, old and new risks are not mutually exclusive due to the volatile nature of social changes. Despite strategic politics in coping, individuals who manage to cope may be faced with old risks in the continuing life experience (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006; Bonoli, 2003; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006).

LONE MOTHER POLICIES

Breadwinner Model and Adult-Worker Model

Different welfare regimes implement different welfare policies as they need to correspond with the gendered patterns and a set of family policies provided by the state (Lewis, 1992; 1997a; 1997b; 2001; Walby, 1986; 2004; Pascall and Lewis, 2004). In some countries, a comprehensive social security system and a family-friendly policy would surely help reduce the poverty rate of lone mother families. Generally speaking, most of the advanced industrial countries, social democratic or liberal welfare regimes in particular, have the tendency to respond in different pathways but still based on men dominating as the main breadwinner while women remain the main unpaid carer at home. Once these women are divorced and become lone mothers, they are at great risk (Jenkins and Rigg, 2001) because of their dependency on their husbands.

Germany and Sweden are typical conservative and social democratic welfare regimes respectively, while Britain is a liberal welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990; 1999). In Germany the traditional concept of male breadwinner and female homemaker is favoured and consolidated through tax breaks for married or partnered families (Duncan, 1996). Lone mothers who are never married, divorced, or separated, are put in a residual and vulnerable position, as they are not entitled to income maintenance. Sweden on the other hand, tends to treat all adult women as autonomous citizens and workers (Duncan, 1996). Since these citizen-workers may also be parents, the state has developed a comprehensive childcare system, the right to parental leave and reduced working hours (Duncan, 1996). Housing allowances are also provided for low income workers. Lone mothers who are citizens, parents and workers are entitled to the above benefits. Lone mothers are not positioned as a special group, so that there will not be any discourse of threat or problem to the society (Duncan, 1996). In Britain women find themselves cornered in assuming the role of motherhood and being coerced to take up employment outside the home by workfare policies. Unfortunately, the gendered employment market does not favour women (Hartmann, 1979) and most jobs available for lone mothers are low paid, sporadic and insecure (Evans et al., 2004; Stewart, 2007) as there is hardly any public service for childcare support (Ridge and

Millar, 2011; Brady, 2016). As a result, lone mothers are more likely to work part-time and subsist at minimum income levels (Millar and Ridge, 2018). Since their income is unlikely to cover their daily expenses, lone mothers would have to consider applying for social welfare, which makes them appear socially problematic and a threat to social order. Despite the liberal welfare regime and government policy changes to combine the individualization rational model with new household economics, much ambiguity is left in the integration of women, either into the labour force as there are not sufficient welfare measures such as child care service, or homemakers such as family subsidies (Clarke 2005; Duncan 2010). Adhering to the British model, lone mothers in Hong Kong face a similar predicament (discussed in Chapter 2), only with a bleaker outlook, where individuals are pushed to the extreme with a traditionally and at the same time increasingly capitalistic society. The labour market also preys on the lone mothers' vulnerability that they are not considered ideal workers as their primary responsibility is their children and not the employer. The notion that the lone mothers' choice is supposedly negotiated by individuals is not very accurate since there are no complementary services or schemes to allow individual negotiations.

While the liberal welfare regime was characterised by the male breadwinner model in the post-war period, there was a tendency of the shift from this model to the neoliberal version of adult worker model. Under male breadwinner model men were assumed to be the breadwinner in full-time, long term employment and women the dependent (Pascall 2012). Women often did not earn a wage and make contribution. In reality, women undertook part-time low paid interrupted work and earned less, contributed less, hence received less benefit (Brady, 2016). The contributory models of benefit provided the individual claimant and independent income favouring the male breadwinner (Bennett 2018). Lone mothers became problematic as there was no male breadwinner in the family.

In the post-war era, after experiencing the change to a neo-liberal ideology in the 1970s, they were treated as mothers but moved in the mid-1990s towards workers in the adult-worker model whereby everyone who can is expected to work, and security only covers those who cannot (Cook, 2012). In a sense, the male breadwinner model had become out-dated. Furthermore, self-provision, including pensions, is expected.

This creates problems for women under the circumstances of an unequal division of work and unpaid care work, and the disproportionate number of women employed in low paid jobs (Lewis, 2009; Tonkens & Verplanke, 2013). Policies under the adult worker model ignored women's unpaid worker and led to conflicts between work and family. The employment policy based on the adult-worker model aims to cut recipients off social security and emphasizes the importance of work for able body adults in order to sustain a high level of employment in the labour market (Miller, 2011). The workfare model requires recipients to be self-reliant in order to reduce government expenses on welfare but neglects their special needs, such as single-parent families need to take care of their children so they can't do full-time work (Bradshaw, 2003; Brady, 2016). This is the main reason why the workfare model is not effective (Tonkens & Verplanke, 2013).

Workfare Measures and Tax Credits for Lone Mothers

Targeting all welfare recipients, the welfare to work policy was implemented to push recipients to go to work by imposing stricter behavioural welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions (Grover, 2005; Grover and Piggott, 2007). This policy paradigm was promoted by the United States in the 1990s. The programme, also known as a 'stick and carrot' policy, offered tax subsidies, financial support, supplementing wages for low paid or part time workers, as well as family programmes for childcare services.

The orientation of welfare-to-work is generally applied in many advanced industrial countries in heterogenous ways. In the UK, the New Deal programme was launched by the Labour Government in 1998 to push welfare recipients including lone mothers to work in the labour market. It was an employment activation programme providing employment information and counselling to lone mothers who wanted to work compulsorily. The minimum wage, reductions in the tax thresholds and contributions to national insurance contributions were introduced to promote make-work pay, and support was lent to the low-paid lone mothers via the 2003 child tax credits. However, these in-work benefits were premised on employment status. Lone mothers faced difficulties to sustain stable employment as they received less pay than men in the gendered labour market, had narrow job opportunities and lack qualifications (Millar, 2008; Ridge and Millar, 2011; Caragata and Cumming, 2011). Subsequently, in-work

poverty occurred when the wages and the degree of work could not allow them to escape from below the poverty threshold (Horemans, 2016; Lancker and Horemans, 2018). This section is an account on a kaleidoscope of interpretation and critique made by scholars on the series of in-work benefits and activation measure policies introduced by the New Labour Governments of Blair (1997-2008) and Brown (2008-2010).

The coalition government (2010-2014) initiated Universal Credit. Subsequent to 2015, the Conservative government encountered technical problems and caused chaos in the program's implementation to amalgamate tax credits and others benefits (Income-tested Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit, Working Tax credit, Child tax Credit, Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance, and Income Support). Eventually, the welfare reform led to a new policy, the implementation of the Universal Credit, expected to be fully operational in 2021/2022 to replace the six existing mean-tested benefits and tax credit. The aim of universal credit is 'to provide a basic income for people out of work, covering a range of needs; make work pay as people move into and progress in work; and help lift people out of poverty' (DWP 2010, p.14). Universal Credit is based on conditionality and a concept of arrears rather than credits in the form of a monthly payment into a single account of the claimant who is the responsible carer or the main bill payer (Andersen, 2019). The government claimed that Universal Credit is gender neutral (DWP 2012) as both men and women, in and out of work under the same circumstances are eligible. Yet, the claim ignored the fact that many men and women are not in a same circumstances (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Bennett 2012; Millar and Bennett, 2017). Take lone mothers for instance, the joint couple earning threshold of higher income to qualify to higher pay would not be realistic as they are restricted by the circumstances of part-time and low pay jobs imposed by caring duties (Orloff, 2009; Millar and Bennett, 2017). Also their choice of being an unpaid carer has been devalued (Pateman, 2005; Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Tronto, 2001). The call for a non-contributory and non-means tested benefit based on categories provides some of the women with an independent income which is lower than the contributory benefits (Pascall 2012). As women tend to be 'conduits' (Daly and Rake, 2003) altruistically passing the benefits on to their children, thus the categorical benefits support and uphold women's duties as carers.

Nonetheless, in reality the income of the lone mothers was complicated, because the main source of their income would be from wages which were tied to with many tax benefits such as child tax credit, working tax credit and child care tax credit. However, the lone mothers often found it difficult to find work to fit into their caring schedule which included caring for the elderly and their children (Millar and Ridge, 2009). The chances of earning higher wages were slim as they were mostly engaged in part-time work (Millar and Ridge, 2013). For the tax credit, the initial purpose was to top up their wages when they earned less. However, the administrative errors undermined the purpose of the scheme. One of the reasons was that the credit was based on the annual assessment. The lone mothers had to repay discrepancies if there were errors in the calculations.

Child Maintenance and Labour Market and Childcare Policies

Child Maintenance

In the UK, the lone mother income package consists of labour income, social transfers and child maintenance. The former two incomes are employment related while the last one is an income based on a median amount formulated by the Child Maintenance Service without consideration to the income of the resident parent. Lone mothers who are not working have to go through mean-tests to receive social transfers which are minimal. As a result, child maintenance has a higher value to poor lone mothers (Meyer and Hu, 1999; Hakovirta, 2011; Skinner and Main, 2013; Bryson, 2013; Hakovirta and Jokela 2018). From 2014 there was a stronger emphasis on both parental responsibilities (Hakovirta and Jokela 2018). There is a need of enforcing the child maintenance to assure such support can be reached to the lone mother families. The Child Support Agency (CSA) in the UK, responsible for assisting the lone mothers to chase down child support, often proved ineffective (Millar 2011) when compared with other advanced industrial countries with backup system and updated law such as the United States (Hakovirta, 2011). There is a need for legislation to mandate authorities to enforce the law.

Childcare and Labour Market Policies

State intervention into childcare and labour market policies have a significant impact on working parents, lone mothers in particular (Walby, 1990). The chronological development of childcare support services in the UK can be viewed in three periods, each of which driven by different ideologies concerning 'work' and 'care' by different governments. It can also be characterised as the different regimes of childcare policies across the world. Childcare policy in the UK was one of neglect until the beginning of the 21st century. Primary education began at 5, two years earlier than other Nordic countries, displaying a lack of childcare policy in the UK (Bonoli 2013).

In the post-war era, different political actors including the Labour Party and unions concurred that childcare was a private issue for the family, and following the liberal tradition in policy-making, the government did not intervene in family matters. Mothers with small children should stay home to fulfil the caring duties (Bonoli 2013). Subsequently, the emphasis on motherhood hindered the development of childcare policies as women's role as mothers and carers contradicted their roles as carers and workers (Lewis 1980).

From the 1980s to the 1990s, policies gearing towards reconciling work and family were underdeveloped as childcare was still regarded as a private matter. Childcare support services for small children were scarce and families received no financial support from the Conservative government to pay for such services. It was not until the mid-1990s, that John Major implemented a voucher scheme for part-time nursery education for 4 year olds (Randall 2000). Meanwhile, the Conservative Government in the UK opted out of parental leave policies despite EU directives.

The New Labour Government promoted work-life balance policies promising to 'help working women to balance family and working life, and to introduce a limited unpaid parental leave' (British Labour Party 1997). These election promises were vague as the new government did not want to appear as high taxing and high spending. As a result, the government continued to fall short in the provision of work-life balance policies despite calls from working women for the government to do more. The

government responded by offering strong incentives under a credit-claiming logic. Under the National Childcare Strategy in 1998, different actors and the publication of a Green paper expanded the coverage of childcare support services and focused on quality, affordability and accessibility. However, the government did not take up the responsibility for providing adequate child-care provisions and services and relied on private sectors provide such services; they were too expensive that made the lone mothers eventually resigned their job and return to live on welfare so as to take care of the young children. As pointed out by Dean (2002), lone mothers face a dilemma that on one hand the welfare-to-work policy created a pressure on reentering the labour market and on the other hand, the government emphasis on parental responsibility. Reference was made to the lack of childcare support being an obstacle to employment for non-working mothers especially lone mothers (Bonoli, 2013).

Anti-poverty policy was launched through a child related tax credit system in 1999 such as Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), which featured means-tested tax credits for working parents who worked over 16 hours a week to use approved forms of childcare services. In the same year, the provision of parental leave was adopted proposing 13 weeks unpaid leave for each parent before the child was 5, and up to 13 weeks for maternal leave. Not only did the Labour government target work-life balance policies in higher income families during its second term, but it also launched the Sure Start programme to encourage employment for parents in disadvantaged families and neighbourhoods to effectively combat child poverty.

From the post-war lack of policies regarding childcare as a family matter to the work-life balance policies in the Labour government, the trend indicates an emphasis on upholding work as solution to poverty, child poverty included. This line of thinking reflects a narrow view of a simpler bygone world where poverty was determined only by class, and work was the only solution. Hence, to maintain stability, roles in society were to be adhered to and hard work was encouraged. Acknowledging changes in society, governments have been trying to answer to the people's demand but with a tunnel vision ignoring the complexity and intertwining nature of the changes. In order to produce effective solutions, the policies for reconciling work-life must be multidimensional instead of skewing towards a neo-liberal approach.

Lone mothers are a defining feature of a welfare regime and how it shapes gender and family relations. Both the breadwinner and the subsequent adult worker models devalue women's unpaid work in caring, and in the meantime, defamilialize and demotherize the role of the mother in the family by forcing them to work outside the family in order to qualify for social transfers (Bleijenbergh and Ciccio, 2014). Employment as the only solution or way out for lone mothers is questionable, despite its prevalence amongst many social actors.

LONE MOTHERS AND NEW SOCIAL RISKS

The responses to new social risks by states vary. As discussed in the previous section, in countries with well-established care services and active labour market policies, the new social risk impact is mitigated by support to women including lone mothers (Bonoli, 2006) in balancing paid work and domestic care, and in gaining access to work (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). In contrast, liberal countries tend to offer market solutions to new social risks, individualizing responsibilities as access to care is unequal in the labour market policies prioritize limited and incentive-based approaches assuming welfare recipients, especially lone mothers, are lazy and dependent. In their defence, lone parents (mothers) are neither necessarily 'weak' nor welfare dependent (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992) and their family problems are socially constructed.

In essence, lone mothers are compelled to respond to the new social risks by making involuntary choices individually. The significance of successfully managing risks has serious implications for living conditions involving not only themselves but for other family members and their future life opportunities (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Taylor-Gooby and Zinn 2006). The notion that they have to take up the responsibilities is actually a result of institutionalized individualization (Beck, 1992) whereby decisions have to be made within the confines of private services in a flexible economy (Taylor-Gooby, 2004) – involuntary individualism as described by Beck (1992). Consequently, particular groups like lone mothers are exposed to specific risks in relation to social changes and each has to bear the risks individually with uncertainty and insecurity (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck-Gernsheim, 1998). In relation to changes in the family and gender roles, the large number of women entering paid

work are forced to carry the double burden of work and family as there is little social support for the traditional gendered caring duties. The change to a knowledge and skill based labour market also has an impact on workers with lower levels of skill, who are faced with a lack of job opportunities when they are at the age of building a career and raising a family. Finally, minority groups with little political clout because of weak constituencies will encounter more hardship securing necessary training and education, and especially difficult for women, and for that matter, lone mothers to draw on family care support from the welfare state (Taylor-Gooby, 1999, 2004; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2006; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006).

The study of the perception of risks in post-industrial societies requires a micro approach because the macro theory assumes value-consensus of the society where risks on different social groups are largely unaddressed (Taylor-Gooby, 2001). Various experiences of insecurity in social groups will result in different capacity to cope with risks. Risk is not universal that can be categorized but a complicated perception of danger interpreted through diverse lived experiences (Irwin, Simmons, and Walker 1999; Lash 2000). In the case of Hong Kong society, a rapidly changing society from need to affluence, the traditional welfare dealing with redistribution of inequality through resources reallocation will definitely gain from an additional perspective of the distribution of risks. While the majority of the society no longer struggles with basic needs and has their focus turned towards a better quality of life, inequality is manifested in the more vulnerable minority groups affected by changing gender roles, culture shift and the retrenchment of welfare (Chan, 2011). The micro risk theory will illuminate the link between the change of welfare and risks created to the lone mothers in Hong Kong.

Micro research was conducted to assess the impact of welfare changes on specific groups revealing risk impacts on women and minorities generated by the change in family roles and the labour market (Taylor-Gooby 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006). This line of thinking, both instrumental and contributive, coincides with the logic of this study of the lone mothers in Hong Kong in viewing their lived experience under the confines of traditional family and caring roles and differential treatment in the labour market, without welfare support, caring service and employment opportunities under the neo-liberal regime. On the home front, while working women

with partners suffer a double burden of family and work, the lone mother is in a worse situation as there is only one income in the family. Their view of individualized responsibilities as carers is a result of traditional values and an institutional shift of welfare support by the government. Consequently, further uncertainties, insecurities and risks may be generated when lone mothers, both voluntarily and involuntarily, deal with the risks on their own in deploying coping strategies. For instance, without childcare support, a lone mother may risk leaving an underage child at home while she is working, and risk being prosecuted for a serious criminal offence. The lone mothers' perception of risks in employment is deeply circumscribed as they regard working as an individualized responsibility because productivity in work defines identity in the capitalistic society. If the lone mother decides to subsist on the meager allowance from welfare, she will be stigmatized as a welfare dependent. Despite the financial uncertainties and insecurities, the two choices for making a living on their own are either working in multiple part-time jobs because of the need for flexible hours to run home to perform their caring duties, or biting the bullet and working long hours in exchange for a wage for the family to subsist on, but that will mean that their children will be left alone to fend for themselves while the mother is at work, usually for long hours. Furthermore, there is little job security or benefit attached to part-time or low level workers and the highly competitive market also affect the higher level lone mother workers who are constantly under the pressure of upgrading their skills to stay in the job or climb a higher level. In sum, the complex decision is not a calculative process of 'rationality and rational deliberation' (Elster 1994; 1998; Jaeger et al. 2001; Loewenstein et al. 2001; Pixley 2004), but a range of heuristic responses affected by their beliefs and traditions, and access to knowledge and resources, (Tversky and Kahneman 1981; Abbott, Jones and Quilgars, 2006).

Bearing in mind the discussion of choice in regard to women's double burden of work and care as inequality in the risk society theory (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 1998, Taylor-Gooby 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006), feminists' idea of ethics of care and work (1991) make reference to lone mothers. This restructures the lone mothers' risks primarily not on a market base, collective relations and interpretation about motherhood and employment framework to reinforce the choices they make as far as paid work is concerned. To elucidate the position of lone mothers, feminist

points of view are now examined, focusing on the post-structuralist feminist concept of discursive practice and diversity.

POST-STRUCTURALIST FEMINISM

Poststructuralist feminism sheds light on the social construction of gendered subjectivities and the diversity of the uniqueness of individuals in terms of class, race, ethnicity and age affecting their perception of family risks and coping strategies. An important contribution of this branch was to establish that there is no universal single category of 'woman' and they cannot be categorized as a 'homogenize group' of lone mothers because each individual is situated differently with their social position (May, 2006). Homogeneity is just a discursive illusion to hide the variety of social positions occupied by those who are ascribed to the categorical identity (May, 2006). Lone mothers are women from various class and other backgrounds with different understandings on what a good mother should be. In the case of Hong Kong lone mothers, they are influenced by both traditional Chinese norms and the western culture, so they have multifaceted beliefs on being a 'good mother' and 'ideal worker', which are also based on the risks that they face. As a result, these lone mothers would choose to work or not based on these beliefs or the existence of supportive network from family members such as ex-husband, grandparents, or other family members, and external social network like neighbours. As Duncan and Smith (2002) put it in a different context, there is no 'standard British family' and there is no standard lone mother family as the construction and experience of lone motherhood varies. Similarly, there is no 'standard lone mother family' in Hong Kong. As such, they should not be teleologically categorized surely based on the behavior displayed, and thus the appropriateness of social policies formed on the basis of such categorization is questionable, as traditional categories cannot always understand the welfare needs of each group such as the lone mothers, and social policies would be more effective if they were based on the social positions of individuals (May, 2006).

Work Ethic Discourse

The work ethic discourse, constructed through discursive social practice, uses paid work as the yardstick to measure the individual's value in a capitalist society, and

women are no exception. The discourse of work is so well constructed that it becomes a driving force affecting both men and women. Based on the work ethic concept and the subsequent workfare policy, lone mothers who have to perform the labour of love and care around the clock at home and depend on welfare to subsist are labelled as lazy and stigmatized as the society only recognizes paid work and excludes unpaid and informal work (Kilkey, 2000). Lone mothers are thus encouraged to participate in the labour market in preference to the unpaid work of caring for their children at home. Furthermore, the power of work persuades women to believe that working hard is a virtue and a duty, and a responsibility as citizenship and also an adult worker (Fraser, 1994; Kilkey, 2000; Lister, 1997, 2003; Lister et al., 2007). However, the design of citizenship rights is mostly male labour oriented with the so-called paid labour regarded solely as work, while the value of the unpaid work of household labour is overlooked (Lister, 1997, 2003; Siim, 2000). The dilemma is further complicated by the construction of the 'work ethics' discourse, a patriarchally construed term that 'work' is labour remunerated by income and salary, which is further manifested as being an 'ideal worker' when an individual can no longer rely on the help from helps. However, this neglects the unpaid household 'work' labour in the family (Finch and Groves, 1983). Individuals who do not perform paid work are not protected or entitled to concessions. Lewis (1992, 1997b), Anttonen and Sipila, (1996), Daly (2001), Bettio and Plantenga (2004), Lister (2003), and Lister and Williams et al (2007) point to the fact that citizenship rights involving concessions and entitlements only for the wage earning workers is based on the patriarchal view of the male figure head breadwinner. Lewis (1992, 1997b), further develops the logic of the ability of male breadwinners to control the relationship between paid work and family / care responsibilities in becoming a universal breadwinner model. Individuals, especially the lone mothers who are left with no choice but to stay home, are not deemed productive.

The Chinese patriarchal society believes in the traditional 'Public-men, Private-women' family mode. If for any reason the family becomes a lone one, the lone mother in Hong Kong will have to shoulder dual responsibilities, earning a wage and performing non-paid caring duties. Similar to the concept of work ethics discussed in the previous paragraph. Therefore, only those lone mothers who participate in paid work are entitled to workfare, the welfare available to workers. On the other hand, for

lone mothers who participate in non-paid caring work in the family, their work is devalued and there is no specific welfare for them. Despite rising feminist movements the deep-rooted obstacles for non-paid care duties to be recognized as work have not been overcome.

The work ethic concept places women, especially Hong Kong lone mothers, in a paradoxical situation for either choice they make. However, the pace of shaking off traditional views cannot catch up with the rapid social changes as far as women's work is concerned. Women have to wear two hats, competing to earn paid wages in the public sphere and upholding their domestic duties in the private sphere. For stay at home lone mothers, their labour is not recognized publicly, or they carry a double burden of labouring at home after a long day working in the public sphere (Chan, Yu and Lo, 2012). In some cases, employers undermine the ability of women or are worried that family duties or giving birth would affect working efficiency. In the case of lone mothers, the discrimination worsens as there is no backup support in the family and the employees are likely to compromise work for family emergencies (Chan and Lo, 2016). Deconstructing the rhetoric behind the work ethic, it is crucial to recognize the value of unpaid work so as to bring equality and fairness to women especially the lone mothers in Hong Kong.

Ethics of Care Discourses

The discourse on the ethics of care in its embryonic stage in the 1970s focused on informal care and it has since sparked critiques and paradigm shifts in the development of the topic in sociological studies. In the 80s, there was a paradigm shift from the research of exploitation of women's unpaid labour to the meaning of care, identity and their perception of the world. Gilligan (1982), suggested the difference of rights and responsibility in moral frameworks between men and women in the discussion of ethics of care. Subsequently, Finch (1989) moved the paradigm into the territory of social obligation and its influence on the normative structures regarding care which is based on the Marshall's starting point of equality of citizen rights (Marshall, 1950). Subsequent studies touched on the exploitation of unpaid labour and the essentialistic view of differentiating men and women's rights and responsibilities in providing care as critiqued by Williams (2001). It was not until the turn of the century when

Sevenhuijsen (1998) introduced the universalist paradigm shift; followed by Lister and Williams et al (2007) who established the principle of universality by employing the enthymeme of parental leave policies, which entitle father and mother to time both off for care; thus taking the gender division of care out of the equation of women equals carers. Furthermore, it also secured the right of children to receive parental care. Since social policies have always maintained and influenced the discourse of the ethics of care, Williams (2010) incorporated her discourses of recognition and redistribution to include diversity into specific framework in the making of care policies to give gender equality claimants and unpaid carers visibility, respect and dignity. There is also a redistribution of care responsibilities from families to the state and mothers to fathers; and to provide services toward poorer mothers as well as time from work to care.

In the patriarchal society, parenthood is distinctly divided into motherhood and fatherhood, a symbolic social and cultural constructed meaning, with the latter associated with the primary full-time bread winner in the public sphere while the former fulfils the domestic work in the private sphere. Focusing on the lone mother discussion, the ethics of care discourse centres on the two concepts of 'patriarchy' and 'motherhood', which sets the parameters of caring duties and impacts on relationships. Different groups of women may be exploited by different combinations of public and private patriarchy (Walby, 1986; 1990; Butler, 1990). In the neo-liberal male oriented labour market, very little provision is made to accommodate female workers, overlooking many women are mothers at home and have to fulfil their role in the private sphere as expected under the patriarchal tradition. 'Motherhood', the natural duty of women, is to give birth and take care of children (Guberman, Maheu and Maille, 1992). It is also believed that women become carers due to their need for gender recognition, self-affirmation and emotional attachment (Herbst-Debby, 2018). Taking up the role as a carer is a 'natural' division of labour (Oakley, 1972, 1974). At the same time, women fulfil womanhood through motherhood and by taking up the role as a carer. Women are raised and constructed to take up the role as a carer (Pascall and Kwak, 2005; Einhorn, 2006; Herbst-Debby, 2018). Thus becoming an unpaid carer in the household is generally accepted as 'reasonable' and 'natural' (Graham, 1983). Female carers lose their opportunity to seek a life of their own, and are restricted to caring duties (Ungerson, 1990). In sum, there are three scenarios women

as carers face, focusing on work and shoving the caring responsibilities to institutions or domestic helpers, and resulting in feeling guilty. For women who choose to give up work to look after their family, they suffer financial difficulties or stigmatization if they receive government subsidies. For those who try to integrate work and family, they carry a double burden trying to find work which will accommodate their need to provide care for their children conveniently (Fang and Walker, 2015; Duncan, 2003; Duncan et al., 2003; Duncan and Irwin, 2004; Klett-Davies, 2007).

Duncan's (1991) gendered moral rationality further reinforces the relationship of choice to the perception of motherhood and work responsibility through the discursive practice of neighborhoods, labour market and welfare state regimes (Duncan, 1991, 2003; Duncan and Edwards, 1999, Duncan et al, 2003; Duncan and Irwin 2004). Duncan (1991) points out the uniformity and diversity of motherhood and paid work in his study with Edwards et al (2003). Women's choice are often pulled by gendered moral rationality and a result of social negotiation in context, particularly the network system they live under, which includes family and friends as well as their neighbors. The lone mother risks losing support by insisting on undertaking paid work if her relatives, neighbors and friends regard women's place is physically staying at home to look after children. Meanwhile, the neighborhood she lives in also plays an integral part of the lone mother's systems of beliefs or moralities as they share the same social identity (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Duncan et al, 2003; Duncan, 2003). The state regards childcare, the major responsibility of the carer, as a family affair, not in the public domain (Duncan and Edwards, 1999, Duncan et al, 2003; Duncan and Irwin 2004). Thus, the childcare and community care services are all left to the market. This creates problems for the women who do not have financial support from the husbands or partners to afford childcare services (Leira, 2002) especially in the cases of separated, divorced or widowed women. When these women go on welfare their dependent relationship with the male would shift to the state (Walby, 1990; Williams, 1995).

THE CHANGING NARRATIVE LONE MOTHER FAMILIES IN HONG KONG

Akin to the west, Hong Kong experienced a series of rapid social changes (Chan, 2009). Prior to the 1960s, the term 'lone mother' was, a neutral one bearing no negative connotation, and was generally applied to widowed women with children, deserving of sympathy from society, and therefore handled by charity organizations, and the government played no part in it. Subsequently, rapid social changes saw an increase in divorce, in which the number of divorced women were triple the number of divorced men (Chapter 2). As far as lone parents are concerned, the majority are lone mothers, women devorced with children creating a new family unit, lone mother family. In the 1980s, the open border policy saw an exodus of light industries migrating north to the mainland. Since men were still the breadwinners of the family and women mainly stayed at home as carers, the movement of work location led to men working and playing away from Hong Kong. This resulted in strains on marriages, including reduced communication and time spent together, which caused the divorce rate to increase. Lone mothers became a prominent social problem and the sharp increase in their number needing welfare caused scholars to turn their attention to the issue. They studied the blueprint from the west, and viewed lone mothers from various perspectives including functional, pathological, welfare needs, citizenship and workfare. Recent discussions centre around the social construction perspective on functionalist, pathological, welfare and workfare discourses.

In the 1970s, the functionalist approach was widespread among Hong Kong scholars. For instance, Lau (1978, 1985), influenced by functionalism, stated that 'utilitarian familism' is the basis of social stability. Even though this analysis did not especially focus on lone parent families, it implied that a stable and conventional family (two-parent nuclear or stem family) is important for social stability. To deal with family crises women should avoid conflicts and make personal sacrifices in order to maintain complete and normal family (Lee, 1991: 4). This seems to imply that lone motherhood is not normal in the life course of a family. This perspective was not able to challenge the traditional gender division of labour between men and women; and obscured the fact that women usually have to sacrifice so as to maintain the solidarity of the family.

Therefore, policies that reinforce the ‘family’ very often become policies that reinforce the subordinate role of women in the family (Chan and Leung, 2002).

From the pathological perspective children from lone-parent families tend to turn bad due to the negative impacts on their development. Research conducted by Ng (1975, 1980, 1985), Lee et al. (1990), Lee and Law (1994a, 1994b) in the 1970s and 1990s, linked the causes of juvenile delinquency to family breakdowns, parental disputes and subsequent poor parent-child relationship. They are often perceived as malfunctioning and problem-prone families (Ng, 1980; Young, 1985; Christian Family Service Centre, 1986; Law and Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, 1991). There were challenges made against this one-sided argument in pointing out the institutional elements affecting lone families, which included lone mothers, but with little success (Lau, 1998a, 1998b; Leung, 1998). Furthermore, some researchers even ignored positive findings in lone parent families, but chose to magnify the negative impact (Young, 1985; Christian Family Service Centre, 1986), echoing western debates such as Murray’s (1984, 1990) ‘underclass’ theory.

Not only has the pathological discourse failed to identify the strengths of lone mother families and the factors facilitating their successful adjustment to their circumstances, it also failed to provide any successful model for other lone mother families to follow; instead, the pathological perspective is intensified. At the same time, the sharp increase of the welfare dependence rate of lone parent families has caught the attention of the Hong Kong Government, especially for lone mother CSSA recipients who are further perceived as being unproductive and unable to take care of their families (Chapter 2). This lack of attention to family diversity contributes to negative connotations towards lone mothers and children who are most in need of assistance.

In the 1980s Hong Kong society responded with the recognition of individual welfare entitlement which required additional support or affirmative action so that they could compete effectively in society, or to secure ‘equal’ access to services (Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, 1981; Young, 1985; Law and Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, 1991; Hong Kong Single Parents Association and the Department of Psychology of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004; Coffey, 2004). As the need for social services for lone parent families rose from the early 1980s social

concern was raised especially about children from such families. In the case of lone mothers, due to the belief that they are victims or the ‘vulnerable’ of the society, the government only provides limited services for the most vulnerable groups. For example, government subsidized childcare service is very limited, and is only restricted to the poorest families (Chapter 2). Although this has raised social awareness towards lone mother families, which has subsequently contributed to the development of lone mother services, it has also inadvertently strengthened the social image of lone mothers being ‘weak’, leading to a conclusion that the society provides support to lone mother families out of sympathy.

In addition, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the non-governmental feminist groups in Hong Kong like The Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF) and the Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centres along with groups formed by social workers had endeavored to advocate structural changes to improve women’s position. It was also at this time that the lone mothers became visible and some policies were made in response to their predicament as a result of these Hong Kong socialist feminists’ pleas. Subsequently, an array of welfare policies was established for lone mothers responding to the material inequality within the system. The more prominent problems were the lack of childcare services and the low wages women were making (Chapter 2), which resulted in the fight for more childcare services and higher wages for women so that they could have ample resources to look after the family. However, under the context of the neo-liberal policies, the good intentions were undermined and their demands and arguments were not supported by the general public. The misgivings rested on two beliefs, first with the view that women, lone mothers included, who depended on CSSA were welfare dependent, greedy and possibly cheating individuals (Chapter 2). Second, traditionally it was believed that childcare should be women’s responsibility. Demanding childcare services from the government was ‘irresponsible’. Subsequently, many lone mothers accepted these ways of thinking and stopped fighting for services and regarded that it was an individualized problem to be resolved individually with individual resources. As it turns out, not only was it futile to solve social problems generated through social changes by individual efforts, more problems were created on the horizon. Eventually, despite the sporadic sparks generated by the socialist and feminist advocates for welfare, the society is deeply ingrained with its belief in the work principle, which

results in the construction of the welfare dependent discourse, a public moral panic and labeling effects. From this perspective, even though lone mothers are no longer 'blamed' for being the problem makers, sympathy highlights the vulnerability of the victim group. A distinction is created between the society and this particular group, and their problems are therefore individualized, ignoring the fact that individuals are interconnected with society.

In the 1990s, with the government providing a so-called 'balanced economy' and equal opportunities, it was the individual's responsibility to realize their own worth. To a certain extent the Hong Kong government incorporated the western workfare theory into its welfare system. Evolving from the Third Way theories, after the late 1990s, the society started to develop a negative image towards lone parent families through rhetorical attacks by the media and government ministers (Leung, 1998; Chan and Chan, 2010). Lone parents have been regarded as over-dependent on welfare, not sufficiently active in finding work, and a threat to society. Consequently, many welfare services for lone parent families were reduced. The Third Way approach to social policy stresses workfare instead of traditional social welfare (Giddens, 1998), highlights the social investment function, and promotes the work ethic of responsive citizen and the ability for people to be employed (Levitas, 1998; Lister, 1998, 2004). Many supporters of the workfare discourse in Hong Kong jumped on the bandwagon, including the ex-Financial Secretary, Leung Kam Chung (2001), who adapted the well-known 'Fishing Theory' stating that 'it is better to teach people how to fish than to feed them fish'. The government perceived that helping lone mothers to enhance their earning capacity was more important than offering direct assistance. It was believed that lone mothers should equip themselves with educational credentials and improve their skill level. Consequently, under the market system, they would have a higher chance to be employed and enjoy better life chances. The government's answer to achieving this goal is retraining programs to help the lone mothers to enhance their self-competitiveness. Thus the New Dawn Project was implemented in April 2006 required lone mothers with children aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment in the labour market and work no less than 32 hours per week to earn an approximate minimum of HK\$1,430 a month with the support of some retraining programmes. Failing that, there would be a deduction of HK\$200 from their CSSA. At first glance,

the project is to motivate lone mothers to seek employment and eventually become self-reliant, and serve as a good model for her children.

Accompanying the implementation of the New Dawn Project, the Social Welfare Department reinforced the rationale behind the project, 'working is the best way for employable persons to move towards self-reliance. Through paid employment, one would be able to improve their living, raise their self-esteem and sense of worthiness, build up a social network and set up a good model for their children (Social Welfare Department, 2006: 1), building on the previous idea that 'low pay is better than no pay and CSSA is a safety net and a last resort' (Social Welfare Department, 1998: 14). Despite the claim that the New Dawn Project would be the yellow brick road leading to self-sufficiency, the rhetoric of the 1998 document exposed the government's ulterior goal to get people off CSSA, and used catchy slogans to dissuade the lone mothers from relying on the government; even though this meant that they would have to accept inequity in the job market.

The conception of the dependency culture can be traced back to another document published by the Social Welfare Department, which said that Hong Kong should avoid the possible emergence of a dependency culture in which there is a tendency for some employable adults to consider reliance on welfare assistance a preferred option even when there is employment available (Social Welfare Department, 1998: 5), and stating that welfare services should not create a sense of dependency among the recipients, and reduce their incentives to work (Social Welfare Advisory Committee, 2010: 4).

The existence of a 'dependency culture' among lone mothers is questioned by Leung (1999) who argues that the lone parents receiving CSSA are not voluntary welfare dependents but are the result of the change in economic and family structure in conjunction to the deficits of the social security system. In addition, as there is inadequate support for childcare from the government, many lone parents are not willing to go out to work and leave their children unattended. Instead they stay reliant on CSSA until the children are old enough to look after themselves. Furthermore, despite the efforts lone mothers may have put into finding a job, there is a lack of flexible job opportunities to earn enough to support the family. Therefore, they have no choice between working and getting subsidies from the government (Leung, 1999).

The corollary of the inequitable job market prevents the lone mothers from earning a decent wage to support the family even if they are employed. Subsequently, being left without a choice, many lone mother CSSA recipients are forced to live below the poverty line (Leung, 1998; Leung and Ho, 2002).

The government's emphasis on occupational welfare assumed that welfare recipients, including lone mothers, were unwilling to work. Furthermore, working on the concept of competitiveness, the government advocated retraining in vain because none of the parties involved, the authority, the trainers and the trainees, are committed to the scheme. Fundamentally, the concept of the Third Way lacks a critique of or proposal to reform capitalism (Benington and Donnison, 1999; Powell, 2000) leaving the issue of logical exploitation by capitalists unattended, which is also reflected in the core problems of trying to resolve the lone mother issues in Hong Kong. In reality, the results produced by the training programs are often very limited as the trainees are not able to find jobs with decent pay or employment security. In fact, the government hijacked the concept of the Third Way in favour of individualization and chose to sacrifice social justice (Chan, 2004). As a result, the poorest were further marginalized and penalized.

The paradigm of analysis of the problem of lone mothers in Hong Kong has shifted and is still evolving. In the 1990s, the social construction perspective dominated the critical analysis of lone mothers and questioned how the negative connotation of lone motherhood was socially constructed. For example the research conducted by Leung (1998), Leung and Chan (1998) helped to explain the social construction of the negative images of lone mothers such as being lazy and welfare dependent (Chapter 2). It is further pointed out that the source of lone parent problems is not due to individual inadequacy, but is in fact the production of the social system, social policies and social discourses. The social protection system pushes lone mothers into poverty (Leung, 1998, 1999; Leung and Chan, 1998). The social construction theory of delving into the origins of the problem has sparked sporadic responses which recognize the need to look beyond the archaeology and genealogy of the problem (Chan and Chan, 2010) and to include other possible factors which may influence the lone mother issue.

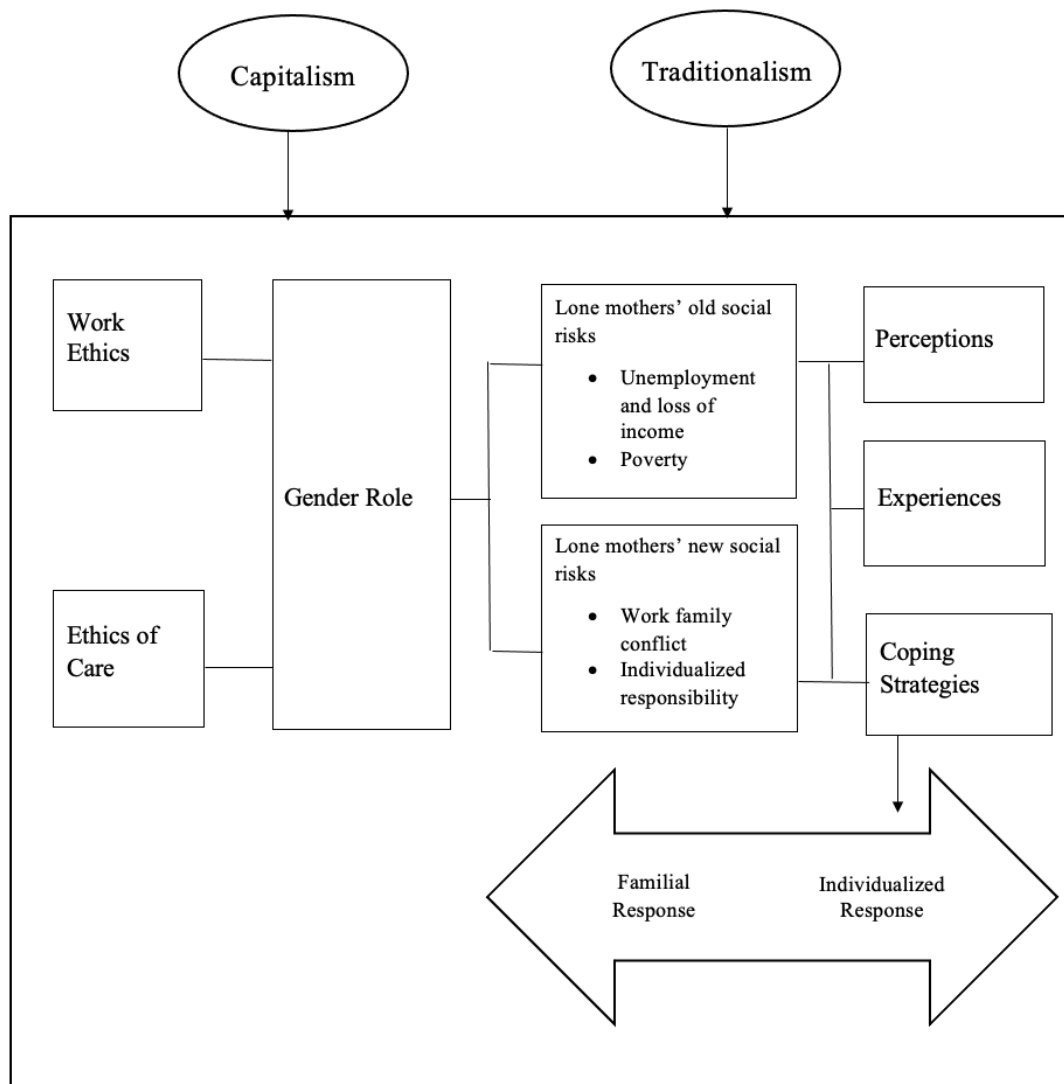
In Hong Kong, patriarchy and motherhood dictate the division of labour in the contexts of language and government policies. To start with, from a linguistic point of view, the phenomenon in Hong Kong is reflected in the society's use of language, a result of constructed knowledge (Foucault, 2002), through which the society is disciplined to adhere to individual roles, and women in Hong Kong are no exception. The language applied to married women in Chinese bears two meanings. First, the relationship prescribed by Confucius is 'man and wife', with man coming before wife. The wife has no identity but is identified through the husband as an attachment. Second, the etymology of the written word for wife in Chinese is 'qi' 妻, defined in the 2nd Century Chinese dictionary as 'subordinate and worker, and taking charge of family affairs is the duty of a wife' (ShuoWen) 《說文》[妻]的解釋為“從女從工，又持事妻職也”。 The prevalence of the term 'qi' in Hong Kong society not only indicates its willingness to adhere to the traditionally constructed knowledge of women's role in the family, but also binds women to practical codes of behavior. Despite the fact that the society of Hong Kong wears a veneer which says that women are liberated from anachronistic traditions towards family duties, underneath, it is layered with intricacy of traditions of a patriarchy society dictating women's value and role in the family, regardless of the precondition of education or participation in the labor market. Indeed, women in Hong Kong live in the world of modernity but within a capsule of traditions. The society, as well as women reflexively, accept their role as carers (Chapter 2). Subsequently, the deep-rooted tradition embedded society in Hong Kong exemplifies the inequality in the gender division of labour. The term 'motherhood' was constructed as a result of the private exploitation of women who become carers in the unpaid labour market of love (Finch and Groves, 1983). Therefore, in the examination of the choices made, it will not be equitable unless Duncan's (1991) gendered moral rationality concept is taken into consideration.

So much so that the women as carers norm is built into the women's moral fibre (Chapter 2). Caring duties are deeply ingrained in women's moral rationality and they accept the rules of the game prescribed by society and discourses to the extent that they submit to the prescription and even become a mechanism of self-surveillance of the system. Despite the fact that many women have taken up paid work as a way of contributing to childcare, the gendered moral rationality adumbrates a guilt factor,

especially for lone mothers through discursive practice from neighbours, friends and family and the lack of state support for childcare (Chan, Yu and Lo, 2012). Working lone mothers are pressurized by families, especially the older generation, for neglecting their children at home and choosing to work long hours as the market prescribes while non-working lone mothers is scorned by neighbors in a working class neighborhood for not making an effort to work and be independent of welfare. Regardless of the choice to take up paid work or not, both working and non-working lone mothers are bounded by gendered moral rationality to play the role of carers (Chan and Lo, 2016).

Lone mothers in Hong Kong face a bleak outlook. The work ethic discourse of the increasingly hyper-capitalistic society pushes individuals to the extreme while the traditional ethics of care discourse shackles women into believing that it is their lone responsibility in childcare. Therefore, the notion that the lone mothers' choice is a rational choice that can be negotiated by individuals is not accurate since there are no alternatives or support to allow for individual negotiations.

Figure 3.1: Framework of Analysis



FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The present analysis of the lone mothers' perceptions and coping strategies originates from the risk society theory (Beck 1992). According to Beck, detraditionalization is one of the areas women are emancipated from traditional norms, allowing them in a position to make life choices and create self-biography. The detraditionalization concept is reinforced by the concept of the institutionalization of individualism, which shifts responsibilities of the state to the individual. Under such circumstances, what seemed rational calculating decisions is in fact the individual's voluntary compulsion trying to respond to life situations within arbitrary parameters. It is also argued that not only has risk cut across class, further risks are generated under the thrust of

capitalism whereby individuals are compelled to the idea of the production of wealth. When confronted with work and caring duties, women bear a double burden (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). As a macro theory, Beck's view accounts for women's position in universality but falls short in fully disclosing the women's experience in diversified social locations. The study of lone motherhood in Hong Kong requires an examination of the degree of detraditionalization and individualization in an endemic sense, which affects their perception and coping strategies to the risks they face. Consequently, the idea of new social risks (Taylor-Gooby 1999, 2001, 2004; Bonoli, 2005; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006) and associated changes in family and gender roles, the labour market and state retrenchment, are employed to view the experience and decision making processes of lone mothers in the current of detraditionalization and individualization, with a focus on work and care, socially and discursively constructed as 'ideal' worker and 'good' mother (Herbst-Debby, 2018). Duncan (1991, 2003; Duncan and Edwards, 1999, Duncan et al, 2003; Duncan and Irwin 2004) and Walby (1990), Williams (1995) and May (2006) supplement the discussion and delve into the lone mother issue in respect to motherhood, the ethics of work and care and gendered moral rationality. The lone mothers' decisions are indeed a highly complex negotiation process, and not merely a rational choice. In a broader sense, the social location, knowledge and accessibility to resources are key factors affecting the lone mothers' experience (Abbott, Jones and Quilgars, 2006). The framework crystallised gender issues around the idea of gender norms, a systematic favouring of male or masculine over female or feminine, which perpetuates a hierarchy of power and privilege, and reinforces an entrenched inequality that restricts opportunities for woman and girls, undermines their rights, and limits their capacity for self-realisation. Although systematic gender norms are not fixed – they do transform under social pressure, social policies and the everyday choices of people who endeavour to oppose those prevalent norms i.e. by the exercise of empowered agency. Grounding the issue, the post-structuralist feminist perspective is added to reflect the reality constructed by discursive practice in the traditional society of Hong Kong its effect on the lone mothers. In turn, the lone mothers' responses also reveal the diversity in perception and the result of reflexivity with the participation of the subject.

CONCLUSION

The review of the various perspectives on the situation of lone mothers in advanced industrial societies including Hong Kong demonstrated that this particular group is in a disadvantageous position in both the labour market and the family. Not only are they adversely affected by rapid social changes, but they are also heavily bounded by residuals of traditions in the dominantly Chinese society. Research indicates that the lone mothers in Hong Kong are in a precarious predicament having to carry the double burden of making ends meet and caring for children without kinship and institutional supports. The various perspectives include functional, pathological, workfare and welfare discourses. The former three perspectives lean towards blaming the victim and causing the problems of lone mothers to be individualized. The welfare discourse serves to spark off the awareness and recognition of the needs of the lone mothers. However, in the process of securing more resources through government welfare, lone mothers are portrayed as a weak group deserving sympathy from society, leaving them still in a victim status. Considering the fact that past approaches to alleviate the situation has not been able to tackle the root of the problem, a critical post-structuralist risk framework is employed. The difficulties lone mothers face in work and caring duties will not be alleviated until a more equitable solution is found while risks are continuously procreating in the process of social changes.

In sum, searching for a more equitable way to view the problems of lone mother in Hong Kong, it is necessary to understand the rationale behind their perceptions and coping strategies. Individualized discourses are deeply ingrained in women's perception of the responsibilities of care and work. In addition, social and institutional constraints perpetuate and reinforce the individualization of responsibilities. Together, tradition and discourse structure the lone mothers' experience, which in turn blueprints their individualized coping strategies. When dealing with individual problems, the lone mothers will employ individual methods and resources which may involve taking further risks. Consequently further problems may be created. In digging into the roots of lone mothers' perceptions and coping strategies, we pinpoint the circumstances which place them in the predicament in the first place.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter various theoretical perspectives on lone motherhood were examined, which led to the conclusion that they tend to individualize responsibility and overlook both the structural constraints on lone women and their subjectivity. In order to avoid the trap of blaming the victim and explicate the social environment whereby the risks and the lone mothers' perceptions of them are constructed, and their coping strategies deployed, critical perspectives from risk society and post-structuralist feminism were employed in this research. Subsequently, with the framework of the analysis established, it was necessary to choose a research paradigm conducive to the investigation. In this chapter, three research paradigms – positivism, interpretivism and critical theory – are considered with regard to their ontological and epistemological methodological positions. In order to understand and describe the lone mothers' perception of risks resulting from diversified and subjective individual experiences, feelings and personal views, the critical paradigm was chosen because it reveals the subjective reality that exists in their lived experiences and social practices. The ontological and epistemological positions under the critical paradigm are discussed in the following pages.

Under the critical paradigm the feminist perspective views issues from a woman's point of view. Traditional research methods on women's issues have always been gender biased deriving the interdependency of theory of knowledge on society, culture and politics chiefly from men's lived experience. In doing so, the male species is treated as the prototype, and study results have been regarded as a universal norm, upon which theories are built. At the same time, women have been constructed as the 'other'. Men's way of thinking, objectively abstract, logical rationing, has long been equated to knowledge and theory while rejecting any subjective thinking related to women. The drawback of such perspectives include overlooking the process of development of both sexes and their respective experiences under restrictive social structures which tend particularly to undermine and constrain women's development.

Such views limit researchers, research topics and the direction of the research, methodology, the data collected and its analysis. Therefore, the feminist perspective, within which post-structuralist feminism is situated, was essential in this study of lone mothers in Hong Kong.

The qualitative methodology involved data collection from in-depth interviews based on semi-structured guidelines. A detail discussion on the qualitative thematic analysis, the research design and ethics, methodological difficulties and sampling limitations are also presented in this chapter.

RESEARCH PARADIGMS

THE BASIS OF THE STUDY

The objective of the research was to reveal the perceptions of and coping strategies towards the risks faced by lone mothers in Hong Kong. The conceptual framework was defined and oriented upon the new social risk, and post-structuralist feminist perspectives in order to study the dimensions of risks without categorizing the lone mothers as a homogeneous group. The dimensions of new social risks interwoven with subjectivity and objectivity, encompass social circumstances and environment, family, marriage, caring duty and work. To accommodate the philosophical underpinnings of the study, a discussion on ontology and epistemology follows with regard to the methodology and methods of the research paradigm.

Among the three paradigms of research explored by Scotland (2012) – positivist, interpretivist and critical theory – this study of lone mothers employed the critical paradigm in order to explore their perceptions and coping strategies as they are related to human behaviour and experience. In examining the various paradigms, the positivists focus on a reality existing ‘out there’ independent of the knower (Cohen et al. 2007) and unmediated by our senses. The positivists’ objective reality does not take into account human behaviour and experience. As a result, no scientific explanation of human behaviour is ever complete (Berliner 2002; Blume and Peipert 2003), and therefore, not employed for this study of lone mothers.

In contrast, the interpretive researcher considers reality as a construction of the human mind. Bassey (1990) asserts that the purpose of the interpretive paradigm is to interpret phenomena, or to search for deep perspectives and theoretical insights, an entirely subjective approach for interpretation which does not take into account objective and structural factors. The interpretive paradigm may have explicated the subjective perspectives of the lone mothers, yet it would fail to reveal the structural constraints existing in the society, thus lacking in fulfilling the aims of this research.

Finally, the critical paradigm approaches reality as socially constructed but with consideration to social structure, economic, political and cultural context, which minors the environment the lone mothers in Hong Kong are situated within. Taylor-Gooby (2004) points to socially constructed risks in addition to structural and situated risks (Chapter 3). In other words, the paradigm helps to explicate the lone mothers' response to risk contributing to the circular process of social construction. Ultimately, it is also the hope of the researcher to function as a catalyst for change aimed at mediating the risks the lone mothers are facing. Such were the considerations surrounding the application of the critical paradigm in this study.

CRITICAL ONTOLOGY

The critical ontological position is anchored in historical realism, the belief that reality is shaped by individuals with social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values (Scotland, 2012). Language, capable of empowering and weakening, is used to shape social construction (Scotland, 2012; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Neuman, 2006; Agger, 1991). The lone mothers' reality, perceptions and how they cope with risks are to a large extent shaped by powerful language in gendered social practice. The language used to categorise and restrict lone mothers includes 'welfare dependent', 'abandoned', 'good mother' and 'ideal worker' (Chapter 3). Such terms are also received by the lone mothers who subjectively and actively participate in the social norms involved in the construction of the self. The positivist paradigm sees only the objective reality independent of its human connection, regarding language itself merely as a representation of the objective world and, thus, has no other function aside from this designated one. This viewpoint fails to account for the circulatory effect of language in the process of social construction and its relationship to human

behaviour, and subsequently hides the relationship between structure and agency. With the interpretive paradigm the pendulum swings to the ontological position of subjectivity and individuality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretive reality is constructed through the individual's senses and in turn creates individual meanings. During the course of social interaction, individual meanings amalgamate to construct through language a reality independent of the objective world. The interpretive ontological position fails to take into consideration the objective reality already constructed through human activities over time. The lone mother question in Hong Kong is indeed a combination of an existing structurally constructed reality and a continuously mutual reinforcement of individual meaning (Chapter 3). For this reason the critical ontological position is appropriately applied to study the various dimensions of issues surrounding the risks facing lone mothers.

CRITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Critical epistemology is a type of subjectivism in that it links the real world phenomena subjectively with societal ideologies. The belief is that knowledge is socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society (Scotland, 2012, p. 13). Knowledge is determined and advocated by individuals with social and positional power (Cohen et al, 2007; Cohen et al, 2011). The study of lone mothers reveals the inequality and constraints they face through the ethic of care and work advocated by a capitalistic society and government (Chapter 3). The society at large, including the lone mothers, jointly create the knowledge which is embedded within inequalities. However, instead of being value free, the critical paradigm carries its values and tries to establish a normative framework of justice and equality (Carspecken, 2008; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Alvesson and Sandberg 2013). Different theoretical perspectives of critical inquiry seek to tackle injustice and inequality. The post-structuralist feminist point of view is one of those theoretical perspectives, and, within it, this study of lone mothers aims at an emancipatory function.

The positivist epistemology is one of objectivism in which knowledge is absolute and objectively exists in the real world without the input of values. The belief is of a value free knowledge not situated in historical and political contexts (Scotland 2012;

Neuman, 2006; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009), and the researcher and the researched are independent from each other. On the contrary lone mothers exist in a mutually constructed social context. The knowledge obtained is from the objective structural reality and a subjective mutual construction of individuals. For this reason the positive epistemology was not adopted in this research.

Interpretive epistemology is one of subjectivism based on real world phenomena, in which meaning is constructed through the interaction between consciousness and the world (Scotland 2012; Bryman 2004). Interpretists believe that knowledge is a consensus reached through the participation and co-construction of various people in various ways in a historically and culturally situated context. Researchers rely on the interviewees to find meaning and deeming value free knowledge not possible. The emphasis is not on structural reality, such as where lone mothers encounter risks. Moreover, the interpretive paradigm does not concern ideologies but accepts their meaning. As discussed in Chapter 3 on the topic of the ethics of care and work in regard to lone mothers, ideologies under the influence of capitalism and patriarchy are perpetually constructed by participants in the society. In this context, it is necessary to adopt the critical paradigm which examines both structure and agency.

CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

The relationship of ontology and epistemology to methodology and methods in research is one of justification. In the scientific paradigm, reality is the knowledge created, acquired and communicated based on the objective existence of the world. It relies on a quantitative amount of proof and facts to predict and generalize in a deductive approach. Thus, the quantitative methodology is undertaken. On the other hand, the interpretive paradigm believes that reality is constructed and interpreted by individuals and various ways of the world. Interpretive knowledge relies on individual perspectives in historical and cultural contexts, an interaction between consciousness and phenomenon (Scotland 2012; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009; Alvesson and Sandberg 2013, Agger 1991). It calls for in-depth case studies as in qualitative methodology. Finally, in the critical paradigm reality is a structure mutually co-constructed by individuals. Knowledge relies on socially constructed ideologies which are constantly influenced by internal forces of power relations revealed in the

analysis of individual experiences. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to engage in a dialectical task with the interviewees in unveiling the reality of structural and discourse injustice (Scotland 2012; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009; Alvesson and Sandberg 2013; Blaikie 2000). In the individual interview, semi-structured questions induce the free-flow of information, and follow-up questions provide additional insights. The dialogue may lead to reflection which may in turn instigate change. The researcher will be able to assess the data collected and analyse it critically to create new knowledge. In this study of the perceptions and coping strategies of the lone mothers in Hong Kong the qualitative approach was applied to obtain rich in-depth data for analysis under various theoretical perspectives. Instead of positivism's prediction and generalization based on a large quantity of evidence gathered from a quantitative research method, or the interpretivist focus on the interpretation of reality from qualitative methods, this research adopted the critical paradigm to study the individual's experience amidst a socially constructed reality. The two research methods are not mutually exclusive in the critical paradigm as the quantitative approach provides a basis to reveal phenomena in the structure, for example, the distribution of income, age and educational background of the lone mothers, while the qualitative approach provides in-depth understanding of the individual experiences in context. Nevertheless, the researcher looked closely at the relevance of the quantitative data obtained. Ultimately, it is not a battle of quantitative versus qualitative research methods in any research, but a matter of the application of the data collected for analysis. Furthermore, the feminist perspective is one of the theoretical perspectives which uses the critical paradigm in research. The post-structuralist feminist perspective was chosen to reveal gender inequality and structural power relationships.

FEMINIST RESEARCH

In any research on lone mothers a feminist perspective is pertinent to balance the traditionally gender biased research norm and fully reveal the reality of women's lives. It has been suggested that traditional social research is framed under a patriarchal mindset, thus reproducing and exerting patriarchal dominance in the findings (Stanley and Wise, 1983; Reinharz, 1983; Eichler, 1988; Harding, 1987; Stanley, 1990; Hesse-Biber, and Leckenby, 2004b). Mainstream sociological studies are often gender blind,

yet there is no single feminist epistemology or methodology (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, and Yaiser, 2004a). Despite the lack of feminist research tools, the feminist approach is in itself an epistemological act (Hesse-Biber, 2013; Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin, and Lydenberg, 1999) in the production of knowledge. However, the focus of this research is not on the epistemological act. Instead the feminist perspective is added as an analytical angle to balance the ways in which gender bias can impact upon the choice of research programme, strategy and mode of analysis (Hesse-Biber, 2013).

Debate on Three Feminist Positions

In the application of a feminist approach there is a progression of positions gradually added to research related to women's issues. There are three main positions in the feminist approach, empiricism, standpoint and post-structuralism. Amidst the controversial debates within these positions, this research employed the post-structuralist approach to compensate for the critique of the first two approaches. To start with, the empiricist position is an add-on of women's experiences and perspectives aiming to correct the androcentric bias existing across all disciplines. It can be viewed as a different concoction but the same old medicine since this sort of research follows traditional methodology. Consequently, the added perspective only serves to partially satisfy the demand of a feminist viewpoint but fails to change the substance of the research (Hesse-Biber, 2012, 2013; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

The 'feminist standpoint epistemology borrows from the Marxist and Hegelian idea that individuals' daily activities or material and lived experiences structure their understanding of the social world' (Hesse-Biber, 2013, p.11). As women are structurally oppressed in the male dominant society, the oppressed in the oppressor and oppressed relationship (Hesse-Biber, 2013, p.11) will be able to provide fuller insights into society as a whole. When the feminist standpoint is taken further to uphold essentialism, the idea that only women are able to effect women's issues is emphasized. Inadvertently, this feminist standpoint approach falls into the same pitfall of pre-constructing knowledge by placing women as the oppressed and men as the oppressors, thus replacing the androcentric bias with a gynocentric bias. Furthermore, Cixous and Clement (1986) and Kristeva (1984) were accused by social

constructionists of 'biological essentialism, of establishing the female body and maternity as foundational and symbolic sources of woman's psychic and sexual difference', limiting the researchers to females only; whereas post-structuralist critics (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009), such as Butler (1990, 1993), expose even the materiality of the body as 'already gendered, already constructed' (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin, and Lydenberg, 1999, p.4).

Post-structuralist Feminist Research

Contrary to the standpoint and empiricist feminist view, the post-structuralist feminist perspective views gender as a social and discursive construction, which is limited in time and space and therefore shifting and problematic in nature. Post-structuralist feminist incorporates Foucault's concept of language in which discursive practice is embedded in language, and within which the power relationship of discourse reproduces itself with the added dimension of subjectivity (Gannon and Davies, 2012). Discursive construction is a matter of power and its assertion in the interpretation of reality. It is not merely language but an intersection of power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, control of population and the modern state constituting systems of thoughts and subsequent actions. Power goes along with knowledge which is not hierarchical, but it proceeds as a capillary, spreading through subjects. The process of reproduction is imbricative, carrying the discourse with added ideology of the individual. Despite the criticism that extreme positions are sometimes taken to avoid generalization or falling into normative patterns, the researcher has chosen to emphasize the concept of diversity to understand the multiplicity and equivocality of women's unique and distinct experiences and interests (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009, p. 240). Amidst rapid social changes, women have been caught by the double-edged sword of discursive construction: good mother and ideal worker (Chapter 3). The intersection of power in these two slogans underscores the tradition of a patriarchal society whereby women's total devotion to the family is revered, and a male oriented capitalistic society's thirst for MANpower resources to include women. Subsequently, individual experiences of lone motherhood, one of the topics of this study, relies on the lone mothers' subjectivity of reality depending on the individual's diversified social location.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the lone mothers' main concerns, the ethics of care and work are socially constructed. The ethics of care are directly linked to motherhood, gendered moral rationality which acts as a guiding principle for women (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Duncan et al, 2003; Duncan, 2003). The parameters of motherhood entail a power relationship of patriarchy and tradition (Walby, 1990). As a result, motherhood is a gendered concept constructed over time and social practices (Pascall and Kwak, 2005; Einhorn, 2006), and hence contingent on temporal and spatial discursive situations, which guides the women's perceptions and coping responses (Chapter 3). An added facet of social practice under the capitalistic ideology is the ethics of work under which individuals are constructed to define identity through productivity (Chapter 3). Despite the fact that men were originally targeted as breadwinners and workers in the public sphere, women have been persuaded to participate in the work force by the concept of citizenship with the connotation of virtue and duty and responsibility (Fraser, 1994; Kilkey, 2000; Lister, 1997, 2003; Lister and Williams et al., 2007). Even though the lone mothers exist within the same social practice, their social location such as class, age, ethnicity and religion, demarks diversity in the perception of risk and coping responses (May, 2006). Consequently, the diverse nature of subjectivity cannot be categorized and studied as a group, but an individual in-depth qualitative data collection method is required in the research to reveal gender inequality and power relationships which are elusive and hidden behind structures, and often embedded in personal discourses.

Post-structuralist Feminism in Practice

In Hong Kong in the 1970s, the dominant trend was that women were seldom chosen as research subjects as they were viewed under the encirclement of the family unit headed by a male figure. In the 1980s, the existence of lone mothers at that time was ignored or disguised as pathological. In the 1990s, researchers took into consideration structural factors, which resulted in the emergence of the welfare entitlement discourse focusing on the needs of deprived groups. However, following the norm of traditional research the missing link of a woman's point of view on women's issues still remained (Chan, 1997 and Leung, 1998). In this research, to understand the social reality of lone mothers, it was important to view their perspective from their position as women through qualitative research rather than a statistical survey approach, which will be

discussed in detail in the section on methods. In order to admit women's unique and contextual experience as knowledge (Smith, 1987; Stanley, 1990; Stanley and Wise, 1983), the researcher also acknowledges that subjectivity and value judgments from a feminist point of view have been employed to add dimensions to the study, which is not to say that the research sacrificed its objectivity and receptivity to understand social reality. In practice, the gender dimension added was a feminist point of view, which encompassed three main spheres. First, women are the central research issue (Eichler and Lapointe, 1985), lone mothers in Hong Kong. Feminist subjectivity was added to the research centering on lone mothers' perceptions and coping strategies towards different risks their families face. Secondly, the issue of emotional involvement versus detachment, a contentious issue in both feminist research and traditional research, will be addressed here. Aiming to conduct a friendly interview where mutual trust could be developed between the interviewee and the interviewer, it is necessary for emotional involvement on both sides (Hesse-Biber, 2012), so that in depth experiences and feelings can be revealed (Oakley, 1981); which the hierarchical traditional interview technique cannot accommodate. In the case of lone mothers in Hong Kong, who are already marginalized by social stigmatization, it was essential that they felt that they were received with empathy which might, hopefully, help to empower them to speak about their identities in spite of stigmatization (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Oakley, 1981; Eichler and Lapointe, 1985).

RESEARCH METHODS

The overall aim of this research was to explore the situation of lone mothers in Hong Kong, their perceptions of and coping strategies towards the everyday risks they face, and to review the effectiveness of government policies towards this group of women. Three main research questions guided this study:

1. What is the current situation and status of the lone mothers in Hong Kong who are divorced or separated in relation to three dimensions namely, marriage, family and social and economic environment?
2. What risks are the lone mothers facing and how do they perceive and respond to them?

3. How effective are the policies implemented by the Hong Kong government in tackling the problems faced by lone mother families?

The structural phenomena have been furnished with census data through quantitative enquires by the government. This study focused mainly on the subjectivity of participants. Therefore, both normative and qualitative methods have been applied to understand the subjective reality of the lone mothers' lived experiences, which includes their perceptions, individual experiences, feelings and subjective views on the dimensions in family, marriage, employment and caring. The qualitative research method looks at social life from multiple points of view and explains how people construct identities (Neuman, 2006; Gilbert, 2001; Bryman, 2004). Typically, the lone mothers identified themselves as abandoned women. Some were in fact abandoned by their husbands while others believed that they were forced into a divorce by the husbands' behavior and had no other choice. The unfortunate status was not only taken on by the lone mothers themselves but reinforced by their friends and relatives, and society at large, affecting their self-esteem, prospects for work and future relationships and the stigmatization of their children. It also sees most areas of social life as intrinsically qualitative borrowing ideas from people they study and places them in context (Neuman, 2006, Gilbert, 2001; Bryman, 2004, Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). In the Hong Kong context, facets of the lone mothers' social life were reflected through individual utterance of experiences. On the one hand, they coincided with each other to form a general consensus, yet on the other hand, the individual experiences entangled in degrees and dimensions which only an in-depth qualitative approach could disentangle. Under the label of abandonment, the familial conservative lone mother might blame herself for not being able to please her husband while the individualized conservative lone mother might tell a completely different story that she was abandoned because of the husband's extra-marital affair. The use of questionnaires found in quantitative research leads to more objective, less nuanced results, and leaves the researcher detached from the data, as well as distant from the interviewees. A qualitative approach was adopted to obtain an in-depth understanding of the interviewee's perspectives. Some human behaviour cannot be understood through statistics as it is a direct consequence of diversified and subjective lived experiences.

The use of semi-structured qualitative interviews has proved ideal to collect individual's subjective feelings and experiences of the lone mothers who have been invited to tell their stories. Their narrations have a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). For instance, in the matter of education, the general concern was winning at the starting line. However, the lone mothers would volunteer full pictures of their desire for achievement in bringing up an academically successful child, the only upward mobility out of poverty, and even insurance having a successful child to look after them in old age. The qualitative approach allowed understanding into the perception of the lone mothers through the language they used to portray their life stories, experiences and practices related to risk discourses. Spontaneous and additional questions were asked so that the interviewees could elaborate on their accounts. The housing risk was a case in point whereby the familial lone mothers equated the house to the home and the nuclear of the family, while the individualized lone mothers regarded the house as a shelter and base to work out of. Upon further questioning, different concerns were found according to the class locations of the lone mothers. In short, the qualitative approach has made possible an in-depth understanding of lone mothers' experiences, perception and responses around risks.

When applying the critical paradigm research method change occurred in the process of data collection, in both the interviewees and the researcher (Scotland, 2012, Neuman 2006; Bryman 2004). When the interviewees narrated their stories, questions would be raised about the unequal status they experienced. The researcher would then relate their questions to social context to add another dimension to their thinking. One of the examples is self-blame. Several lone mothers questioned why women were always to blame in a divorce instead of the men. The researcher would suggest viewing from the angle of tradition and how it has contributed to the issues. It would become clear how they had been shaped to accept the inferiority of women. As a result, some would reduce the degree of self-blame while others would understand but remain feeling that it is inevitable. On the side of the researcher, that would be a confirmation of the hegemony of tradition and its deep rootedness in Hong Kong society.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

In practical terms, a qualitative inquiry was employed and the information was gathered through individual in-depth interviews instead of focus groups. The in-depth interviews encompassed extended accounts of lived experiences in context through a process of narration. Located within the qualitative paradigm, the in-depth method often involves a series of multiple interviews with the same interviewees, a good way to collect unwritten verbal experiences of eyewitnesses (Coffey, 2004). These history data 'should be located and analyzed within their social contexts' (Witherall and Noddings 1991). In-depth interviews are also conducted to help understand the social world from the perspectives of the interviewees. Coffey (2004) also argues that qualitative in-depth interviewing can be an opportunity for genuine collaboration between researchers and researched, and for the giving of voice to otherwise 'invisible' lives. In this study, the in-depth interviews allowed the collection of full story and life patterns of the lone mothers, giving a substantial voice to their 'invisible' lives. Consequently, the series of interviews extracted a form of oral history from eyewitnesses through the genuine collaboration of the interviewer and interviewees. The information collected is essential and productive towards subsequent studies and analysis of the research. Instead of using focus groups which allowed the interactions between interviewees to generate different viewpoints, the use of individual in-depth interview allowed the interviewer to touch on sensitive topics, such as taboo of sex, marriage, remarriage, and finance. The lone mothers were probably more at ease to disclose their feelings and point of views in a private setting with regards to marriage, family, employment and caring duties. The hesitations in the beginning were eventually overcome in the private setting.

At the operational level, a semi-structured format was used to help the interview stay on course in gathering accounts of individual lone mothers' experiences, thoughts, and perceptions in various dimensions set out by the researcher. However, there were no particular guideline or schedule for the entire discussion. The questions could be altered and follow up questions asked to reveal deeper meanings of the lone mothers' experience. For example, in the area of gender role, the research would enquire whether the man help out with household chores, and then allow a free flow of complaints depicting what the division of labour was within the family. The added

information would enrich the in-depth analysis to the research question. The researcher acted primarily as a listener and said very little to allow a free-flow and connected account of the lone mother's experience. Occasionally, the researcher would make comments to ensure the narration continued in a meaningful pattern and to avoid the inclusion of random and disconnected events. In such cases, the researcher would bring back the relevant subject so that the interview would continue on a relevant course.

In the initial stage of recruiting the lone mother interviewees, a contact person would make an initial inquiry and explain the research objectives in brief to potential participants. Willing participants were then contacted by the researcher personally via telephone to explain the purpose of the research, questions anticipated, approximate duration, recording and note taking in the interview. The researcher would also emphasize the confidentiality of personal data and the identities of the interviewees. They were also explained the voluntary nature of the interviewees that no remuneration or compensation would be awarded, and volunteers were free to stop the interviews at any time. Finally, the interviewees were given the name and contact phone number and address of the research supervisor, Professor Alan Walker, if there were any concerns about the interviews.

Ideally, there would have been several interviews with each respondent but, given time and resource constraints, only one interview was conducted with each lone mother. In addition, a pre-interview telephone call was made to break the ice and begin to develop a familiar relationship, so that the interviewee became more at ease and in volunteering their recounts during the interview. Focusing on family, marriage, work and caring duties dimensions, each interviewee was asked about their perception of risks and coping strategies.

The interviews were then scheduled at the interviewees' convenience respecting their lifestyle and time restrictions in their caring duties. Provisions were made for rescheduling to suit the interviewees as necessary. In addition, all the interviews were conducted in the local dialect – Cantonese, and, with permission, taped and transcribed to preserve precision and accuracy for subsequent analysis. In addition, a written

interview summary with preliminary analysis and reflections was performed to capture the real time experience.

To protect the interviewees' privacy and anticipated emotional responses, public places such as fast food restaurants were not chosen for interviewing venues. Instead, the interviews were conducted either at a familiar NGO private office or the Polytechnic University private interview rooms, with the intention to provide a private setting in case there were emotional moments when the interviewee recalled difficult experiences. As far as security was concerned, the researcher endeavoured to adhere to safety measures when conducting the interviews. Family members and the local supervisor were notified as to when and where such interviews were conducted.

RESEARCH DESIGN

SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES

As the focus of the study was on the strategies adopted by divorced or separated lone mothers in coping with risks related to family, marriage, work and caring duties, the researcher attempted to locate 'suitable cases' reflecting a range of problems they might encounter. There were difficulties in identifying suitable cases because the population of lone mothers in Hong Kong is scattered and invisible. In addition, they were often reluctant to disclose their lone status since divorce or raising a child without a father is still a taboo in Chinese society. The first attempt at locating the lone mothers was via NGOs which provide general family services including lone mothers and their children, and NGOs which provide services to lone parents exclusively, including new immigrant lone mothers from the mainland. The researcher initiated contacts with relevant organizations and explained the objectives of the research. The organizations were asked to post recruitment notices for volunteer lone mothers who were interested in the subject. The role of the NGOs was to alert their clients about the research and establish contact. Secondly, some of my colleagues and friends also spread the word about the research and helped connect suitable volunteer lone mothers who were interested in the topic. Most of the lone mothers connected were willing to participate as they felt it was an issue concerning their welfare and it was a worthwhile cause. However, as most of the lone mothers were pressed for time, with caring and

paid work responsibilities, occupying their time without remuneration cut into their earnings and took time from their caring duties.

The study adopted a semi-structured and individual in-depth interview method. The interviews were held between April 2017 and October 2017 with 31 lone mothers participating in the research. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers, encouraging them to feel free to share their experiences of family, marriage, work and caring duties for their children. Small talk and non-judgmental tone was used to smooth the hierarchy relationship between interviewer and interviewee. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The recorded interviews were analysed thematically, based on thematic extraction from the interviewees' texts.

The research contained 31 lone mothers from a diversity of backgrounds (Table 4 and Appendices B and C). The specific focus of this research was on lone motherhood resulting from divorce or separation created by family breakdowns. The second criterion for interviewee selection was the duration of lone motherhood status, which did not exceed a period of ten years. An endeavor to obtain an even spread of time spent alone was made as those who have been lone mothers for a shorter period may face more difficulties, while those divorced for a longer period of time may have developed better coping strategies. Those who have been lone mothers for over 10 years were not considered at this time, recognizing that some memory of the difficulties, struggles, and coping strategies in the early years of their lone motherhood might have been lost. The third consideration was the age of the interviewees. The research included lone mothers from the age of 25 to 49 years old, a period considered to be the productive years as a mother and worker. They were divided into four categories, which were related to the age range of their children and their income level.

Finally, the age of the children of the lone mothers is also important as younger children require more care and guardianship than older ones, which also affects the decision of going through with a divorce by women who are still married, as a lot of considerations related to their younger children may need to be attended to while the older children will spend more time with their peers, and less time with their mothers, a less demanding factor in deciding whether to stay in the marriage or get a divorce.

Interviews were conducted with lone mothers who were divorced within ten years for two reasons. First, the experience is likely to be fresh and intact, and second, the first years are crucial when the lone mothers have to adapt to the new life. As such, the research mainly included lone mothers with children aged from 0 to 12 years and from 13 to 18 years.

The number of children aged under 6 was 10, 20 were between 7 and 12, 7 between 13 and 15, 6 between 16 and 18, and 8 were over 19 years of age. Their household income ranged from HK\$5,300 (£ 530) to HK\$42,000 (£ 4,200), and the main sources of income were earnings from employment or business, alimony, family support and CSSA. While 17 of them were working either full-time (15) or part-time (2) and not on CSSA, 10 of them were unemployed and were CSSA recipients. The remaining four lone mothers were on reduced CSSA because they had part-time jobs. The lone mothers' education backgrounds varied with four primary level, nineteen secondary school level and eight with tertiary education. Thirty of them were Hong Kong residents except for one who was a 'Two-Way-Permit' holder from the mainland. In fact, there were originally two 'Two-Way-Permit' holders from the mainland, but one of them had a sick child and received special permission from the Immigration Department to get a permanent Hong Kong resident permit so that she could take care of her child in Hong Kong. The non-resident lone mother looked after her child in Hong Kong but had to return to the mainland to renew her permit every six months. However, the non-resident lone mother was neither allowed to work nor qualified for CSSA, and she basically lived off her children's CSSA.

Due to the fact that lone mothers who were never-married or widowed were not involved in family breakdowns, they were not included in this research. However, I strongly recommend further studies on these two groups of lone mothers in the future (Chapter 8). Lone parenthood encompasses a variety of family units such as lone fathers and ethnic minority lone mothers. However, the world-wide issue of lone fathers is itself a subject prominent enough to warrant separate research. The study of ethnic minority lone mothers in Hong Kong also involves a unique parameter of understanding as to their culture, religion and customs. Hence, these two groups were also excluded from the current study.

COMPARISON OF SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES AND GENERAL POPULATION OF LONE MOTHERS

In Chapter 2 background information, including age distribution, educational level and incomes of lone mothers in Hong Kong were reported using census data from the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department and related research. These help us to understand their disadvantaged position and the difficulties they may face in Hong Kong such as financial difficulty, instability in the labour market, inadequate social support and discrimination or stigmatization from the society. In fact, even if they can enter the labour market, it would be hard for them to find work that can help them maintain a balance between their caring duties and paid employment. In Chapter 3, by employing the risk society theory, the situations of lone mothers could be conceptualized, and this revealed that lone mothers face stress from traditional beliefs and individualization in this post-industrialized capitalistic society, which shape their struggles between working and care giving. This is particularly common in Asian cultures and Hong Kong has been used as an example for discussion. Such conceptualization generates features of lone mothers, which helped to find suitable samples and critical cases for this study. Therefore, in this section, through comparing the social demographic characteristics of lone mothers in Hong Kong provided by census data as well as the sample cases in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, their socio-demographic position can be highlighted and their experiences among different classes of lone mothers mapped.

One of the considerations in this study was the age of the interviewees. The research included lone mothers up to the age of 50 and they were divided into two categories, 29 years old or below and 30-50 years old. The two age categories may explain their perceptions of family risks and the strategies employed. In terms of lone mothers aged less than 30, the census data showed that they comprised 5.5% of all lone mothers in Hong Kong, but they were 12.9% of the interviewees. The reason for sampling more lone mothers within this age group is that, since younger lone mothers may find it harder to face new social risks (Chapter 3), this study was trying to investigate the effects of traditional beliefs on their coping strategies and how these shape their perceptions (Chapter 3).

Though lone mothers aged 50-59 and those older than 60, occupied 5.5% and 0.3% respectively in the census report, neither were included in this study. This was mainly because a key criterion for interviewee selection was the duration of lone motherhood status, which was not to exceed a period of ten years. Older lone mothers mostly have children who have already grown up and do not need much caring from their mothers. Furthermore, since these groups of lone mothers may have been divorced for many years, some memories regarding the difficulties, struggles, and coping strategies in the early years of their lone motherhood might have been lost. Therefore, the experiences faced by these two age groups did not match the research focus.

Women, especially lone mothers, face a double burden of working and care giving, which is regarded as a new social risk (Chapter 3). In this research 22.6% of lone mothers were aged between 30-39 years, while the census showed that, overall, 40.1% lone mothers in this age group. This study had 64.5% of lone mothers aged between 40-49 years old, while the census records 44.1% in this age group. There is a higher rate of lone mothers in these two age groups in this research because the study focused on how these age groups maintain a balance between caring duties and paid work, and their decision to choose work or to take care of their children, and the job types they choose. Thus this research looked into types of work, such as part-time or full-time, lone mothers opt for in response to the need to balance their caring duties. The median age of lone mothers in Hong Kong is 40.8 from the census data and 40 from this study. Moreover, for the numbers of children and age of children, the census data and the sample data were very close. Because of its sample selection strategy this research was able to obtain a clear understanding of the actual situation of lone mothers aged 30-49 when they had to simultaneously take up the responsibilities of working and care giving.

Concerning the numbers of children - 1 child, 2 children and 3+ children - they are 73.7%, 23.3% and 3.1% respectively in the census report and 67.7%, 32.3% and 0% respectively in this research. In Asian countries like Hong Kong most are nuclear families and it is common to have 1 or 2 children but less so to have 3 children. In this research there were a few 3-child families, but since the children were over 18 years old and do not live with the lone mothers, they were not included in the above

statistics. They were only included in the background information about each participant.

The age of the children of the lone mothers is important as younger children require more care and guardianship, which is likely to affect decisions concerning divorce by women who are still married. There are a lot of considerations relating to the care of younger children that may need to be attended to, whereas older children will spend more time with their peers and less time with their mothers, and hence perhaps be a less demanding factor in deciding whether to stay in the marriage or get a divorce. In light of these considerations this research focused on lone mothers with children aged from 0 to 12 years old and from 13 to 18 years old.

There were four age categories of children: less than 2 years old, 2-5 years old, 6-11 years old and 12-17 years old. They represented 4.5%, 13.6%, 30.9% and 51% in the census data while in this study they comprised 0%, 23.1%, 43.6% and 33.3% respectively. However, it should be remarked that the census data only includes children under 18 years, which means that it does not count children 18 years old, but two of the participants in this study, (cases 13 and 20), had one 18 year old child each. The rationale for choosing these exceptional cases was that they displayed unique experiences regarding how they coped with traditional values and individualization (as well as the general issue of needing to achieve a valid sample). Participant 13 was a middle class woman with high educational level. Although she held traditional values, under the concept of individualization, she divorced gradually when her daughter reached 18 years of age. Participant 20 hid her lone status from neighbors and even her own children until her daughters became adults. These two cases display the traditional belief that women have to be completed with marriage, while having a man as a breadwinner in the family involves an individualized belief, so their experiences were rather unique.

In respect of the age of their children, the census shows that 4.5% of lone mothers in Hong Kong have children aged less than 2. However, this study did not have such young children in the sample, most likely because women are less willing to get divorced when children are at such a young age, this might also be the reason why this age group is the lowest percentage of children of lone mothers in Hong Kong.

As for the lone mothers who had children aged between 2-5 and 6-11, the census data and the sample in this research are similar: 13.6% and 30.9% respectively from the census and 23.1% and 43.6% respectively from the research. These two groups of children are dependent and require their mother's care on aspects such as physical caring and guidance. With children with high levels of dependency, lone mothers face the most difficult dilemmas between work and care, and thus were the main focus in this study.

Regarding children aged 12-17, the research proportion of 33.3% was slightly lower than the census data of 51%. Children at this age are more independent and require less time to take care of. Therefore, in this research, lone mothers with children between 12-17 years old were relatively fewer than children aged 2-11, because the study purposely focused on the latter age group. Lone mothers with children 12-17 years old were still included in the study as they faced other challenges, such as education and adolescence related problems.

Concerning lone mothers' education levels, for all domains including primary and below, secondary, and post-secondary, the study with 12.9%, 61.3% and 25.8% respectively was similar to that of the census: 12.1%, 66.5% and 21.5% respectively. This correspondence meant that the research provided an accurate picture on how different education levels are affected by individualization and traditional perceptions, to shape the ways lone mothers coped with risks and life experiences.

With respect to residential types, it should be noted that the census data only cover single parents, not lone mothers, and therefore cannot be strictly compared with the research data. In the five housing tenures - public rental housing, subsidised home ownership housing, private permanent housing, non-domestic housing and temporary housing - the census data reveal single parents distributed thus 24.7%, 12.4%, 61.7%, 0.3% and 0.8% respectively. This was similar to this study: 25.8%, 9.7%, 64.5%, 0% and 0% respectively. The census data and research data both show that housing risks for lone mothers are becoming more important, especially among the first three tenures, as they are similar. Nevertheless, by comparing lone parents and lone mothers, both of the housing tenure distributions are close. As for non-domestic housing and temporary housing, the research data had zero data because these two types of housing

are relatively rare in Hong Kong and are not commonly opted for by lone mothers. The reason is that non-domestic housing in Hong Kong may not be safe as it may not meet local fire safety standards or lack security. On the other hand, temporary housing in Hong Kong is normally for designated people, such as those waiting for housing compensation from the government due to their original house being demolished by the government. However, it should also be noted that the private permanent housing tenure in this research is further divided into private buildings and subdivided flats, but this distinction is not found in the census data. This reflects the fact that most lone mothers need to live in small and unhygienic subdivided flats after divorce, which increases the risks they face and further lowers the quality of life of the family.

In terms of the income level, this study had three categories, namely the low to middle income group with a monthly salary of \$10,000 or below, with a stable or unstable job, or low income, or casual work, or CSSA; the middle to high income group, the middle class with stable jobs (monthly income range from \$10,001 - \$39,999); and lastly, the high income professional or manager level with monthly incomes of \$40,000 or above. It should be noted that census and this research both excluded other subsidies such as CSSA, alimony or financial support from relatives. Regarding the income groups lower than \$2000, \$2000-3999, \$4000-5999, \$6000-7999 and \$8000-9999, the census data distribution is 2.0%, 3.0%, 3.7%, 4.1% and 7.4% respectively; while, among participants in this research it was 9.5%, 9.5%, 4.8%, 4.8% and 4.8% among the interviewees. From these data, it can be seen that the research income levels were generally higher than the census data. To investigate how lower income group lone mothers, who usually opt for part-time work, cope with the difficulty of maintaining working and caring of children, more research on these income group is necessary. As for the middle to high income group, the research included the five income groups used in the census data. For the \$10000-14999 income group, the census data is 21.7% while this group accounts for 9.5% of the interviewees. Lone mothers in this income group usually receive minimum wages for their full-time jobs. One difference between the study and the census data is that the study can provide lived experiences of their struggles in working and caring other than employment income. In addition to employment income, this study provided additional information about the type of employment that contributed to the lone mothers' income, such as casual work, alimony, or children's allowances that the lone mother received. Concerning the

income group \$15000-19000, the census data show 13.3% in this income group, while in the study it was 28.6%. Lone mothers from this income group normally receive incomes higher than the minimum wage and are from the sandwich class of the society. Unlike lone mothers of the lower class, they cannot claim welfare services and have to pay tax. For the income groups \$20000-24999, \$25000-29999, \$30000-39999, the census data show 10.8%, 6.3%, and 9.0% respectively. Each group in this research represented 9.5%, which is similar to the census data. This group of lone mothers enjoy less welfare from the society but have a stronger bargaining power in the labour market compared to lone mothers from other income groups. Although they seem to have more flexibility on taking care of their children, in fact, they have long working hours and eventually have to sacrifice the caring time. Therefore, since they carry both the traditional and the individualization value, they face struggles when they encounter job opportunities. This study did not include any of those whose incomes were higher than \$40000, due to the difficulty of searching for lone mother with such high incomes, which is also one of the limitations of the study.

This section compared the census data and the research sample by pointing out their similarities and differences. It shows slight differences, such as the census only shows housing type data for lone parents, while this study shows housing type data for lone mothers. In addition, this research further differentiates private permanent housing into private buildings and subdivided flats, which better reflects the housing issues faced by lone mothers. Moreover, the age of children and number of children in the family are also important factors that affect the difficult decisions that lone mother mothers need to make after their divorce. Therefore, the comparison between the study and census data is meaningful as the interpretation of the experiences of lone mothers in the study can be relevant to the rest of the lone mothers in Hong Kong.

Table 4.1: Comparison of Socio-Demographic Characteristic between Interviewees and General Population of Lone Mothers

		Hong Kong Lone Mothers (n= 45,083) (Census and Statistics Department, 2018)	Interviewees (n= 31)
Age of lone mothers (n=31) Table 3.2, 3.3, p.21-22	Aged <30	5.5%	12.9% (n=4)
	30-39	40.1%	22.6% (n=7)
	40-49	44.1%	64.5% (n=20)
	50-59	10.0%	0.0% (n=0)
	60+	0.3%	0.0% (n=0)
	Median age	40.8	40
Number of children under age of 18 (n=31) Table 8.1, p.68	1 child	73.7%	67.7% (n=21)
	2 children	23.2%	32.3% (n=10)
	3+ children	3.1%	0.0% (n=0)
Age of their children* (n=39) Table 8.3, p.70	<2	4.5%	0.0% (n=0)
	2-5	13.6%	23.1% (n=9)
	6-11	30.9%	43.6% (n=17)
	12-17	51%	33.3% (n=13)
Labour force participation Table 6.1, p.39	N/A	59.2%	employed interviewees rate = 67.7% (n=21) 21/31 *1 while n=10 non-employed
Monthly income from all employment (HK\$) (n=21)	<2,000	2.0%	9.5% (n=2)
	2,000-3,999	3.0%	9.5% (n=2)
	4,000-5,999	3.7%	4.8% (n=1)
	6,000-7,999	4.1%	4.8% (n=1)

Table 6.5, p.49	8,000-9,999	7.4%	4.8% (n=1)
	10,000-14,999	21.7%	9.5% (n=2)
	15,000-19,999	13.3%	28.6% (n=6)
	20,000-24,999	10.8%	9.5% (n=2)
	25,000-29,999	6.3%	9.5% (n=2)
	30,000-39,999	9.0%	9.5% (n=2)
	>40,000	18.8%	0.0% (n=0)
	Median monthly income from all employment (HK\$) (person living with child(ren) aged under 18	17,000	14,929 (sum=313500)
Education level (n=31) Table 5.1, p.36	Primary and below:	12.1%	12.9% (n=4)
	Secondary	66.5%	61.3% (n=19)
	Post-secondary	21.5%	25.8% (n=8)
Residential type Table 7.4 (Single parents but not limited to female)	Public rental housing	24.7%	25.8% (n=8)
	Subsidised home ownership housing	12.4%	9.7% (n=3)
	Private permanent housing	61.7%	64.5% (n=20)
	Non-domestic housing	0.3%	0.0% (n=0)
	Temporary housing	0.8%	0.0% (n=0)

Sources:

Census and Statistics Department (2018) 2016 Population By-census, *Thematic Report: Single Parents*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong SAR Government, Table 3.1

p.21.

Note

*1. Since the study does not have information on unemployment status such as economic inactive or active of lone mothers, this research can only indicate whether the lone mothers are employed or non-employed. Therefore, the employed interviewees rate of 67.7% (n=21) cannot make a direct comparison with the official labour force participation rate.

*2. Within 31 interviewees, 10 are living in sub-divided flat, which makes up 32.3% (n=10) of all interviewees.

Table 4.2: Background Information on Interviewees

ID	Age/Education/ Year of Separation/ Divorce	Children (with age)	Employment	Income: Salary and Other Source of Income	Residential Type
1. Ada	42/Primary/4	2(11F, 7M)	Unemployed	\$7,500 (Social Security)	Sub-divided Housing
2. Bonnie	43/Primary/ 10(separated) 4(divorced)	3 (21F,18F(living alone), 12M)	Unemployed	\$10,080 (Social Security)	Sub-divided Housing
3. Carrie	35/Tertiary (degree)/5	1(7M)	Journalist (Full-time)	\$14,000 (Salary)	Rental Private Housing
4. Doris	48/F.5/1	2(21M, 13M)	Manager (Full-time)	\$38,000 (Salary)	Rental Private Housing (elder brother)
5. Eva	49/Tertiary (degree)/10	1(11F)	Account and Admin (Full-time)	\$28,000 (\$26,000 Salary and \$2,000 older brother)	Owned Private Housing
6. Fiona	48/F.5/6	2(21M, 15F)	Senior Officer (Full-time)	\$34,500 (\$22,500 Salary and \$12,000 Alimony)	Owned Home Ownership Scheme Flat
7. Gloria	43/F.1/3	2(11M, 9F)	Unemployed	\$7500 (\$5,500 Social Security and \$2,000 Alimony)	Rental Public Housing
8. Heidi	40/F.5/ 10(separated) 5(divorced)	2(16M, 14F)	Salesperson (Part time)	\$16,600 (\$3,000 Salary, \$11,000 Alimony and \$2,600 Gov't subsidies)	Rental Public Housing
9. Iris	36/F.5/ 3(separated) 1(divorced)	2(11F,5F)	Admin personnel (School setting) (Full-time)	\$15,000 (Salary)	Owned Home Ownership Scheme Flat(living with in-law)
10. Joan	49/F.1/7	2(13M, 11F)	Unemployed (Two way permit)	\$8,000 (Social Security) not in her account	Rental Public Housing (living with ex-husband)
11. Katy	43/Tertiary (degree)/6	2(12F, 12F)	Unemployed	\$11,600 (\$10000 Social Security and \$1,600 Alimony)	Rental Public Housing

12. Lara	36/F.5/1.5	1(5.5M)	Analyst (Full-time)	\$42,000 (\$25,000 Salary and \$17,000 ex- husband)	Owned Private Housing
13. Mandy	49/Tertiary (High Dip)/10	1(18F)	Special Child Care Worker (Full-time)	\$38,000 (\$35,000 Salary and \$3,000 ex- husband)	Owned Private Housing
14. Nicole	49/F.5/9	1(17F)	Clerk (Full-time)	\$12,500 (\$11,000 Salary and \$1,500 ex- husband)	Rental Public Housing
15. Olivia	41/Secondary/3	1(8M)	Unemployed	\$7,000 (\$3,000 ex-husband and \$4000 rental property)	Rental Private Housing (elder brother's)
16. Pauline	28/Tertiary (degree)/4	1(4.5M)	Ground Crew (Front-line) (Full-time)	\$15,000 (Salary)	Rental Private Housing (living with parents)
17. Queenie	37/Secondary/10	2(10F, 5M (a child born out of wedlock))	Waitress (Part-time)	\$16,000 (\$6,000 Salary and \$10,000 Social Security)	Sub-divided Housing
18. Rose	38/Tertiary (degree)/2	2(10M, 4F)	Unemployed	\$11,001 (\$10,00 Social Security and \$1,001 Alimony)	Rental Public Housing
19. Susan	27/F.5/9months	1(4M)	Unemployed	\$14,000 (ex- husband)	Rental Private Housing (living with younger sister's family)
20. Teresa	49/P.5/1.5	3 (24F,22F (living alone), 18F)	Janitor (Part-time)	\$5,300 (\$2,300 Salary and \$3,000 daughter part-time work)	Sub-divided Housing
21. Ula	43/Tertiary (High Dip)/1	1(11F)	HR Officer (Full-time)	\$19,600 (Salary)	Private Housing (living with ex-husband and in-law's family)
22. Vanessa	43/F.3/4	1(14F)	Home-Helper (Part-time)	\$10,500 (\$4,000 Salary and \$6,500 Social Security)	Sub-divided Housing

23. Wendy	27/F.3/3	1(4F)	Manicurist Nail Technician (Full-time)	\$17,500 (\$16,000 Salary and \$1,500 Alimony)	Rental Public Housing (living with parents)
24. Xandra	38/F.5/9	1(10M)	School Bus Assistant (Part-time)	\$9,000 (\$500 Salary, \$6,000 Social Security and \$2,500 Alimony)	Rental Public Housing
25. Yanki	42/F.5/9	1(15M)	Air Conditioner Installation worker at Construction Work Sites (Maintenance /Repair Worker) (Full-time)	\$15,000 (Salary)	Sub-divided Housing
26. Zara	42/Tertiary (degree)/10	1(14M)	Social Worker (Part-time)	\$15,000 (Salary)	Rental Private Housing
27. Abby	43/P.6/10	2(12F, 4M (a child born out of wedlock))	Home-Helper (Part-time)	\$9,000 (Salary)	Sub-divided Housing
28. Bobo	44/Secondary/3	2 (18M (from first marriage in Mainland China), 8M(HK))	Unemployed	\$12,000 (Social Security)	Sub-divided Housing
29. Cathy	33/F.3/5	2(10M, 8M)	Part-time Work	\$13,500 (\$1,600 Salary and \$11,900 Social Security)	Sub-divided Housing
30. Daphne	25/F.5/1	1(4F)	Cosmetic Salesperson (Full-time)	\$20,000 (Salary)	Home Ownership Scheme Flat (living with Parents)
31. Emily	48/F.3/4	4(29M,27 M, 24M under ex- husband custody), 10M)	Piece-Time Work	\$10,000 (Social Security)	Sub-divided Housing

QUALITATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is employed in qualitative research to identify and analyze data collected via the identification of themes and concepts (Bryman, 2004; Gilbert, 2001; Mason, 1996). In this research it contributed to understanding the lived experiences of the lone mothers and enabled linkage to the chosen theoretical framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The theoretical framework was based on two theories, new social risk and post-structuralist feminism. The new social risks conceptualisation points to a structural issue whereby women in the post-industrial society have to balance family and work because of changes in gender roles in the family, de-standardization of the labour market and privatized welfare. Post-structuralist feminism entails the ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism, and the lone mothers' diverse and subjective responses to the ethics of work and care within structural constraints. From the data collected under the two central concepts, patterns of shared meanings were identified as themes and sub-themes. Subsequently, the identified themes shed light on the lone mothers' attitudes towards and response to the key areas of work and employment, caring duties and social and institutional support. The research included 31 interviews and a substantial amount of data was collected.

The initial analysis was performed manually to show the complex and varied patterns of 'conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs' (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p.131). In the previous chapter discursive constructions in relation to the ethics of care and work were examined including a number of folk sayings. For example, the meaning of the word 'qi' 妻, wife in Chinese, stems from age-old patriarchal traditions and carries the shared meaning of the subordination of women as female workers taking care of family affairs, the duty of a wife. Still under the boundary of the role assigned to a wife, women have shown diverse patterns of subordination over time exercising subjectivity according to their individual lived experiences. The patterns were closely compared and contrasted to generate sub-themes for ideas in relation to the themes under the theoretical framework (Mason, 1996; Bryman, 2004). The example of wifely duty and subordination generated sub-themes of placing the family as priority and serving the husband and children as the predominant duties of the wife and mother. To a larger

extent, it also responded to the issue of detraditionalization and either justified or challenged the concept. The data lend support to the themes through the analysis, and in turn support the framework of the research, and ultimately justify the arguments. The argument was then reviewed with the support of the analyzed data, and sub-themes were added to the theoretical framework (Aronson, 1994; Mason, 1996).

On an operational level, the interviews were audio recorded, and transcribed as quickly as possible to keep the data intact. During the interviews field notes were made to locate possible themes in reference to the framework of analysis in areas of gender norms surrounding work and care. The field notes were also summarized after each interview. There would be no interpretation at this point, but general comments and annotations would be made to retain the context of the interview for later analysis. The manual coding of each interview was performed to prevent the risk of losing context and fragmentation of the collected data in terms of the chronological flow, coherence and sequence of the stories told by the interviewees. The data were manually coded according to the categorization of themes and topics derived from the research framework, for example, language used pertaining to gender norms – ‘wedge for the stove’ a negative connotation of an unmarried woman, ‘follow the chicken you married’ to depict woman subordination in the marriage, ‘second-hand commodity’ to denote the diminished value of a divorced woman; beliefs represented by statements such as ‘complete family is the responsibility of the woman, I am to blame for not being able to please the husband and failing to keep the family together’ to express the ingrained idea of the inferiority of women stemming from the patriarchic society; and the influence of hegemonic ideologies - ‘work is important, one has to rely on oneself’, ‘working overtime means the worker is loyal to the company, those who do not work overtime will be the first on the chopping board’ in response to the hegemony of capitalism and distorted interpretation of individualization. After the coding process, themes and sub-themes were categorised according to the framework of analysis. In the analysis, inferences were made through initial interpretation of behavior and action to explore underlying layers of thoughts and ideas, and eventually linking them to the research theoretical proposition. At this point, additional concepts surfaced and unique to the lone mothers in the Hong Kong context, like partial detraditionalization and the dawn of individualization were grounded as add-ons to the research theoretical

propositions. The gathering and analysis of data would eventually illuminate the research questions.

RESEARCH ETHICS, METHODOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES AND SAMPLE LIMITATIONS

The first concern is to uphold the integrity of the research starting from the sources of information. Upon the approval from the University of Sheffield Ethics Committee (ref: 012671) initial calls were made to potential interviewees. The lone mothers were referred by NGOs which provide general family services including to lone mothers and their children, and NGOs which provided services specifically to lone parents. Another source of interviewees came from personal networks, both the interviewer's and interviewees'. All the interviewees were willing to participate in the study as they had already been briefed about the objective of the research. In the icebreaking calls, the researcher would try to minimize the interviewees' anxiety by providing basic information such as the purpose, questions to anticipate, approximate time required, recording and note taking, confidentiality of personal data, the rights and the nature of voluntariness, and that no fees would be rewarded to the interviewees. The researcher was also adamant in acknowledging the interviewees' contribution to the research, and in all cases, the lone mothers displayed willingness to participate in the research.

The main concern of research ethics is to protect the interviewees' from physical and emotional harm. All but one of the interviews were conducted at various NGOs, and the Polytechnic University conference rooms. Some of the NGO locations were familiar to the lone mothers while the University was central to their work places. One interview was conducted in a coffee shop requested by the interviewee as she wanted to be near her work (in this case, the coffee shop was quiet and a familiar setting to her). The consideration for these locations was to provide a safe and private setting for sharing experience. The interviewees were free to schedule the interviews with the understanding of their childcare and work demands. Therefore, the appointments were set at the lone mothers' convenience. Also, provisions were made for rescheduling to suit the interviewees where necessary, but none of the cases requested rescheduling. The interviewer was fully aware of safety issues and endeavoured to adhere to security measures in performing interviews outside of the public domain.

Although no personal safety issues were envisaged, as a precaution, my family members, the local supervisor and Professor Walker were notified as to the when and where such interviews were conducted. A text message was sent to them upon the completion of each interview.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion to allow the interviewees a free-flow account of their experiences. The researcher was able to ask follow-up questions on top of the guideline questions. Often the free-flow account would represent their main concerns. With the semi-structured interview, the researcher still had the freedom to adhere to the dimensions of the study.

To ensure that the interviewees were aware of their rights, the interview would start with an information sheet which the interviewer would explain the proceedings of the interview point by point systematically. This included an explanation of the purpose of the research and their voluntary nature in participation without remuneration, and they had the right to withdraw, pause or skip any part of the interview or research at any time even after signing the consent without any consequence or providing a reason for the withdrawal. The interviewees were informed that the interview would cover their marital experience with respect to their perception and response to risks, and the interview would be conducted in an open, non-judgmental and respectful way. Also, the interviewees were informed that the duration of the interview would be less than 2 hours, and the entire interview would audio-recorded as part of the data collection, and it would remain confidential. The interviewees were also told that complaints regarding the research or treatment received from the researcher could be directed to the researcher's supervisor by email. The interviewees were asked to sign a consent form either in Chinese or English, approved by the Ethic Committee of Sheffield University. The interviewees were also made aware of the fact that the research might be published with the intent to improve the situation of lone mothers in HK.

To eliminate the perception of being judged the researcher maintained a non-judgmental attitude throughout the interview as the lone mother issue was a sensitive one. The researcher would respond to their point of views with gestures such as a nod, a smile, or a pat on the shoulder. Verbally, the researcher would express empathy and understanding of the situations they were in. There were also occasional emotional

moments when the interviewees recalled unpleasant experiences. As a professional social worker, the researcher would offer to pause the interview and express understanding. The offering of a pat on the shoulder, a sip of water or a Kleenex tissue would help smooth the situation. The researcher usually found kinship in a female interviewee. None of the interviewees displayed any serious emotional distress.

As far as confidentiality is concerned, the researcher arbitrarily assigned false names to the interviewees so that they would not be identified in any reports or publications. The interviewees were told that unauthorized parties would not be granted access to information collected about them and they also have the right to reserve any part of information to be used as research data. The researcher endeavoured to generalize the type of work to protect the identity of the interviewee to avoid linkage to the individual's identity. Any association to the interviewee's identity such as profession, employer's name and location were generalized.

In order to protect the interviewees' identity, recorded data including audio and verbatim transcription, which contains raw data that can identify the interviewees, were stored in a security coded USB only to be used in the interviewer's private office and home instead of public areas and when it was not in use it was stored in a locked drawer. Only me and my supervisors are privy to the data collected before it is destroyed six months after the completion of the research. I am the only person who is able to identify individual data.

Furthermore, it was explained to them that no other use would be made of the recorded data without written permission, and no one outside the project would be allowed to access the original recordings. Should the data be used for further uses, the interviewees would be informed and asked for permission to access the data. In addition, the information would not be stored in desk top computers or in I-Cloud. Any email between the researcher and the research supervisors pertaining to the confidentiality of interviewees would be sent with coded security. Six months after the completion of the research, any paper trails would be shredded and data on the USB would be deleted twice, initial deletion and purging in the garbage bin in the system.

The methodological difficulties encountered were all of a language nature. As the interviewees were all Chinese speaking in the Cantonese dialect, the interviews were conducted entirely in Cantonese. The sensitiveness of the lone mother topic had made some of the interviewees less forthcoming and used obscure expressions. Often they assumed that certain things were understood, or certain expressions in Cantonese would express the rationale and embarrassment of their situations, especially when it came to sex. The fact that the researcher is Chinese and also speaks the Cantonese dialect is definitely an asset as it was necessary to show understanding and clarify ambiguities with follow-up questions. The entire conversation of each interview was recorded both in audio and written note form for cross-referencing. Transcripts of the interviews were then translated verbatim to English immediately after each session to preserve freshness and authenticity of the data, and for the research supervisor's review and comment. One of the interviewees indicated that her husband went to '滾', 'gun'. She did not want to spell out what it meant and presumed that 'gun' was generally understood. Yet the word itself has multiple meanings ranging from causal dating to promiscuous sex. In order to understand her concerns and the effect on the couple's relationship, further questions were asked to clarify the meaning of the word. Unfortunately, the woman found out that her husband was involved in compensated dating, a form of prostitution, and was indeed engaged in promiscuous sex.

Another example of difficulty in language was one of the interviewees used a classical Chinese allusion '畫地為牢', which the interviewer had no knowledge of. This was rather embarrassing because the interviewer was educated in Hong Kong and the focus is on English. It turns out the interviewee set the parameter of finding her children a new 'complete family', an idea which imprison a limit her freedom instead of remaining single she rushed into a second marriage.

There were some limitations in the research sampling. As never married mothers, widowed and ethnic lone mothers are sui generis, they were not included. Therefore, only divorced lone mothers from both local and new immigrants of mainland China were included. One major setback for the research sampling was the unavailability of high socio-economic status lone mothers because they are a minority, scattered in the

society, and seldom seek help from an NGO. In fact, there was a potential participant that eventually was not able to join the interview as she travelled frequently so we were not able to arrange a date for the interview.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the positivist, interpretivist and critical paradigms were further reviewed in the search for a methodological basis for this research. In order to understand the production of knowledge leading to reality, the ontological and epistemological positions are examined to determine the research methodology. As the researcher believes that knowledge is socially and ideologically constructed in situated contexts, it is not possible to categorize individual perceptions. Subsequently, the post structuralist approach under the feminist perspective of the critical paradigm is chosen to bring out the subjectivity of the lone mothers from a diversity of background and experiences in a women-centred study. Subsequently, the research design and ethics were built upon the qualitative method of data collection from in-depth interviews and semi-structured guidelines, and qualitative thematic analysis is performed. With that in mind, the research also took into consideration relevant quantitative data to support understand the structural location of the lone mothers in Hong Kong.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three revealed the new social risks generated as a result of rapid social changes in three spheres, gender roles and family, labour market and welfare retrenchment. Women need to balance family and work and this is particularly stressful for the lone mothers. That chapter also pointed to the importance of subjectivity and diversity in regard to the ethics of care and work, the analysis of which calls for the post-structuralist feminist perspective. In turn a semi-structured interview guide was compiled based on the critical methodological paradigm discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter reports the results of the interviews with regard to the lone mothers' perceptions of marriage and family and their coping strategies when encountering difficulties. The lone mothers shared cultural context in common, that is the influence of the traditionally patriarchal society, yet they deviated in interpretation. While some lone mothers held steadfastly to traditions, others modified traditional views with individual nuances depending on their social positions. They have been loosely grouped into two, *familial conservative* and *individualized conservative*, in the discussion of their views on the themes of marriage and family. The sub-theme of marriage focuses on their views of marriage, remarriage and related issues. The other sub-theme of family focuses on the idea of the complete family, gendered roles, and prioritizing work and family.

PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Traditionally, an adult woman's social status has always been identified in relationship to the family, and marriage is instrumental in establishing a subordinate position within the family in a patriarchal society. In a Chinese society women have to get married.

Teresa: Every woman wants to have a marital status, a status of belonging ... having somewhere you belong ... it's only natural to get married. It's like you should get married at certain age, it's time.

Ada: It's very natural to date, get married and give birth ... You have to get married when you reach that moment (age).

Ula: It have been 30 years since we went out together, got married ... I was approaching late twenties ... had to get married ... it was time.

Women's perceptions of marriage are strongly influenced by traditions actively passed down by parents who are often eager to see to it that their daughters are married and have children. In the past, there was no place in the parents' home for an unmarried daughter. Metaphorically, her status was as insignificant as 'a wedge in the crack of the stove'. It was not until the daughter got married that her name would be registered in the family tree in the ancestral hall, beneath her husband as her final destination, the root of her life. Nowadays, despite the fact that there are only a handful of ancestral halls left in the New Territories, and traditions are eroding fast, residues of such thinking are widely prevalent. To the Chinese community such beliefs have transpired into the linguistic subculture where terms are developed to reflect meanings.

Ada: If you don't get married, it's just like my mum said, 'A wedge in the crack of the stove'.

Olivia: My parents' view is traditional: you have to follow certain steps at certain ages; getting married as early as possible; a woman is like a falling leaf returning to the roots; to have a person to belong to.

Teresa: Your parents keep telling you to get married, otherwise you will be left over as a wedge to fill in the crack under the stove, so ... my parents often keep reminding me.

A recent term, left-over women, is now commonly used in Hong Kong to depict female singletons in their 30s, with a distinctly negative connotation. In the interviews Bonnie voiced her fear of this left-over women status and saw marriage as a way to avoid it.

Still not married? I don't want to be a left-over woman. My colleagues and schoolmates are getting married and sometimes it's an effect on you.

Katy is one of the women who tried to achieve completion of a woman's status through marriage.

Find a good husband, so marriage ... means a good future, yes, I agree. Perhaps I am rather traditional, I feel that it is better for a person to have a family. That way you become complete. It means to be able to ... form a harmonious family with the other half, have children ... that brings hope for the future.

Even women like Fiona with successful careers reflected similar ways of thinking about the completion of a woman's status through marriage. Ultimately, marriage became a natural stage of a woman's life.

[her mother] she'll say that no matter how capable the woman is, she has to get marry, bear children and have a family ... so as to be complete ... I agree ...

Another element of a woman's 'complete status' is children, male heirs in particular. As a result, parents become quite anxious when their daughter has reached a certain age and is not married, which means their biological clock is ticking and their child bearing age is passing. Mothers, family and friends will advise their daughters or even act as match-makers to ensure that they find a husband. Trusting their mothers' wisdom and experience, some of the interviewees, like Bobo, obliged, married and bore children.

Why did I get married ... because of my parents ... they rush you into marriage because you don't want to bear children when you are too old ... (why can't you have children at an older age?) my parents convinced me to have children young because you should enjoy life instead of still taking care of them when you're old ...

Marriage and permanency are closely knitted together. To achieve this end, the prospective husband should be pragmatic and able to provide for the family, meaning a family man with a stable income. The rationale behind such criteria reflects the tendency for patriarchal subordination as women should be able to rely and depend on the husband for a life-time. To women, the imagination of marriage encompasses two areas, the provision of material and emotional support. The other side of the equation on the part of the wife is loyalty, servitude and bearing children. The belief was so deep-rooted that in some cases it was apparent even among successful career women like Eva and Abby:

Eva: He promised me that he would take care of me just like his mother for the rest of my life, I thought that I no longer had to worry about money and rely on myself alone, I could depend on him. Based on how well he treated his mother, he should be ok. After a while, I chose him.

Abby: The first time we dated, I thought that I had found a good man because he seemed honest ... I felt that I had found where I belonged ... (what do you mean by 'belonged?') It means that I could depend completely on him ... (in what way?) Not having to worry about a livelihood ...

Another group of women married to escape from an unhappy family of their parents or to seek haven for personal situations which might include emotional or financial difficulties. The option to remain single was not considered because women and the family were inseparable in the traditional way of thinking. In the cases of Rose and Carrie, sexual abuse and an overbearing mother, they both found out that the haven in marriage and forming another family with Mr. Wrong was no heaven at all.

Rose: My sisters and I were sexually abused by my father. I was small. I felt I could rely on him without thinking what I really wanted, and then find out it is not my Mr. Right.

Carrie: The reason I chose to be with him ... is because ... I really wanted to leave my mother's house ... she was very strict on me, I just felt that I could gain my freedom through marriage thinking that I would have my own family, I would have ... autonomy and my freedom, something like a new stage in life ... however, ... it is not so.

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

While some of the women held the *familial conservative* belief that a complete woman was a married one, some married for other reasons. Their approach to marriage was *individualized*, each having their own expectation from the marriage, either thinking that they would find what they were looking for or seeing what it would bring. Some of the women like Mandy, Yanki and Nicole were often quite independent and self-sufficient. The last thing they wanted from a marriage was control and restraint.

Mandy: I went out with my ex-husband for a long time before we got married. I didn't think that there was a need for me to get married. Since my husband seemed responsible and genuine, I therefore gave it a try ... I could manage by myself ... in fact, maybe I have always had a man's character. (What is a man's character?) Being very independent ... therefore, no need to get married ...

Yanki: I felt that he was a good person, so we got married. Unexpectedly, he started to control me after we got married. If I had known this before we got married, I would never have married him as the marriage I wanted isn't like this, not being controlled, but rather having discussions with each other. If I

wanted to work, I can go to work without being controlled and forced not to work. I tried talking to him but he still controlled me.

Nicole: We dated for a long time so we got married, but I think that I didn't really want to get married, as I preferred to be alone and have my own life.

Other women might have financial considerations in mind, as in Lara and Doris' cases.

Lara: I had three suitors at one time. I would lay out everything, do some calculation myself. I would give it a try if there was potential in the guy. That was what I said, but really I was trying to see if it worked ... it didn't, feeling that it's not okay, so I left because his financial situation did not meet my expectation. This is only one side of it. The other side is the age gap. What was I supposed to do if he died? That's why I ... did some calculations on the three guys. As to why I got married, I did because my ex-husband treated me extremely well. I slipped and hurt my back and I was very depressed. I felt like giving up on myself. At that time, my bank account was zero because we had just invested in two properties. Still, I had to pay \$600 every day for doctors ... Since he gave me money and was good to me ... perhaps I could rely on him the rest of my life ... so we got married.

Doris: His family was quite wealthy that I could rely on, but he didn't have a stable job, I thought he would change once we got married.

PERCEPTIONS OF REMARRIAGE

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Some women sacrificed everything for remarriage. They were eager to re-establish a complete family and a few of the lone mothers looked to remarry were within a short time after the divorce but in vain. They continued to believe that playing the submissive traditional woman's role would secure a new relationship. One woman, Bobo, remarried legally and took up the responsibility to take care of the new mother-in-law with Alzheimer's disease, the two children of the man's previous marriage and a newborn child from this marriage. She even left her son from the previous marriage with her mother in the mainland in order to please the new husband, who eventually left her for another woman.

I thought I would have ... a complete family for my son (from the previous marriage) ... the other kids would laugh at him ... that's why I don't mind getting married again ... Perhaps people would say that he is fatherless because either his father or mother is not a nice person. I didn't expect my second

marriage to fail because my second husband is also a divorced man, equal status as mine.

Katy and Abby both believed that getting pregnant would lead to remarriage in order to get a complete family. They were making use of pregnancy to negotiate for a remarriage. Unfortunately, both potential husbands deserted them and their new babies. The consequence of a failed second marriage and two empty promises of remarriage rendered the strategy ineffective and added to the woes of the three cases of divorced lone mothers who ventured into remarriage.

Katy: A complete family is very important. That's why I long for remarriage ... even I didn't mind I had had his baby to negotiate this marriage.

Abby: I was pregnant again but he told me his mother objected, so he left before the son was born. I really wanted to remarry. I thought he would marry me if I had his child and his mother would allow the marriage seeing that there's a child on its way. His mother didn't think it was fair for her never-married son to marry a divorcee.

The lone mothers with male children were keen on finding a male role model for their sons.

Heidi: I have thought about it ... because I want my son to have a fatherly model. (Can you substitute?) ... no ... the son would learn more from the father ... you would want him to learn from the father, not the mother ... man, macho man ...

Zara: My son needs a role model ... only a man can provide that ... therefore, I would consider remarrying.

Parents of the divorced women would go to great lengths to persuade their daughters to remarry soon while they were still able to attract a man. They would tell their daughters to consider their compromised position, divorced with child, a definite mark-down of their value. In the meantime, friends and relatives would work hard to find a match, normally one with an equal or less status as a man who had never married before was considered to be of a higher status. In contrast, divorce added to a man's experience and maturity. A divorced man would have a much better chance of finding a new wife.

Iris: My family, friends and co-workers are all very concerned about me. They would say, "Still single? You should find someone when you are still young. Should I introduce someone to you?"

Pauline: My parents are concerned that I haven't remarried yet. They would say, 'You are divorced. You should find someone else. It's difficult to find a good one. If you find someone nice to you and your son, you should go for it.' Their traditional way of thinking is that men would not easily accept a woman with a child. I think so as most people want to start from zero and build up a family but you are bringing a child into his home.

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Among the *individualized conservative* group of lone mothers, some were reluctant to get re-married because of the threat to their children's safety.

Mandy: I would consider my daughter more. Let's say if I remarried to a new guy, I would worry about my daughter's safety.

Susan: My child is my priority ... If I hurt my child in any way being with the new man, why should I do it ... right? It means ... even though I was not able to provide for my child in many aspects, why do something to hurt him?

Two of the lone mothers in this group seemed to be more concerned with the actual benefit to themselves, to the extent that they were willing to hand over custody to the father, saying that the children would stand a better chance than staying with the mother. When they considered remarriage, they would take into consideration what lay ahead for themselves in the new family. In some cases, the interest of the self might override other considerations when they entered into a new relationship.

Lara: For the time being, I am involved in a new relationship with a man completely different to my background. I am just curious to find out how the rich live. I am so delighted that I am just an ordinary folk but I manage to meet someone who is a race-horse owner. And for that matter, the one before him is the director of a listed company. He owns a yacht. If not for their background, I don't think I would be interested. This is the thing, the most important thing. I am realistic. This is the only thing that attracts me. Otherwise, I would have gone out with them. I plan to move out and return my son to his father.

Emily: Having my own business means more than motherhood responsibilities ... my future is more important. Therefore, I don't mind relinquishing custody to my ex-husband ... as I have already wasted so many years of my life ... I don't want to continue ... wasting my life. I can live my life again and not waste my time ... I have been wasting time since I got married ... I want my own business ... I have wasted so much time rearing a son ... I have lost my self ... I can't do what I want ... now I have the opportunity the new guy is loaded and I am confident that I have the brains ... I just have to give it a try ... reclaiming an opportunity for myself ...

COMMON CONCERNS AROUND REMARRIAGE

Despite varied views on remarriage, the lone mothers in both groups shared common concerns. At the time of the interviews four of the women were involved in romantic relationships. The lone mothers involved were relatively young, in their early thirties, with stable incomes. However, despite the urging from family and friends to remarry and settle down, they were apprehensive and seemed to be dragging their feet. They seemed to want to avoid making the same mistake as in the previous marriage and needed time to ascertain the men's sincerity. Their strategies varied from actively dating to find a suitable candidate, to putting the relationship to the test of time. Meanwhile their families were quite anxious for the women to grab the fleeting opportunity of remarriage.

Gloria: I'm not too keen on a second relationship and will observe carefully to prevent similar mistakes to occur.

Doris: I have a boyfriend now and I enjoy this relationship ... I will consider, but I won't rush it and do it slowly.

Traditionally, divorced lone mothers were not well-received by the new in-laws. In Zara and Abby's cases (*familial conservative*), the women were not accepted by the men's mothers who raised objection to the relationship claiming that it was unfair to their sons to marry a lone mother.

Zara: His parents were very traditional and would have nothing to do with a divorce woman with a child as their daughter-in-law. I come to understand that a divorced woman with a child is not going to be accepted by most.

Abby: I have a daughter from the previous marriage ... his mother didn't like it ... so she forbids him to ... then we parted.

The idea of being a second-hand commodity with liabilities was ingrained to the extent that the women rejected any prospect of a relationship. To them, it was unimaginable to believe that there was any man out there who would be genuinely interested in having a relationship with them. Gloria, Cathy and Heidi who formed part of the *familial conservative* group.

Gloria: Who would want a woman with two children from a previous marriage? In return man would easy to get remarriage as he has financial condition.

Cathy: I was involved in a relationship once since the divorce but it didn't work. We didn't see eye to eye ... and we argued ... and then we parted. My friend told me, 'It's expected. The likes of you, a woman with two kids from a previous marriage, who would want that? He won't marry you or develop a relationship with you. Truly, he would have to look after someone else's sons if he were to be with you. You should just be happy that you two were together once, forget it now.' It's really true that a divorced mother or a lone mother with children will be forever looked down upon by men and the likes of you. Thinking back, perhaps I have been too naïve to think that he would want us, a divorced woman with two kids. I think they are right ... anyone who has a choice will not be interested in someone like me.

Heidi: It's impossible, no one would like a divorced woman.

Some women harboured a sense of inferiority as a second hand commodity. In Yanki's case (*individualized conservative*), she felt that she was inferior to her boyfriend who was never married before. The fact that she was divorced and had a child made her break up the new relationship.

He has never dated before and I am his first ... if I ... have a child ... if not ... he said it was alright ... but I have a lot to consider. In the end, for his sake, I didn't go on ... then it won't be fair for my son ... I didn't want to date or get marry again.

Fiona also felt inferior in new relationships as she did not think any man would be willing to consider her with the children. Xandra felt the same.

Fiona: I don't think I would have a second chance ... as you are dragging two children along ... who would want you?

Xandra: my son has Thalassaemia, an illness which may be a financial burden not every man is willing to bear, a sick step-son. On top of that, I've been divorced once, not many men would go for it.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMPLETE FAMILY

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

When it came to the family almost all of the women in the following cases stressed the importance of the ideal of the ‘complete family’ – father, mother and children living together. Katy added that the complete family would breed good children while Bobo would risk a second marriage to provide a complete family for her son. The normative family stood for harmony and completeness, as Vanessa put it, ‘Children growing up in a complete family with the father’s love and the mother’s love will be fine.’ The opposite, being fatherless, denoted chaos and shame, being abnormal and problematic, affecting the children especially. Joan expressed her worries, ‘...affect them a lot ...they will become delinquents without a father.’ Olivia had the same concern, ‘I don’t want an abnormal family without a father or mother. It is not good for the children.’ Vanessa said, ‘Young people who do drugs or do poorly is because they grow up in incomplete family because they are neglected without the father’s love and the mother’s love. The children become especially vulnerable.’ ‘I can understand how my son feels and it will definitely affect his growing up.’ Said Bobo. Furthermore, the lone mothers also felt that children in incomplete families would be stigmatized and adversely affected. Eva talked about the stigma of a lone mother and she didn’t want her daughter to grow up in a lone family while Fiona thought that the incomplete family was a stigma, and a fatherless family would attract ridicules. Ula tried not to air dirty laundry outside the family because ‘humans need face while trees need bark.’ Bobo’s son was teased by his friends that his parents were divorced probably because his mother was not a ‘good woman’, and Bonnie also said that the children will be ridiculed, and divorce would mean the children could not hold their heads up without a father. Rose summed up the significance of the complete family by saying, ‘the feeling of ... which means, I feel that certain people will look at it with tainted glasses that they would feel, “Oh, most kids from lone families are problematic.” So you can see the impact on children, something bad. For example, to a certain extent, they feel inferior because they are told, “Everyone has a mom and a dad to do things with ...”’

Many of the women were worried about the stigma on the children as far as their friends and neighbours were concerned. Consequently, fearing the stigma of shame and other related difficulties brought forth by the incomplete family, most of them would not disclose their lone status.

Vanessa: I don't tell my friends about the divorce but for one whom I have known for years. Even my neighbours in the subdivided housing ... they would ask why my husband does not live with us ... I just make an excuse that we do not get along with the in-laws and he is temporarily living with his mother ... I have no idea what people think ...

Wendy: I won't tell my friends and neighbours I am a lone mother, it's not a good thing ...

Olivia: I can't even interact with women friends, let alone men ... I become suspicious ... will they talk about me behind my back?

Some of them tried to hide the lone status from neighbors and even their own children until they became adults, like Teresa's case.

I didn't tell my daughters about the divorce. I just told them that house was too small. If anyone asked, they should say that their father had gone to look after grandma. I didn't want the neighbours to know and I didn't want my children to be discriminated against. Only a few friends and colleagues know about this. (Why?) I didn't feel that it is a good thing. Even if you let them know, they may not understand and look at you at a certain way. Therefore, I'd rather not say until they reached at 18.

Bonnie went to a great extent to hide her lone status by buying a new ring and wearing it on her finger.

I still wear this ring is because I want people to know I'm still married. I'm afraid that my neighbors will know I am divorced. I think I've worn the ring for 10 years, as I've been divorced for 10 years.

Maintain 'Complete' Family Status

Financial Help

Seeing financial debt as a threat to the stable existence of the family, some of the women including Eva and Vanessa, would sacrifice their personal interests to repay the husband's gambling or investment debts. They would first exhaust their own

savings, then borrow from family and friends and financial companies, and eventually sell personal assets as in Ula's case.

Eva: Under my name, I borrowed from more than three financial companies to help him out on top of the three hundred thousand of my own savings I gave him.

Vanessa: He borrowed from three financial companies under my name. I have to repay over a hundred thousand dollars eventually ... I did it because I don't want my child fatherless ... I feel so sorry for her.

Ula: In fact, I had been tolerant for a long time ... our flat went first, then it was the inheritance from his mother, another flat and savings. I was hoping that it would save the family ...

In the worst scenario, exhausting all avenues, Joan even borrowed from the mother of her son's friend.

I even borrowed from my the mother of one my son's friends ... a few hundred dollars to feed the family (my husband gambled away the CSSA).

Bonnie even resorted to bearing another child hoping that the man would start fulfilling his financial duties to the family.

I was under a lot of pressure. What else could I do? I thought that another child would make him behave and feel more responsible towards the family. Therefore, my daughter was nine years senior than my son. Who knows, it just backfires like lifting a boulder and dropping it on my foot.

The traditional life-long submissive approach to the husband was not limited to women in a particular age group. Cathy, a younger woman in her early thirties, felt that she should submit to one man only, her husband, from the beginning to the end, as in the Chinese idiom – 'marry a chicken, follow the chicken; marry a dog, follow the dog'.

I had never thought about divorce ... once you marry a chicken, you follow the chicken to the end ... it is so important to a woman. I tolerated and helped him borrowing from finance companies as well as my own father, hoping that he would change. In the end, I was overwhelmed by the stress repaying his debt and owing money to my dad ... I was so thin ... my hair fell off in chunks and the whole head turned grey.

Tolerating Extramarital Affairs

One third of the women interviewed chose to tolerate their husbands' extramarital affairs. The belief is continuously reinforced by family and friends that 'men will be men', and their fooling around is normal as long as they eventually find their way home. The women readily accepted the saying, as they thought that their mothers were wise while many of their female friends had weathered the same situation in their marriage. Furthermore, they were made to believe that it is their duty to please their husbands so that they did not have to look elsewhere. If the husbands did wander astray, they tended to blame themselves for it. Consequently, they would answer to the men's accusations of not treating them well enough at home by improving their physical appearance, learning how to cook better, creating a warm atmosphere at home, satisfying his sexual needs, hiring domestic helpers or seeking their parents' help to free themselves up to spend more time to serve their husbands. In other words, the woman was made responsible for the man's indiscretion as in Fiona, Heidi and Carrie's cases.

Fiona: In order to save the marriage, I tried to free up myself for him by hiring a maid to take care of the home and the children. I kept him company going out with him and spent time to make myself more presentable. I even talked myself into reading up and going online to learn techniques in sex to cater to his demands. But these methods don't work.

Heidi: I hired a maid and returned to work so as to alleviate his burden because he complained about pressure for having to shoulder the financial burden of the family alone. However, it is futile.

Carrie: In order to save the marriage, I tried my best ... to do whatever he wanted ... to show respect to him. There is no reason to ask a child to bear the consequence of a lone family; that's why I tolerated. I don't want the lone status. It will affect the child's development in terms of the way he thinks and behaves, and how he deals with other people.

Influenced by their mothers' submissive views towards men with extramarital affairs, Pauline and Teresa both looked to themselves first when they found out their husbands' extramarital affairs. First, they pretended not to know about the affair and tolerated it in order to protect the children from a broken family. They struggled between divorce and tolerating the affair.

Pauline: What it boils down to is, either you have a complete family with the parents in constant argument or a happy incomplete family. This is my struggle.

Teresa: I cannot tolerate his affairs and I prefer a monogamous relationship – a wife and a husband ... but my mother told me men are always like that, and said it's okay as long as he finds his way home ...

Despite Wendy's younger age, she had something in common with Teresa and Pauline in that all their mothers and mothers-in-law told them they should tolerate the indiscreet flings that their husbands had outside the marriage. They agreed with the mothers' view and tried to tolerate the men's extramarital affairs, hoping that they would eventually find their way home.

I tolerated my husband's indiscretion. Shouldn't I trust my mother's advice? After all, she is experienced. I fully agree with her view. It is so sad for young children to grow up without a father. They will grow up with flaws in their personality. At that time, I was so weak that I dared not confront him, fearing that he would just abandon us. Furthermore, my mother said it should be up to the man to raise the question of divorce and it wasn't my place to talk about it. She also told me it's acceptable for a man to 'gun' '滾' (for a man to stray as long as he eventually finds his way home).

Two out of the ten women, Zara, initiated the divorce after they were harassed by the third party.

I broke down when I found out that he had someone else. I asked many questions, trying to 'calculate' (I listed all the favours I had done him and his family) where I faltered. I even tried to mend the relationship but ... she called me to talk to me about letting go of my husband ...

Tolerating Overbearing Patriarchal Behaviour and Domestic Violence

Some of the husbands held overbearing patriarchal views towards their wives. They tended to exercise extreme control over all aspects of their lives. Like Katy, the women were not allowed to work outside the home and they were told what to wear and buy, how to speak and feel, whom to befriend, and when to have sex. These women were blamed for not being able to produce a male heir. As a result, the women were not allowed to stay home to look after the female children, and they were forced to seek employment to contribute to the household finances. Since they viewed women as chattels, some men even went so far as to beat up their wives when

challenged or to simply let off steam from work onto them. Most of the women chose to tolerate and obey so as not to endanger their complete family status.

Katy: I had always in my in-laws' bad book, so bad that they even resorted to violence against me. In order to pacify the situation and the tension it exerted on the marriage, I took up a full-time job to earn some money so that I could give them some money for good-will on top of doing all the chores at home. With the money, I paid for my twin daughters' kindergarten fees and lunch charges.

Queenie, Rose and Abby tried to keep their family together by tolerating their husbands' overbearing patriarchal behaviour through tears and sweats, but in vain. They were at a loss as to what else a woman could have done apart from toleration and harms that they had little choice. The Chinese idiom 'A woman should follow the chicken she marries' was rooted deeply in their belief systems.

Queenie: If I dare talking back to him, he will screamed louder at me. What else could I do but tolerate with tears rolling down like streams. After the tears ... I would tell myself to look on the bright side.

Rose: To hold the family together ... I can only tolerate ... what other choice does a woman have apart from tolerating? After all, I married the chicken, so I had to submit to him, but ultimately, it didn't work ...

Abby: I married the chicken, followed the chicken. What was I supposed to do then?

Overbearing patriarchal behaviour included violence in Katy and Olivia's cases. They tried to tolerate the physical violence inflicted on them by their husbands without involving the police. They both thought that their tolerance would keep the family from breaking up so that their children would not grow up without a father and become problem children. Olivia was even more stoical in tolerating adversities in her second marriage.

Katy: I don't want my daughters growing up in a fatherless family and people will look down on them ... what can I do ... only tolerate ...

Olivia: I tell myself that I have already had a failure in the previous marriage, so I need to tolerate more so that I don't fail again and lose face in front of family and friends. I am sure that I will be blamed for causing my son to be fatherless once again.

Bobo as well as Olivia was in her second marriage, and both strongly believed in the

'complete family'. They remarried and went to great lengths to recreate a complete family for their children and themselves. Believing that they had learnt something from their previous failed marriages, they had high expectations in the new marriage and put in extra efforts in pleasing members of the new family in vain. In the end, both of them failed in their second marriages, which left them in an even worse emotional state and with lower self-esteem.

Bobo: I tried to be even more vigilant and cater to his needs in my second marriage. I performed all the chores at home accepted the criticisms of his children from his previous marriage. I was thinking that if I love the house, I should love the dog as well. I deeply believe that if he is kind to me, I will be even kinder in return including everyone in his family. I think I have been 100% devoted to his family.

Self-perception after Divorce

The lone mothers with traditional views reported different self-perceptions after their divorces, the majority for the better and some for worse. Many of the women regarded themselves as domestic slaves, failures and as abandoned in the failed marriage. Some women had to follow their husbands' wishes or face abuse, whether they were willing or not, while others blamed themselves for not serving the men well enough to maintain the complete family. When the men left, some of them felt that they were abandoned. The abandonment, failure and slavery experienced in a failed marriage often left the women quite shattered and it took time to pick up the pieces.

Fiona: I felt that I was abandoned ... I blame myself ...

Cathy: I was in dire situations. I didn't think that anything good would happen to me ... there was just no way out ...

Rose: I think of myself like a domestic slaves and abandoned by the master.

Some women blamed their predicament on fate as, perhaps, an outcry of frustration. Some of the women also blamed fate because they had totally submitted themselves to the family they had lost. Out of desperation, the only plausible explanation to the shattering of the rock of their belief seemed to be that it was predestined.

Bonnie: I've said it ... I have a bitter life ... it fate ... I can only submit to fate ...

Bobo: It's written ... people and things are all pre-destined ... if you are a woman, you have to submit to fate ... in Chinese saying, (畫地為牢) self-imposed restrictions/limitations.

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Some of the women interviewed displayed a slightly different attitude towards the complete family although it was still their preference. However, they had other considerations about how they wanted to live. It appeared that they had their bottom-line as far as their livelihood and their children were concerned. To them, the biggest fear seemed to be uncertainty. Therefore, they would try to calculate how much financial and emotional burden they could bear against being lone parents. Mandy claimed that she had tried to tolerate and adjust to his thinking until it reached a certain point. She did not want a family like that and started planning for herself and her daughter by saving up for 2 years before the divorce. In Nicole's case, despite the fact that her husband's salary provided the family with a comfortable living, she regarded his debts as a bottomless pit. His extramarital affair led her to consider divorce which was unacceptable to most of her peers. Emily factored in the fact that a new family would bring her companionship and business advantage. Xandra's idea of a complete family was: 'I want a stable family which is complete family for my son, an extra pair of hands and financial support ... not only a father and a mother, the basic members of a family but also there should be children ... stable income is a must. That way, it is a stable family.' Finance became an integral part of the complete family, without which the divorce was imminent.

Susan, aged 27, Yanki, 42 and Daphne, 25 shared a different view on a 'complete family'. They thought that husband and wife should be individuals staying together and having the same goal in life. They should retain their individuality and contribute equally to the family.

Susan: The basis of a complete family ... at least love. Most essentially, like the Chinese idiom – (舉案齊眉) to hold the serving tray above the eyebrows, an allegory of mutual respect. (The wife respected the husband so much so that she would hold the serving tray leveled to her eyebrows to avoid looking at the husband at eye-level.) Respect is essential in the marriage, without which, divorce is imminent. It's no point to live with a person you know but feel estranged under the same roof.

Yanki: A complete family consists of man and wife both working outside the home and maintaining their own biography. It is quite impossible for one party to dictate to the other the role she should play. His idea of a complete family is that the woman should remain in the domain of the home serving the husband and raising the children, but I think that's nothing but selfishness, like keeping a pet.

Daphne: A complete family ... I didn't think about it ... neither did I think that there would be a problem for children without a dad ... I can raise my daughter on my own ... I feel that since we are together, we should have the same goal. Of course the child is priority. Secondly, we should at least have in common ... finance should be normal, meaning that income and expenses should be in balance. I don't care how much money he hoards. I make more money. It's OK but not to the point that he makes so little, making it as though you have become a burden to me. That way it is impossible to stay together.

While it was generally felt that a stable income was the key to a happy marriage, Mandy and Yanki valued their freedom and power to make decisions, and chose to become lone mothers so that they were independent and no longer had to account for their decisions to their husbands.

Mandy: My friends said that I was well set because my husband is an engineer with a good income. They couldn't understand why I wanted a divorce. I feel that this is the best decision I've made. I regain my freedom.

Yanki: It's not his money I desired. My ex-husband questioned why I had the need to go out to work even though he had provided an easy life for me. I wanted my freedom and was criticized for being foolish. Happiness is not just money. A happy and complete family is built upon both the man and the woman working and having a life, each has one, and is one.

Maintain Complete Family Status

Financial Help

As far as financial debts were concerned, the women evaluated the trade-offs, and how much they could bear. In one case, Gloria helped to repay a certain amount of the debt because the husband contributed to looking after their chronically sick child, while another woman stopped helping to repay the husband's debt as she was confronted with uncertainties about the magnitude of the debt.

It is for self-protection ... meaning that I don't have to deal with harassment phone calls and red paints on the door which will frighten the children and

threaten their safety. On top of that, the constant bickering and fights makes them feel insecure. Why should I waste time on him?

In one instance, Lara did not offer to help as she thought that her husband was too stubborn and ignorant about financial matters, and he would probably not be able to provide for her and the child in future. After some calculations for herself and the child, she made the decision to abandon the marriage.

When he lost that money in the stock market, he did not ask me to help. Even if he had asked, I would not have helped him. I don't think I'm being selfish because after all, it's only natural that I had to think about myself and my son. I just wanted him to know that I am a sensible person and would not act impulsively. I feel that there is a need to be sensible even in emotional matters. I figured that it was 20% my problem and 80% his. How would we continue? At least I couldn't at that moment.

Tolerating Extramarital Affairs

Even though some of the women were considered to be *individualized conservative*, they were to some degree traditional especially in their belief in a complete family. They drew a bottom-line in maintaining a complete family. Before that bottom-line was violated, the women would tolerate the situation and try to make the marriage continue. However, when the bottom-line was touched, they evaluated the situation and made swift decisions to cut their losses.

Nicole: ... I did tolerated him ... waiting for him to think clearly ... Later on, the woman whatsapped me (telling me to let go of my husband) ... I couldn't tolerate that ... that way we'd be better off divorced. My husband suggested separation first but I said not to bother and went straight to divorce. (Why are you so determined?) Because it doesn't make any difference. He couldn't face it, a coward, escaping, therefore I would rather leave.

Tolerating Domestic Violence

While the *familial conservative* women took the subjective view that they were committed to upholding the complete family, the *individualized conservative* ones interpreted the idea of the complete family objectively and were more concerned with what it would serve. The concept of a complete family is further complicated if other variables are added. For example, a sick child needing extra care would alter the bottom-line drawn in maintaining the complete family. Also, some of the

fundamentals such as divisions of labour became unstable. The man who did not contribute to the family financially may be asked to perform caring duties so that the woman could go out to work. If the man failed to bring in an income and refused to perform caring duties at home, it would mean that the complete family could no longer serve its purpose, and there was no need to continue with the marriage, as in Xandra's case.

I tolerated first ... offered to go to work and he remained home to look after our son ... he ignored me ... Basically, he didn't want to mend the marriage, to save the marriage. You can see that he would not take the step ... and he even beat me. Therefore, I gave up.

Tolerating Overbearing Patriarchal Behavior

Another group of women who had tolerated the overbearing patriarchal behavior responded swiftly when their bottom-line was touched. They seemed to tolerate this sort of behavior despite being well aware of the unpleasantness of it. However, the criteria for tolerance were clear and like Daphne, Emily and Yanki, they had no qualms in making the decision to leave once they had decided to do so.

Daphne: I had never had the idea of a divorce. Later on, I felt that he was irresponsible ... did nothing ... so I got a job and asked him to look after the daughter who is sick and needed him to cooperate, at least to take her for check-ups ... he didn't want to (divorced) ... this way ... I just didn't want to anymore ...

Emily: There was no communication ... I had no chance to fix the marriage ... he didn't come home until 9 in the evening ... and worked all day... I could no longer tolerate him so we separated ... he didn't want a divorce ... but I had already given him a chance ... I went ahead for the divorce ... waiting for legal aid ... until he found somebody else ... then he agreed to the divorce ...

Yanki: My ex-husband is rather traditional and conservative, yes. I feel that it was stressful living with him, by which he meant that since he was paying me money, I should obey him. I told him the way he was acting was like the olden days, no difference. I said that I am not that type of woman. In fact, he didn't want a divorce in the beginning. He said, "Don't do it. Before we get a divorce ... we should cool down for a while and then decide." I answered, "No."

Self-Perceptions after Divorce

Some of the lone mothers who were less traditional said that they had become more assertive since their divorce. It is especially true with those who had been minimized and not given an opportunity to make decisions. With their children's success at school and in other activities, they took pride in being able to make decisions for themselves and the family. In other words, the notions that they were not able to take charge and be responsible were dispelled. They displayed new-found freedom and confidence in handling their own affairs and making decision for the children and themselves. This group of lone mothers included Yanki and Gloria.

Yanki: I live with my son after the divorce ... no big deal ... no restraint from anyone ... freer ... spending the money I earn and providing for my son ... I can make decision by myself ...

Gloria: Now the pressure is gone and I am relieved as I no longer have to account to my husband and mother-in-law. I make all the decisions.

PERCEPTION OF GENDER ROLES IN THE FAMILY

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Women with traditional beliefs readily accepted the patriarchal division of labour within the family, with men being responsible for the public sphere and women the private. This belief was both inherent and natural to them. As a result, there was no challenge to the uneven distribution of power in decision making, allocation of household chores and caring duties. They held distinct views on the roles of husband and wife, as well as father and mother. Men were the head of family with the duty of providing for the family financially. Furthermore, they were exempt from doing household chores except for 'men's jobs' changing light-bulbs, fixing electrical appliance and plumbing or lifting heavy furniture in the house. The role of fatherhood was fulfilled if they participated occasionally at weekends in taking the children out to play, or delivering them to and from activities. In the case of a male child, the father was expected to be around to exert masculine influence since it was beyond the woman's bounds. As a wife, it was necessary to be submissive and subordinate to the man. Since the man was the head of the family, there would not be any argument or

objection from the woman to maintain harmony in the family, and the final decision would always be that of the man's. It was also the wife's duty to foster a household with warmth for the family to the extent that even if she was a full-time worker outside the home, it would still be her duty to go the extra mile to labour at home after work in order to achieve this end. For the stay-home wife or mother, it was strongly ingrained that this was their innate duty to create a warm and harmonious family setting for the husband and children. Her instinctive response was to shield the family from being neglected by putting herself forward. Consequently, she was likely to blame herself for her failure to protect the complete status of the family.

Women's Role and the Family

Some women thought that it was instinctive and their natural role and responsibility to be a mother which included doing all the chores at home, serving the husband and looking after the children. To them, men were not equipped to do the job. Therefore, it was only natural that the men should stay out of the domestic domain. Heidi regarded it as 'my duty to look after the children ... woman's bounded duty.' She did not blame her husband for not contributing to the household chores because 'he was working in construction sites and it was hard work'. Olivia echoed the same thought that she 'was totally devoted to serving him and the family ... my duty'. She thought that she had failed her duty to save the family. Zara said that her role as a mother was not replaceable by a domestic helper. Her work in monitoring and interacting with her son were 'things a mother must do ... very basic things for a woman to serve the husband ... a woman has to play a woman's role well, the role of a mother and wife.' Ula claimed that it was 'a mother's instinct to look after the child', and 'men in general are not as attentive to details'.

Apart from taking care of the children and serving the husband, some women extended their wifely duties to take on their husband's problems as well especially when these problems threatened the family. Bobo and Cathy felt that it was crucial to protect the family as a whole. Bobo felt that she 'belonged' to the man, and she should 'fulfil my duties'. She went further to explain that, 'It is a deep-rooted traditional way of thinking that once you marry, regardless it is a good or bad husband, I have to treat him well ... to help the family. I feel that I am traditional like ... drawing a circle to

stand inside, imprisoning myself within the walls ... you cannot escape ... I try to do as much as I can for him to fulfil the wife's duty.' Cathy made an allusion to an old Chinese proverb, 'Marry a chicken, follow the chicken ... Since I am married to him, I should perform a wife's duty ... Also ... if there is a problem, it's not only his problem. I am responsible for it too. This is my interpretation from the beginning of marrying a chicken and following the chicken.'

Expectation and Reality of Men's Role in the Family

First and foremost, the man was expected to earn money to provide for the family. Many of the women quoted below would have liked their husbands to participate in household matters. Some stated that their husbands had minimal participation except for performing some of the 'men's jobs'. As far as the children were concerned, the fathers only helped out on their days off, and the principle care givers were still the mothers, who seemed to accept this situation. Olivia complained that she had to pay for her son alone and her husband 'didn't do anything a man is supposed to do, make money for the family ... It had to do with how a family should function! Looking after the son is my job... he did not fulfil a man's responsibility (financially).' Pauline accepted that looking after the children was her duty but 'he has to contribute as well, for example, playing with the son.' Cathy agreed and said, 'OK, it's my duties to look after them but he has to take the role of father to support the family.' Fiona thought that she was performing two distinct roles, the man and the woman's, 'after the divorce, earning an income and performing full time housewife duties.'

Heidi did not think that her husband understood how exhausting it was to look after two toddlers at home full time. Not only did he not contribute to the child-rearing, he also expected Heidi to serve on him at home after work. Zara seemed to have a clear picture in her mind as to what roles should the father and the mother play at home. The father should provide a little guidance to the child, like common sense in everyday living, so that the son will learn about men and women at puberty; the father will have a better handle and understanding of certain things the mother cannot explain. 'I have no idea about the doubts and concerns of male puberty or how a primary school boy is supposed to socialize with others. I wouldn't have done a good job going into details. I do possess such skills from my field of studies. However, I still feel inadequate at

certain levels. There should be a man in the family to balance the talkativeness of the women (herself, her mother and sister) especially when it is a son – the Chinese saying that three women are as noisy as a market place. He keeps the balance.’ Both Eva and Vanessa held presumptions about the men’s responsibilities in the family, and it would be intolerable if the husbands did not live up to their roles.

Gender stereotyped views on men’s work

Some women thought that there were certain tasks which belonged to the men’s domain, for example, in Teresa’s case, household chores like changing a lightbulb and fixing the plumbing or the sink in the kitchen. The initial shock after the divorce was that there was no man around the house to perform such tasks. Eventually, she realized that it was merely a habit of dependence and if she tried, she could handle the job just as well. ‘The biggest problem is that there are certain things women cannot do in the house, a man’s job, such as changing the lightbulb, plumbing ... like moving something heavy ... really want a man to help ... after all, a woman’s force is limited, right? It is a habit of reliance, but without them, I can do it myself ... I can even fix a leaking tap myself now ... but I’d just rather not.’ Nevertheless, Teresa was not able to shake off the longing for a man to perform these jobs for her psychologically. On the one hand, Rose was fully aware of the slave-master relationship in her marriage; on the other, she tried to hold on to some power and control through the ability of managing a ‘man’s’ work.

I realize that even as a slave in my marriage, I was strong because I could do the man’s work like putting together the cupboard and wiring for the computer wi-fi. I tried to read the instructions without his participation ... even the baby’s bed. Really, I regard myself inwardly fragile like a slave, yet outwardly tough in performing masculine jobs.

Carrie, a journalist, who regarded herself as ‘a strong character’ and competing in a man’s profession faced similar situations at church.

I was told off before ... you know, when I was competing with the men, I had to physically move heavy furniture ... When I tried to help out at church, I was told by male church members that I was not giving them a chance ... It felt like I was taking over the work which was supposed to be man’s job.

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

The concept of the complete family lingers despite changes of time when both women and men are exposed to Hong Kong's hyper-capitalist influence. As many women earn wages working outside their homes, they are able to contribute to their families financially just like their husbands. With this financial contribution, a grey area of duties in the family is created. Some working women started to question the division of labour and gender role in the family whether women should carry the double burden of work and caring. Another aspect of capitalism is the management of individual biographies. Women are no longer restricted to the family. In the meantime, they are also confronted with a much wider scope of issues including work careers, leisure and security. Depending on the type of issues women are dealing with, their responses vary.

The Role of Mother and Father in the Family

The following group of women started to question the assigned gender role that women were responsible for family chores, and mothers were carers for the family. The uneven distribution of work seemed problematic as it was physically demanding for women who worked and provided caring duties at home. The women would first try to adjust to the situation by looking for resources to balance work and home duties. They would then ask the husbands to participate in household chores or at least to look after the children to achieve a more equitable position in the family. However, not wanting to jeopardize the complete family, this group of women reverted to their original position as carers if the husbands refused to cooperate.

Some women would question the gender role prescribing that women were solely responsible for the family, and further sought to redefine the division of labour. Lara felt that her husband should be more involved in taking care of their son and herself both in quantity and quality. At the same time, she was quite ready to take charge of the man's role in the family in making important financial decisions. It was almost a reversal of roles as she thought she was 'progressing' while her husband 'stayed at a certain level', thus causing 'distance' in their relationship. Susan concurred with Lara's view. To her, the man 'should contribute in other areas besides money and to

look after the wife's emotion.' He should also share the household chores, and it was unreasonable for one party to contribute all. 'It was definitely his job ... he thought that men are smarter ... women are not as smart,' said Mandy, 'I think he has to be responsible to discipline and care for the daughter ... these are the things a man should do, not only earning money.' Mandy was one of the women who had raised questions and tried to redefine the man's role in the family. In Yanki's case, she had hoped for a more equitable position in the family that her husband and her would share all responsibilities earning and income and raising their child. The rift occurred when her husband expected her to be confined to the family while he remained the sole provider financially. 'I am paid to get locked up at home day in and day out, not going out, I can't do it. I'd rather have both husband and wife each working at a job, raise our son and be happy,' said Yanki. To a certain extent, it was believed that men and women should share the family responsibilities equally and at the same time manage their individual biographies. If family duties interfered with her career path, she would first laid it on the table with the spouse and argued her rights. Emily's workaholic husband refused to share the caring duties of the children when his wife wanted to go out to work as well. His snapped and said that 'he had to work hard as well ... unlike me ... who had nothing to do ... He told me to handle the children myself ...' Emily had a different view on her role in the family, 'I like working ... I get satisfaction from work ... I need some kind of balance ... to have work and be able to look after my son ...' More aggressive actions would have been taken to protect her position if the husband had not cooperated.

In some cases, disputes transcended to violent confrontations. Daphne went further offering to 'take up a job and he stays home to take care of our daughter.' She believed that the man could learn how to look after their daughter. When her husband did not deliver, 'it didn't take long to make the decision to divorce ... he is irresponsible ...' Xandra was less fortunate. She had a sick child and she believed that her husband should play a part in the caring, only to be told, 'This is your, a mother's, responsibility.' When she questioned, 'What about the father?' he neither brought money home nor took care of them, and he even beat them up in the end. Iris also expressed dissatisfaction towards her husband's stoicism towards her and the sharing of responsibilities of the children, 'I feel that except he has his own duties ... the responsibility to make money ... he has to take care of the children and me ... I need

someone to care of my emotion ...’

COMMON CONCERNS

Gendered Parenting and Guidance

The majority of the lone mothers held a normative gendered traditional belief that it was necessary for healthy children to grow up in a complete family. After the divorce, the women tried to play both the mother and father roles, yet it was mostly in vain as they felt inadequate as women who lacked certain knowledge privy to men, a male role model was seen as essential to the development of male children. Both Heidi, Zara, and Bonnie (*familial conservative* lone mothers) blamed their sons’ problems on the absence of the father figure in the family. Surprisingly, the deficiency seemed to only affect the male child, but not so much on the daughter. Heidi said, ‘There was no problem with my daughter but my son ... He feels that no one understands him as it is all women in the family ... no male figure who understands and talks to him ... He claims that I don’t understand him.’ Heidi felt the same way herself, ‘I don’t really understand him ... only his father can ...’ Subsequently, she derived the strategy of asking a male friend to talk and play with her son. Bonnie was in the same boat. She said, ‘My son is at his rebellious adolescent age ... I can’t influence him at all but his father can ... he listens to his father. I have a male colleague whom I asked to help my son. He took to him well ... I think it is better to have a father to guide the son’. Zara also said, ‘There are things that a mother just can’t replace a father especially when it comes to boys. A son can only learn to be a man from his father as a mother doesn’t have the knowledge to teach him. The divorce really affects the children especially boys.’

The traditional lone mothers (*familial conservative*) worried about the lack of fatherly love which might push their daughters into premature romantic involvement. Vanessa blamed all her daughter’s rebellious adolescence problems on the divorce, ‘it is such a big headache ... I just couldn’t play her father’s role ... I can only play the role of the provider ... I am so worried that she may meet some men and get romantically involved because she lacks the attention of her father.’ Queenie also shared their views, ‘lone motherhood is so hard without a father ... you have to provide guidance to the

children alone after working the full-day. Sometimes I got mad and yelled at them as they were not able to listen to me, but their father who was the male figure at home ... It was difficult.'

On the other hand, the *individualized conservative* lone mothers like Doris agreed even though she did not have daughters and were thankful to that, 'It's lucky that my child is a boy ... if he was a girl, she would become prematurely romantically without fatherly love ... I can't play the fatherly role ... I can only express verbally what is right and wrong for a man to do, where his responsibilities lies ... I am so worried about his future without the guidance of his father ... emotionally, he has to do without his father's love.' Gloria, Yanki and Xandra felt troubled when providing parental guidance to their children after the divorce. This was because they believed that the lack of a father role in the family would still lead to certain problems such as missing a role model to be a father. Gloria said, 'My son didn't have a father in the house for him to learn from.' While Yanki said, 'Since we don't have a father in the house, my son doesn't do well at school because he would usually share his difficulties and thoughts with his dad. Now, he has nobody to share his problems as he rarely shares them with me, so he isn't doing well at school. I feel guilty for being unable to help him.' Xandra expressed, 'I feel troubled as my son is reaching puberty soon, so I need to think of ways to explain this physical transition to him. It would be much better if his father was present to explain this to him.' As for Lara, she said, 'I'm still willing to live with my ex-husband as he has more time to take care of my son and affect how he acts as a male'.

PRIORITIZING WORK OR FAMILY

The women with *familial conservative* beliefs tended to see as their main commitment the roles of mother and caring for the family. Working outside the family was distinctively men's domain while childrearing was women's. Their priority was staying home and looking after the family full-time. Even if they had to work to make ends meet, it was merely a means to the end – the family – and it was not seen as a career path by the women. Believing in their place in the family, the working women often blamed themselves for neglecting the family, and said that they would rather stay home to fulfil their duty as wife and mother. Some of them would eventually quit

work and return full-time to caring duties at home.

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Family as Priority

The lone mothers' perceptions of work varied according to the degree of traditional influence. The *familial conservative* group of women had a distinct gendered perception of work as caring duties and maintaining family relationships and saw earning money in the public sphere as the man's domain. This perception was reinforced by the similar belief of the ex-spouses that the women should work in the family to serve the husband and care for the children and to facilitate the 'normal' functioning of the family. Three of the husbands forbade their wives to work outside the home, stressing that the wife's duty was to serve the husband and look after the children. For these women, this perception of work perpetuated even after the divorce. They preferred to stay home so that they could look after the family, for example:

Bobo: The most important thing is that I can concentrate in looking after the children because I have great responsibilities as a mother ... so I didn't work ...

Some women had well formulated thoughts of the woman's responsibilities inside the family. If they had to work outside the home for financial reasons, the job itself would be viewed as a means to achieve their responsibilities at home, with regard to the children and the husband. This belief continued after the divorce. If they had to take up paid-work outside the home, their priority still remained with the family and children and, therefore, work would merely be a means to make their caring role possible financially. Vanessa, Heidi and Abby perceived caring as the priority and they took up part-time jobs to allow them to continue their caring duties:

Vanessa: I felt so guilty for working at the café at that time (working night shift and returning home at midnight) ... because I didn't have time to help her develop the habit of reading from young ... for that matter, self-discipline, initiatives ... now, I have taken up several domestic assistant jobs so that I can look after her ... fearing that she might go astray ... in fact, I regret now ... and I want to make up for it ... it's a mother's duty ... I want to make some compensation to my daughter even though it seems a bit late to live up to my responsibilities

Heidi: I went back to do part-time jobs because it is flexible ... I can choose the day and time to work, no weekend shift. I only work a day or two during the summer holiday, which means I can look after my kids ... I did not consider full-time work as I have not worked for many years. If I were to work, it would be 10 p.m. before I got home, and I would not see my children. This is a mother's responsibility ... to take care of my children.

Abby: I worked as a security guard but the hours are too long and I couldn't look after my son. I then changed jobs and become a domestic assistant for a number of homes. The first priority is my children ... I arrange for the children to go to after-school tutoring centers to get some help with their schoolwork and I pick them up after work. If I have to work on weekends, my mother will chip in.

In Zara's care, she made the decision to quit her professional full-time job and worked part-time.

Zara: My first consideration is my son because it is my duty as I brought him into this world. He has no choice but I do. I choose to have him, so I have to bear the responsibility not only do I have to raise him but to see to it he is happy and healthy.

Ula, Wendy and Pauline all emphasized the importance of being a mother despite the fact that they had to take up full-time work to support the family. The work itself became secondary with most interest being on the working hours and location rather than job prospects, the nature of the work and even the remuneration.

Ula: As I am the mother ... looking after her and helping her with her school-work is important ... I had chosen to work in my neighborhood, five days week and no over-time. That way, I could pick up my daughter on time from school after work. Later on, the company I worked with moved to a farther location. I quitted the job because of my daughter. Now, I have found another job nearby so that I can continue to look after my daughter.

Wendy: I look for jobs with short working hours so that I can look after my daughter. Since I am the mother, I should ... do this.

Pauline: At that time, I changed from working shift to a more regular time position, thinking that I could look after my child ... I didn't think about anything else ... just about looking after him ... the most important thing is my son ... being able to look after him is the most important. In fact, I didn't get paid as much working in an office then ... it was lower, a great deal lower. I thought about it for a long time. Eventually, I thought about getting off at 5:30 ...

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Work as Important as the Family

The *conservatively individualized* group among the lone mothers regarded work to be as important as the family. They preferred working outside of the home as a link to the outside world while earning a second income to subsidize the household expenses. While married they actively sought the opportunity for paid work. For those who managed to engage in paid work they had to balance the demands from both work and the family. They expected their husbands to chip in to alleviate the burden of family duties. After the divorce when they took up paid work the situation might have taken a down turn as the Hong Kong labour market was not conducive to employment for lone mothers (see Chapter 6 and 7). They therefore carried a double burden due to often harsh employment practices such as inflexible long working hours, work overload and stress, and unsupportive employers. This group of working lone mothers suffered both from conflicts of work and the family and vice versa. In addition, they fell victim to self-blame as they could not escape the realm of motherhood ingrained in traditional thinking. Striking a balance between work and childrearing became their priority. Some of the lone mothers shared the desire to strike this balance each for their own reasons. For example, Emily ‘picked up some part-time jobs because I enjoy working as I get satisfaction from work’; Daphne aimed at ‘a higher position’, yet she would mention ‘to the employer at the interview that I need to choose the location close to home so that I can look after my daughter’; Yanki believed that ‘work and family are both important but the family is a shared responsibility’, even after the divorce, she didn’t want to give up working and had to change jobs to suit the caring demands, ‘I switched to become a domestic assistant, holding down three jobs and working after my son is asleep or away at school’; Doris considered herself ‘lucky’ because she was able to work for her brother so she could continue working and looking after her child while Iris had to fit her work schedule according to her daughter’s. Both Doris and Iris hoped to keep pace with society, Doris said, ‘It is my duty to look after my own child, but it is also important to work so that you stay in tune with society’; Iris said, ‘I don’t want to disconnect with the society, so I need to continue working, but taking care of my children is also important.’

Work as the Priority

Some of the lone mothers can be viewed as the least affected by the traditional belief that a woman's place is in the home. In these cases, the ex-spouses did not object to their wives working as they accepted the benefits of two incomes, but the men seldom initiated sharing the family duties. To the women, paid work was a priority. While they were working hard to pursue advancement through further training and education, they were ready to seek available resources from family and friends to help with family duties. Facing harsh capitalist employment practices, the women became more adept at asking for help before they would take a day off to manage a family crisis. This situation continued beyond the marriage. When they became lone mothers, they suffered conflicts of work and the family, yet some claimed that the satisfaction gained from working compensated for the hardship from the burden of caring for the family. In Lara's case, motherhood was redefined to stress quality rather than quantity of time spent and financial support to the child. 'I feel that ... as a woman ... you should not abandon your job. It has nothing to do with your economic condition,' 'My care focuses on the quality and not the quantity.' She even surrendered custody and became a weekend mothers in order to fully engage in her job. 'I even plan to move out and leave my son with my ex-husband and the maid, and I'll just play the role of a weekend mother.'

COPING WITH THE CONFLICT OF WORK AND CARING

The data collected showed commonalities and differences in the struggles faced by the lone mothers who held the traditional beliefs in caring and motherhood as well as those who believed in individualized responsibilities. They all seemed to share an ingrained belief in individual and motherhood responsibilities, and were strongly inclined to resolve or cope with the difficulties caused socially through individual resources. For its part, the state only provided piece-meal and sporadic community support for lone mothers, so it was entirely up to the individual to explore what scanty resources were available to them.

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Caring Duties as the Priority

Strategy 1: To Accommodate Caring with CSSA

For the group of lone mothers who held strong traditional beliefs that their utmost responsibility was caring for their children, they did not work when married and their preference was to stay home to care for their children. Once they were divorced and found themselves and their children without financial support, they became anxious about their motherhood responsibilities. Bobo and Queenie's chose to turn to CSSA.

Bobo: I don't work ... instead I live off the government because I have to look after the kid.

Queenie: Since the most important thing is the child, the CSSA from the government allows me to have time to look after him.

The decision to rely on CSSA rested mainly on the priority the women gave to their caring duties but it also reflected that there was no alternative for them but to find other sources of support as in Rose's case.

Rose: as I cannot break through and fly out to get a job and risk going to jail (conflict with CSSA regulations). I can't take the risk as I am still receiving welfare from the government as I don't have no other backup or support ... I have to take care of my children alone.

Strategy 2: To accommodate Caring with Part-time Work

Some women would not consider taking up full-time jobs that would interfere with their caring duties. They would consider taking up part-time jobs to make ends meet. In Cathy's case, she chose to take up two or three part-time jobs, morning, afternoon, evening or midnight shift, so that she could take care of the children and make ends meet. She also risked breaking the law of child negligence while she was away at work. It was a constant struggle with the dilemma of work and caring. Cathy was not alone in that struggle, Queenie and Olivia were in the same boat. They would break up a full-time job into several part-time jobs so that she had the flexibility to tend to her children.

Cathy: I have several part-time jobs on top of CSSA. Currently, I work graveyard shift opening oysters on top of the several jobs during the day when my children are at school. I had to leave them at home alone. I started working night-shift after they have gone to sleep. (Aren't you worried about something might go wrong at night?) Sure, I do, but not as bad as during the day as they have already gone to bed. Yes, I know, I risk leaving my sons alone at home ... I was worrying ... I was so anxious and worried if anything would happen to them. I simply don't want to give up looking after them for work. Yet, the problem of making ends meet poses a dilemma and it is really a struggle. I always think it is because of my children that I have given up my career in the restaurant business. Anyway, if I work, I will be able to make ends meet. On the other hand, it is meaningless if I have to sacrifice caring for the children. In the end, if you are a mom, you have the duty to look after your children.

Queenie: I have chosen to work part-time in a restaurant from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. when my kids are away at school. That way, I can pick them up from school and don't want to leave her at home alone.

Olivia: I won't do full-time work as I won't be able to take care of my children. As a mom, I have no choice but to give up my full-time job if I can't take care of my children. But I am worrying to leave my children alone at home.

Strategy 3: Compromise Work for Caring

Some of the working lone mothers made choices about their work to accommodate their caring duties. At times, as in Pauline and Fiona's cases, they might have to make the decision of switching to a less interesting, less well remunerated or less career-oriented job in order to fit in with their children's schedule.

Pauline: I enjoy challenges at work as they are all different, nothing routine. I don't like repetitive work. That's why I have chosen front-line work as it suits me and the pay is high. However, I had to request a transfer to office work with regular hours to fit in my son's schedule. The work is boring and I earn less. I told myself that it's alright, and we'll just make do for my son's sake.

Fiona: The salary is a bit low so I need to control my expenses by spending less and having no entertainment. The benefit is that they pay on time, don't need to work during the holidays, and can allow me to pick my children when they finish school.

Apart from finding jobs with a suitable location and work hours, some of the lone mothers, like Eva and Ula, would plan for emergencies by working harder and longer in exchange for time off, outsourcing the care duties or paying neighbours for in-between hour childcare, or appointing trustworthy family members or friends to stand

in. The trade-off for financial security might generate further problems with regard to their child rearing and their own health.

Ula: Sometimes, I work late ... not leaving on time (in fear of being laid off) ... but I have not enough time to take care my children ... sometimes my family will help (caring duties) ... yes, I feel guilt and really guilt not being able to take care of them.

Eva: I employed a helper to take care of my daughter ... I have my worries too about being lay-off, so I work harder and do more overtime ... and hope that I will not be laid off ... as my employer will feel that I am still worth it ... willing, and hardworking with loyalty ... and I have to earn money to pay off the mortgage and my daughter's ... I feel exhausted and also feel guilty for not being able to spend time to my daughter ...

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Reciprocal of Work and Family

Strategy 1: Balancing Work and Caring Duties

Although the lone mothers interviewed were prone towards the traditional women's role in the family and the demands of motherhood, they displayed various responses in coping with their lone family situation. While one group of women desired work so that they would not be out of tune with society, some women sought to establish their identity and were eager to participate in contributing to society. With the added burden of providing for the family after the divorce, they had to work even harder to provide security and extras for the children as they had to become self-reliant in the face of limited support from the state or other family members. Their work choice was limited as the lone mother status was not well received in commercial firms which looked unfavorably on employees who had to take frequent time off from work to look after families. The lone mothers tended to remain in one job instead of changing in fear of having difficulty landing another suitable job.

Daphne: I concerned about work and caring should be in balance ... I mentioned to the employer at the interview that I need to choose the location close to home so that I can look after my daughter ... but I declined the promotion for my daughter.

Yanki: I switched to become a domestic assistant, holding down three jobs and working after my son is asleep or away at school.

Iris: I have arranged to go to work after I drop her off at school and pick her up after work ...

In Emily's case she left her job after she gave birth to her son but soon suffered from depression because she was not able to connect to the society, and then a sense of isolation set in. She feared the danger of losing touch with the outside world, so she returned to work as part-time worker.

I only do part time as I have to fulfil my caring duty. I have no choice, you know ... work and caring both are important to me ...

Strategy 2: Outsourcing Caring Duties

In the meantime, some lone mothers recruited a network of help from family and domestic helpers. In some cases, they would balance work and caring duties by seeking assistance from outsiders to do the caring duties for them so that they can continue to work and maintain a connection with the world. Doris did not have any family support so she had to employ a domestic helper to help take care of her children. In contrast Daphne could work longer hours as she received assistance from her father to share the caring duties.

Doris: I don't want to quit my job because I like working, so I hired a domestic helper helps out the caring duties.

Daphne: Being a mother, you have to have a sense of responsibility, I have a domestic helper who is willing to take her day off during the week so that I can work at weekends.

Strategy 3: Remote Monitoring and Spot Checking

Furthermore, fearing that their children might fall into undesirable company and habits, they tried to integrate work into the caring duties by arranging children to attend after-school tutorial schools or resorting to remote control via the phone and spot checking. Nicole worked a full-time but worried about her daughter to join a bad company. 'I think about her all the time when I am at work ... her whereabouts ... the only thing I can do is to monitor her over the phone ... it also affects my work ... that's why I ask her to bring her friends home (to be safe) and also I get to know them.' Doris adopted

a similar strategy, 'I don't really trust the domestic helper, so I make multiple phone calls to monitor her and my children remotely.'

CONCLUSION

The perceptions of marriage and family in the two groups of lone mothers are influenced by traditional beliefs to varying degrees but a diversity of views and responses in relation to individual social locations was obvious. Despite the varied responses, the lone mothers deployed strategies with the resonance of the traditional values which still bore heavily in the context of the Hong Kong society. The *familial conservative* lone mothers submitted to marriage to fulfil the status of complete women. However, another force at work is the traditional idea that a good complete woman should only belong to one man. Hence, women would feel inferior being a second-hand commodity in a remarriage. When children were involved, the belief in the complete family took president, the women would choose to sacrifice the 'good women' belief in order to reestablish a new complete family to provide a male model for the children especially for boys. For the same token, the *individualized conservative* lone mothers also submitted to marriage under the influence of traditional belief but with reservation. Among other factors, the basis for marriage would include financial considerations as most of the women were not financially dependent. They shared the same belief in remarriage and bought into the traditional idea of 'good woman' belonging to one man only in a lifetime. Therefore, the term remarriage connoted inferiority as a second-hand commodity. Another common concern in reestablishing a new complete family was the need for a male figure for the boys, yet the fear of abuse to girls lurked in the background.

Another critical dimension was the family. Some of the *familial conservative* lone mothers whose belief in the complete family precedes even selfhood struggled to maintain the complete family at the expense of exhausting personal resources, sacrificing job prospects, and in desperation, bearing another child in an attempt to change the man's mind. On the other hand, the *individualized conservative* lone mothers, in spite of a similar traditional belief in the complete family, were willing to discount the idea with a bottom line which placed the children and the self as priority. The *familial conservative* lone mothers have distinct gender roles in the division of

labour in the family while the *individualized conservative* ones tended to redefine the traditional values of gender roles and desired equal contributions in forging new paths individually for themselves and their children to go on. Subsequently, the *familial conservative* lone mothers would compromise work for caring duties as family was priority to them. The lone mothers might choose to change job location or time to suit their caring duties. The *individualized conservative* lone mothers took a slightly different approach in prioritizing work and family. The majority of the women gave equal importance to work and family to maintain a certain degree of independence, both financially and in creating their own self-biography. A couple of them regarded work as priority to focus on the development of the self. When conflict arose between work and caring duties, they would try to strike a balance with their own resources such as out-sourcing the caring or deploying innovative modes in monitoring their children. Other gendered concerns shared by both the *familial* and *individualized* lone mothers were the need for parenting and guidance.

As the idea of a ‘complete woman’ and a ‘good mother’ and a ‘ideal worker’ are so deeply ingrained in most women’s minds that they tend to acknowledge marriage and the family as an individualized responsibility. Positioned in various social locations their responses to resolving difficult situations depended on individual views and concerns. Their decisions are by no means autonomous but a complex combination of existing inequality and emerging rapid social upheavals in the labour market, gender role change in the family and government retrenchment. The following chapter will reveal the data collected in demonstrating the complexity of the lone mothers’ coping strategies.

CHAPTER SIX

COPING WITH THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the major themes that emerged from the data collected in the face-to-face interviews: finance, employment, housing and social situations. The data revealed diversities in the perception of difficulties and in responses. These differences arose from their traditional belief in motherhood, and their various social backgrounds. The *familial conservative* lone mothers demonstrated a kind of tunnel vision on motherhood adhering closely to the role of carer. As a result, a shortage of income became a concern because of their desire to become or remain full-time mothers and part-time workers. The *individualized conservative* lone mothers took a practical approach to motherhood, which emphasized the equal importance of their dual roles of provider and carer. Another source of income derived from alimony but there was a lack of enforcement leaving the lone mothers very little chance to benefit from it. Some women turned to CSSA as the last resort to solve their financial problems but suffered from stigmatization and contributed to the feminization of poverty. Another factor causing financial concerns to the lone mothers was the elite education system, a seemingly bottomless pit for their limited incomes. The second area of concern was employment. First of all, it was difficult to find employment with outdated skills and low education. Secondly, the traditional labour market caters to the male breadwinner worker not the double-burdened female worker. Lastly, employers did not look favourably on the lone mothers requiring frequent times off for their caring duties. Without equitable employment the lone mothers would find it difficult to provide for the family, and at the same time this created an obstacle in forging a self-biography. A third concern unanimously voiced was housing problems after divorce. Despite rare and sporadic discussions on women and the notorious Hong Kong housing market, the majority the lone mothers found themselves facing being left out in the cold. Apart from the few lucky ones who had private housing, they had to find shelters almost immediately after the divorce or separation. While the *familial*

conservative lone mothers equated a house to a home for the family, the *individualized conservative* lone mothers saw it as a safe base for them to leave their children in so that they could work outside. Despite the difference in the interpretation of housing, access to resources would determine the difficulties the lone mothers had to face. For those who had to move because they could no longer afford the high rent, they would find that most landlords were unwilling to rent to lone mothers for fear that they might not pay the rent on time. The alternative was settling for subdivided housing, a horrendous environment for both the women and the children, or applying and waiting endlessly for public housing. Those who lived in public housing under the main tenancy of their husbands were at the mercy of the men to transfer the tenancy to the women. Failing that, they would have to go through the application, means test and waiting all over again. To the lone mothers, prejudicial treatment in finance, employment and housing are closely connected as their most immediate concerns.

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

Despite the uncertainties they faced, those who were not working before their divorces struggled to find means to provide for the family without the support of their partners while those who were working before the divorce found that they had to make compromises with only one income. Other sources of income were from CSSA, alimony or undertaking part-time work, sometimes several part-time jobs to make ends meet. Since divorce was considered a personal decision made by the individuals involved, the consequence also became individualized and the state did not play a role. Whether they took up employment, relied on alimony or went on CSSA, the obstacles in structure and institutional practices deemed their responses unsatisfactory. The lone mothers deployed individual coping strategies to deal with the extirpated financial difficulties. Not only was the result often unsatisfactory, it also teetered on the edge of generating further problems.

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Tunnel Vision on Motherhood

For the traditional lone mothers, finance became an immediate concern once they were divorced. Holding a distinct view on gender roles, motherhood was preeminent while everything else took a back seat. They were less inclined than others to undertake the role of the father, the breadwinner, to resolve financial problems of the family. Instead, they would become extremely worried and look for other resources to enable them to continue to stay home to fulfil the role of mother, the carer. Financially, either the family was reduced from a two-income to a one-income family, or from one income to zero. The lone mothers soon found that they were in a substantially different financial situation. The degree of dependency certainly played an important role in the financial struggles of the lone mothers. For the group who used to be stay-home mothers, it was an overwhelming problem as they had no source of income. They were no longer endowed with husbands as breadwinners so they could devote full attention to their children.

Abby: The biggest problem after the divorce is money, the lack of it as I had always relied on my ex-husband. At that time, I didn't know what to do ...

Bonnie: I was a full-time housewife before divorce, without income and not enough saving to. I only knew that I had to take good care of my children.

Ada: It must be a financial problem because I was a full-time mother before.

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Practical Approach to Motherhood

The rest of the lone mothers were also concerned about their roles as mothers but at the same time realized the necessity to resolve the financial problems they faced after the divorce. They were more inclined to take matters to their own hands to provide for the family. The idea of being in the driving seat and in control alleviated some of their anxieties. As a result, it came natural for them to accept the role of the breadwinner on top of motherhood, and they would try to juggle the two roles. Xandra, Yanki and Daphne, stay-home mothers, took up employment immediately after their

divorces and Yanki thought it was natural for both men and women to work to earn a living. Daphne faced the imminent financial difficulties with a matter-of-fact attitude, and started looking for a job.

Xandra: The first thing I did was to find a job because of the loss of financial support. I can take over his role as a bread winner as well ... no big deal ...

Yanki: Financial problem, because my ex-husband didn't let me go out to work and wanted me to stay at home to take care of him and our son. I didn't have to think about much ... but work ... women can be strong too, why not? I can do whatever a man can. How difficult would it be to make a living?

Daphne: Finance is the first problem I have to face ... I told myself it's no big deal ... I didn't work because I had to take care of my daughter before ... now it's just a matter of looking for a job ... going to work ...

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

CSSA – Lifeline or Ball and Chain?

For the lone mothers who upheld motherhood as their main role, CSSA could be a lifeline to keep them alive, if only barely. Those who went on CSSA were also chained to poverty. Insisting on the individual responsibility of caring for the family, some of the divorced women might turn to CSSA, in response to their financial woes. They strongly believed their duty as a mother was towards the family, or what was left of it, the children. As the CSSA only provided minimum coverage, some women also considered taking up part-time jobs to make ends meet.

Bonnie: I have to take care of my children because I am a mother, then I went on CSSA but it was not enough. I chose to work part-time to support my family.

Cathy: I go wherever there is a job because CSSA alone is just not enough. In fact, I'd rather take care of the children ... CSSA pays \$12,000 which includes \$4,000 for rent. I have to top up over \$2,000 for rent. Sometimes, there are miscellaneous fees that have to be paid to the children's school like luncheon fees.

Queenie: In fact, I also receive CSSA but it is not enough to cover our expenses. So I work as part-time worker.

In order to overcome the CSSA allowance shortfall and stretch the limited amount they had, Teresa, Vanessa and Bobo responded by curbing their grocery shopping habits looking for bargains, shopping at closing hours in the market or buying frozen meat instead of fresh. Teresa became vegetarian and Vanessa walked to work in order to save on bus fares. Bobo went to the extreme of eating only one vegetarian meal a day.

Teresa: I look for bargains in the market by waiting till closing time when grocers lower the price to half price to get rid of the day's vegetables. Mind you, that won't work with the butcher or the fishmonger. So I don't buy them fresh. I buy the cheaper frozen ones. To save money, I no longer eat meat and I became vegetarian to save on the food bill. The money saved will be spent on supplementing my daughter's diet. However, I still have to set a budget on what she eats so that we don't overspend.

Vanessa: I walk to work to save money for food.

Bobo: I myself only eat one meal a day to save money. I go to the market at closing time to find bargains for vegetables and eggs but not meat. I buy small quantity of meat for my son.

As for the food banks and soup kitchens, the women stopped using them, saying that there were people who were worse off, or because they were not allowed to receive double benefits due to the CSSA policy.

Bobo: I used the food bank for half a year and stopped because there are worse off people than me.

Bonnie: I used the food bank before going on CSSA but was cut off as soon as I got CSSA.

Teresa: I was referred to the food bank but I felt it was beneath my dignity. First, I have to swear in front of a notary public to prove that I do not have a job. I saw old people and disabled people eating \$10 meals there, and I felt that I was taking away from them. I felt sorry for them and myself, so I told the social worker that I would not go anymore.

Others like Joan no longer went to those places because the staff there would look down on them.

I used to go to the soup kitchen, but I stopped going there later. I felt embarrassed as the staff seemed to look down on me.

The prolonged financial stress and poor nutrition took its toll on the lone mothers' lives, but they still believed that their priority was to let their children live better lives.

Bobo: I have lived like this for the past four years and the poor nutrition has caught up with my health. I don't go to the doctor when I am sick so that I can save the money for my son.

Katy: CSSA doesn't pay enough for you to live on ... It is still not enough. I won't spend money to see doctor when I was sick so as to save money for my children.

Since CSSA is a bare minimum safety net provided for the down and out individuals in Hong Kong and not catering to any particular disadvantage groups, the lone mothers would always be put in a sinking position of want. In order to fulfil their role as mothers, some of those on CSSA would take up part-time work to make up for the shortage. Actually, they were in a catch twenty-two situation. If they had reported the income, a certain amount of the CSSA would have been reduced. If they had not reported the income, they would have risked being found out and got disqualified from CSSA or worse, got in trouble with the law for CSSA fraud. Subsequently, the CSSA and part time work kept the lone mothers in poverty. Bonnie was the one who undertook several part-time jobs without reporting them to the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

As you know, any amount earned over the threshold would be deducted. The staff at social welfare department handling my case didn't inform me about the deduction. I worked even though I had a painful leg or when I felt ill to earn extra money. I cried when I went to renew my CSSA this year when I found that out. I asked the staff why they had reduced my subsidy and how else I could have survived if I hadn't taken up employment and earned more. Now I told them I'm not working for fear of them deducting a large chunk of the subsidy.

In Cathy's case, she also risked being discovered working four part-time jobs to make ends meet while on CSSA.

I have no choice ... of course, I didn't report to the SWD officer when I undertook four part time work ... I don't want the salary to be deducted.

Other Sources of Funds – Lifebuoy or Sinking Stone?

As well as CSSA, they would seek as much support as possible from other sources of flexible welfare, for example the Child Development Fund and other charitable funds set up by the government or private charities. However, these funds were temporary and subject to frequent cuts and changes. The Working Family Allowance Scheme (WFAS) was only awarded to those who were already working but poor. They would only be entitled to the subsidy if they worked even longer hours. Thus the WFAS punished the already working poor, forcing them to work longer hours in order to qualify for it. This temporary appeared to trap working mother into poverty, Teresa and Heidi were in these situations.

Teresa: I had applied for other charity funds to pay for rent for my subdivided housing. The three-month rent subsidy was a life-saver because I was injured and couldn't work. It wasn't a long term subsidy and it was cut abruptly.

Heidi: I applied for subsidy for the working poor. I figure that if I worked 36 hours a week, I would only get the basic \$1,300; but if I work 72 hours, I will receive the maximum \$2,600. I arranged with the company I work with to do only 72 hours, not an hour more or less. The subsidy will drop more than half if I work an hour over. Sometimes if it gets really busy at work, I'll do it free in exchange for time off in the summer for my children. In the meantime, I try to work at least 36 hours to qualify for the subsidy.

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

CSSA – a Poor Option

Some of the lone mothers in this group considered the CSSA as the last resort to fall back on in unusual circumstances. They might be forced to go on CSSA at one point of time but they would try to go off the assistance as soon as possible, as in Yanki's case: 'I didn't know CSSA was so restrictive. My experience is that there are so many questions that you have to disclose all private information ... it is discriminatory.' She went on CSSA for a few months after her son received an electric shock when he was left alone at home. She returned to work because CSSA was just not enough to keep the family afloat. She didn't want to stay home and not work. 'I felt that people around, including my son's school and the neighbors, were all looking down at me and thinking that I was lazy and relied on welfare.' Often, the younger the children

were, and in special cases of children with disabilities, the more they had to rely on the system. However, in Xandra's case, when she had to find ways to make up for the shortfall in the CSSA, she could not help but felt embarrassed. 'My strategy is to go scavenger hunting in garbage dumps for appliance and furniture. One time, I moved a desk home for my son by myself. I always peek inside the garbage collection station every time I pass. I try to comfort myself that I am not really a beggar; I am just picking up things others discards.'

COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT CSSA

Negative Connotation on CSSA

The stigma of CSSA exerted a dreadful effect on its recipients in this research. Neither the stay-home nor the working lone mothers were willing to go on to CSSA because of the stigma. Regardless of *familial* or *individualized* groups of lone mothers, they would rather rely on themselves, doing part-time or full-time work to make ends meet since they were able bodied. Ula and Eva both rejected the idea of applying for CSSA, saying that it should be reserved for the 'deserving poor' while Olivia, Fiona Yanki and Heidi did not want to set 'a poor model for their children by relying on welfare'.

Ula: I would not consider CSSA as I am an able body. Basically, I think people go on CSSA only when they are really unable to work, and the poor So, being able, why shouldn't you rely on yourself and get a job?

Eva: As I am still healthy and able, I don't want to waste government resources ... the one who is deserving to get the help from the government ...

Olivia: After all, CSSA is not a good idea. It will be a poor model for my children ... my son may think that it's alright to do nothing, no studying, no work ... Also, people may look down on him.

Fiona: I won't consider CSSA because I am still able ... I don't want my child to be stigmatized ... and it is a poor model for them in relying on welfare.

Yanki: Neither my children nor I are able to bear the stigma of being CSSA recipients.

Heidi: There's nothing wrong to receive alimony but CSSA is a stigma saying that you are lazy. It will impact on the children's self-image.

Society as a whole upholds the stigma of CSSA lone mothers who are deemed inferior under the presumption of poverty and welfare reliance. The public seemed to have a say in how they should carry themselves. Most of those interviewed believed that welfare should only benefit the deserving poor, while those who received welfare benefits were labeled as dependent and lazy. Being a lone mother on CSSA was a double stigma that the women tried to avoid. Xandra was an *individualized conservative* lone mother and she felt that the entire community judged her as a lone mother who relied on CSSA public money and therefore, she must keep a low profile and she was in no position to bestow generosity on others.

Sometimes I was given sample clothing from the company I worked for, and even bags, name brands. However, I felt that people looked strangely at me assuming that I had no right to wear expensive clothes since I was on CSSA. I was even criticized for giving the security guard in my building a red packet at Chinese New Year, a small token of appreciation for his help throughout the year. They didn't think that I should be in the position of giving since I am 'taking' public money from CSSA. My neighbor criticized me for being a lone mother who was not able to support my son, and having to rely on welfare, so I shouldn't be giving out red packets. It's a form of stigmatization and discrimination against being a lone mother on CSSA. The entire society keeps an eye on you.

Carrie and Joan had the experience of being discriminated against by the government workers assigned to handle their welfare cases. They felt that they were deliberately put through the mill when they sought help simply for the fact that they were lone mothers. Because of this, Carrie a *familial conservative* lone mother gave up the CSSA application while Joan felt quite helpless.

Carrie: I had tried to apply for CSSA because I was out of work ... but the staff's attitude was really awful ... they made me feel so bad. They put up a face looking down on you, like, you were a beggar ... all in all, extremely poor attitude.

Joan: I am a failure ... For being a CSSA recipient, the social worker came for a home visit and I told her that my ex-husband gambles away the CSSA ... and lose it all. I was told, 'I am neither his father nor his mother, and therefore have no control of his gambling,' and continued, 'CSSA is for your ex-husband and children. We are not responsible in providing support for you ...' (How do you interpret that?) It means first, it is none of their business ... second, they discriminate against me ...

Bobo's experience put so much pressure on her that she had to resort to taking medication for insomnia and anxiety.

There was an unexplainable amount of \$2,000 in my account and I was questioned by the CSSA staff assuming that I was cheating and hiding income ... they told me to investigate myself where the \$2,000 came from and who gave it to me ... The result was that it came from SWD but they didn't believe it claiming that there's no way that they didn't know ... I didn't want to argue with them ... then I was told that if I couldn't explain the money, she would cut my child's CSSA off and not approve the coming up application. They called me frequently and told me off ... it was so mind-boggling ... and it bothered me to no end ... I jumped every time the phone rang ... it made me so nervous ... my heartbeat raised and I breathed heavily ... heartache, dizziness ... I simply couldn't handle it anymore ... I had to take sleeping pills every time before and after I had to go to see them ... You know, as a social worker and civil servant, it is supposed to be a noble job because you are helping the underprivileged. I thought that they are supposed to treat the people they serve with respect, but I just don't feel that I have been treated that way ...

The stigma extended to the children through outdated and gratuitous practices at school. For example, children were shamed when they submitted different coloured forms for the exemption of fees. Teresa's daughter, a eighteen-year-old, refused to go on CSSA and she would rather help filling in a full time job for her mother who suffered from severe back pain because of overwork. Instead of focusing on school as any regular 18-year-old girl, she ended up suffering the same back problem and academic failure, all for a low paid poor part-time job with no prospects.

I was going to bend to reality and go on CSSA. After the divorce, I made my living borrowing from friends and family because I was no longer able to work with the back problem I sustained from the job. My daughter reacted violently in tears and refused the idea. She proposed to fill in with my job working after school from 6 to 11 on top of full days on weekends. After a year, my daughter also suffers from back pains which affected her studies. The pain and school work exert tremendous pressure on her. Now she is working weekend only 8a.m. to 10p.m. at \$40 per hour. You can't help but submit to reality ... your body has arrived at a stage ... I tried and recruited the teacher at my daughter's school to convince her that it is alright to go on CSSA in vain. She is proud and has a strong will. She thinks that her number one image will be destroyed if her schoolmates find out she is on CSSA. As you know, students on CSSA have to present a yellow form when it comes to exemption for miscellaneous school fees. She just couldn't face being marked out as some sort of a beggar ...

Responses to the Stigma

In response to the stigma of being a lone mother and being on CSSA, the women regardless of whether they were *familial* or *individualized* demonstrated their achievements through paid work in the labour market or voluntary work at their children's school and other charities to show their contribution to the community. Through these they wanted to retain their dignity not to be labelled as lazy and welfare dependent.

Bonnie: I decided to work only a few days a month to show that I am not lazy.

Cathy: I work several part-time jobs to prove that I'm not welfare dependent and contribute to the society.

Queenie: The part-time job has really helped us towards a more stable life in making ends meet. No matter how hard, I must work, because I don't want people to say that I'm lazy.

In Katy, Rose and Gloria cases they were eager to demonstrate to their children's schools that they were worthy parents. To some extent, they tried to shield their children from being discriminated and labeled as lone family children on CSSA.

Katy: I volunteer at my daughters' school to showcase my contribution despite my lone and CSSA situation.

Rose: I volunteer at my son's school. I have obtained many certificates from his previous school. I forwarded all the certificates to his current school. I just want to prove that despite the lone status and CSSA, I am a contributing parent ... I have my share of contributions ...

Gloria: I participate in my daughter's school volunteer work, dishing out lunch twice a week. It makes me feel good because I am also contributing to the community and not relying solely on the government.

A few of the lone mothers even took a step further and participated in community politics to demonstrate their value to society. For Teresa, Ada (*familial conservative*), and Yanki (*individualized conservative*), the concept of the self derived from helping others and participating in community affairs. They both demonstrated a different approach against the stigma of lone mothers. They displayed a tendency of self-fulfilment neither through the achievement of their children nor conquering the boundaries between men and women's work.

Teresa: Even I am a lone mother ... I feel that I am valuable through helping others. I hope that I will give some support to the lone mothers who are in a bind emotionally ... so that they can step out of the rut.

Yanki: Women and poverty concern group ... they aim at helping women. I want to have some contribution ... being a lone mother doesn't necessarily mean that I have to live a miserable life ... I just want to contribute in some way ...

Ada: I am a lone mother relying on the government but I have my worth ... as I am the vice-chair of the PTA at my children's school, and members of several public committees ... I can live a meaningful life ... what good will it do to look down on me ... neither of us gain ... I just want to live my own life ...

COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT WORK

Work – Floating on or Sinking below the Poverty Line

Lone mothers who took up paid work to resolve financial needs fell into three main work modes: holding down multiple part-time jobs, full-time employment and CSSA plus part-time work. The *familial conservative* lone mothers were likely to take up multiple part-time jobs as they prioritized motherhood and wanted to fit in their caring duties (in the previous section). On the other hand, many of the *individualized* lone mothers, who did not mind undertaking the breadwinner role, were likely to take up full time work. Trying to balance the roles of breadwinner and carer (in the previous section).

Consequence 1: Health Issues

It was quite impossible for the women to stay afloat financially, and they put themselves into further risks of fatigue and, especially, excessive physical wear and tear. Vanessa held down several jobs, while Olivia was willing to look for an extra job if her current income was not sufficient.

Vanessa: It is hard ... shoulder pains ... but it's better than going on welfare.

Olivia: If one job doesn't pay enough, I'll look for more. At least I can look after him (her son) even though it is hard and might cause my health to further deteriorate.

For the full-time working lone mothers, regardless of whether *familial* or *individualized*, who had long working hours like Eva, Carrie, Ula (*familial*), and Lara (*individualized*), all did not want to become exhausted. The consequences they had to bear were not only being unable to spend more time with their children but also the need to face the pressures from work.

Eva: There is no fixed time for me to leave work, sometimes I would even finish work at 9pm. When I arrive home, I still need to check her homework, so it's really tiring.

Carrie: Originally, my boss wanted me to work overtime, but I tried to negotiate with him. However, my boss threatened me that if the company had any problems, I would be the first to get laid-off.

Ula: It's not like I don't have financial difficulties, but relatively less as I am a fulltime worker. I work extra hard in order not to be fired by my boss. It's sad.

Lara: I need to work until 11pm and travel long distances to and from work, so it's tiring and stressful.

On top of a full-time job, Pauline took on an extra part-time one working overnight shifts to increase her income, which affected her performance in the day job, she further risked ill-health.

On top of my full-time job during the day, I tried working overnight shifts in McDonalds after my son had gone to bed. For more than half a year, I used to work only Friday and Saturday overnight shifts, but it was really tight, so I also worked Monday to Thursday overnight. My boss was curious why I was always sleepy. I tried to catch up with my sleep on the bus and at lunch. And my health was deteriorating so much.

Consequence 2: Lack of Personal Life

The financial change from a double-income to a single-income family could be devastating. Some of the women like *familial conservatives* Ula, Eva and Carrie, who had to rely only on their income to provide financial support to the family after the divorce, responded first with stripping out all personal expenses and then cutting corners in the household budget to compensate for the loss of the men's support. Ula said, 'Worst come to worst, I find ways to save.' Eva said, 'it is my own responsibility, I don't have any entertainment, I no longer buy clothes for myself.' Carrie was in a

similar situation, 'reduce socializing with friends ... and eventually, lose my personal life.'

Having to look after children and hold down a job some women, like *individualized conservative* Iris, simply did not have time to socialize. Even if they met up with their friends, they probably had to bring their children along due to the lack of childcare. As Iris explained, she would rather not drag her daughters to her own social gatherings:

In fact, I am quite busy working and looking after the children ... I have no time to see my friends ... but I do keep seeing my friends even though that it means dragging my two girls along ... what can you do ... sometimes we can't really talk in front of the girls ... but I don't want to leave them with someone else ... I am their mother ... I can't ignore them ...

In *individualized conservative* Daphne's case, she felt that she was further alienated with a sick child. She longed for some social connection with her friends, yet she was under pressure to devote more time to her daughter:

I work around the clock, going to work and looking after my daughter ... sometimes I feel really tired ... I struggle and feel tired ... 'Should I go out with friends for dinner tonight?' But then I feel the pressure ... that I haven't spent time with my daughter for a while, so I'd better stay in and not go out. Then my mother would say, 'Don't look to me to help her with the exercise, I have no idea how to do it.' I feel really lonely ... I long for some private life ... and friends ...

COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT ALIMONY

Alimony – support or nightmare?

In theory, alimony and child support are supposed to be paid to sustain the spouse and children after the divorce, and the lone mothers were supposed to find some financial relief from it. In fact, only in a few cases, less than 10% of these studied, were the women were able to rely on a stable alimony and child support income which allowed the *individualized conservative* lone mothers to pursue self-improvement, and the *familial conservative* lone mothers to stay home to look after their children. However, only a few lucky ones received such payments on time because the Hong Kong legal system was not responsible for enforcing alimony and child support payments. If the men defaulted on payments, the women would have to chase the promised financial

support through a civil court. Since the civil court had no jurisdiction over elusive ex-husbands, it was often a long drawn-out and futile process. It was entirely up to the mercy of the men or the insistence of the women to the extent of losing all dignity to beg for the money. For this reason, some of the lone mothers would resort to individual effort and means to deal with their financial woes. In order to cope, some of them, like Carrie felt it was ‘so annoying to have to go after him and beg like a beggar’, so after he stopped paying, she had to ‘dig into my own savings’. Iris’ case summed up the situation: ‘The alimony was settled in court for \$4,000 a month but it has never materialized. I was told that I had to go after him through the civil courts if he relinquished because it is a matter between him and me, and it is not up to the judge to enforce alimony. The legal-aid lawyer told me that I had to go through the civil court every time he relinquished the payment, even every month. I gave up eventually because I didn’t want the \$4,000 to weigh me down emotionally.’ Katy symbolically asked for \$1 alimony as she explained, ‘I was applying for CSSA. I just didn’t want the trouble ... Since alimony is so unreliable and it will be deducted from CSSA, I might as well give up the alimony and go on CSSA which I can count on.’ Nonetheless, these solutions were temporary because Carrie’s savings ran out and she had to return to work; Iris still had to struggle between work and caring; and Katy risked being discovered by the authority for breaking CSSA rules because she worked to subsidize her allowance. Xandra was in a bind because CSSA deducted the alimony and child support she was supposed to receive despite the fact that her ex-husband defaulted on the payments. When she was unable to pay her son’s kindergarten fees, she felt ‘inferior and miserable’. Therefore, some women would choose to forego requesting alimony and child support in the divorce settlement in order to qualify for a more stable CSSA they could count on, even though the allowance was minimal.

COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT CHILDREN’S COMPETITIVENESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Elite Education - Winning at the Starting Line

Most Hong Kong parents, including the lone mothers, believe in the idea of an imaginary starting line in the educational system, a belief which was reinforced by institutional practices. The lone mothers feared that their children were disadvantaged

at the starting line by their lone status manifesting itself financially. A successful education, possessing a university degree, was perceived as essential to a successful future. It was also believed that children who were unsuccessful at school would likely remain in the lower stratum of society with no future. They viewed their children's competitiveness in two aspects, excelling in academic and extracurricular activities in order to secure a place in an elite school. Many of the lone mothers were either hindered by their lack of time and financial resources to support their children or their educational background to provide academic guidance. In the milieu of competitive education, many of the lone mothers felt the pressure to provide their children with the best start money could buy. No matter whether *familial* or *individualized*, all the lone mothers perceived their children not being able to win at the starting line as a problem. Yet, the resources possessed by each individual would affect their coping strategy. While those with more resources tried their best and made sacrifices to provide extras for their children, others with less resources would feel that their children were doomed because they had lost their competitiveness, and would not be given the opportunity to win at the starting line.

To cope financially, many lone mothers looked for suitable time shifts or hold down several part-time jobs while low income or no income lone mothers will endeavor to look for other resources, subsidies from NGOs and charity organizations. The proceeds from such endeavors would be devoted solely to their children's competitiveness project paying for extracurricular activities. Competitiveness fueled by a competitive education system seemed to have drained the lone mothers dry of money, energy and time. On top of financial inadequacy, they blamed themselves for not being able to spend time with their children to help them in the competition at the starting line. Eventually, they got caught between having to work longer hours to provide for their children and scrambling to find more time to help them to compete.

Ula and Eva were *familial* lone mothers with resources. Ula felt dismal because she could not see her daughter fulfilling a formulated definition of success, graduating from an elite secondary, receiving a dream of gold-plated tertiary education overseas and a guaranteed high paying job with unlimited prospects and perhaps a spouse with equal standings. She said, 'Children in Hong Kong have to win at the starting line which I can no longer afford.' When asked what her interpretation of the starting line

was, she answered, 'You have to be so advanced that you are a step ahead of others. For example, you have to learn secondary material while you are still in primary 5, a step ahead.' Her interpretation was echoed by Eva who said, 'My daughter is in primary 4 but compared to P4 at my time, it is much more difficult, more like P6 equivalent ... which I find hard for me as well as my daughter because she is not ready yet.' As a result, Ula and Eva spent a large portion of her income on her daughters' extracurricular activities and lessons. They felt the pressure from their daughters' teachers at school about getting kicked out from the elite class, and Ula said, 'Whenever her teacher cracks the whip on her, I feel it.' She had her hopes high before the divorce when her mother-in-law had promised to sponsor the granddaughter to study abroad. She was quite desperate as the money went into paying her husband's debt and burst her dream bubble of a gold-plated overseas education for her daughter, she simply lamented, 'My daughter has no future whatsoever.' Her coping strategy to the bleakness was to yield to the thought that the future was beyond her control, 'I have no expectation. Right now, I just take it day by day as I have no idea about tomorrow', and seemed to linger in a state of hopelessness so that she would not get more disappointed. Eva had a similar experience and said, 'In order to compensate my absence, I felt like a lunatic and spent a large amount of my hard-earned money to purchase all kinds of books for my daughter, in hope that they would accompany her while I'm not beside her. I would also stay up late with her until one a.m. to help her schoolwork, even though both of us might be falling asleep at the desk.'

The idea of competitiveness and success extended to the lone mothers, such as Zara who was a *familial* lone mother with resources, with special education needs (SEN) children. Despite the diversity in perception and their ability to plan and provide extras for their children, they deployed similar strategies chasing an advantage at the starting line. She started planning for her son since kindergarten. She exhausted all her resources, including selling her home, so that she could allocate the money in her son's treatment and education to enhance his competitiveness to achieve success in life.

For me home is important, but I sold my home to spend money to my son. I enrolled him in music therapy, play therapy ... anything that might help his condition since he needed professional help as he could only get results in hospitals ... despite of his deficit ... I have to help him to get to the finishing

line. (what do you mean the finishing line?) ... to help him achieve a good future ...

Apart from a general sense of defeat and powerlessness when they could not afford the extras in helping their children at the 'starting line', the individualized responsibility also affected *familial* group of lone mothers with resources. Some of those who were engaged in full-time work, like Carrie and Eva, sacrificed their own comfort to pay for their children's long list of expenditures, as they were either unaware of or did not qualify for NGO or government programs. Sometimes it might be out of necessity that they had to pay for sending their children to after-school homework groups before they finished work. On top of that, to compensate for the lack of time and guidance they could provide, the lone mothers hired private tutors to boost their children's results in core subjects at school. Finally, they had to pay for extracurricular activities in music, sports, art and the newest technology so that they could keep up their competitiveness. This keeping up with the Joneses mentality was prevalent among the lone mothers as they did not want their children to be left behind, thinking that they should attend whatever activities the next child was attending. Carrie's son was into many extracurricular lessons and she tried to satisfy him, 'and the demand of the society to build an impressive portfolio ... everyone does ... there was no exception ... The only thing I could do was to be stringent, not doing any shopping for myself. It's my responsibility to help me son ... and I don't want him to lose at the starting line ... Eva said, 'I have stopped doing further studies myself as all my income goes to my daughter ... I have to help her after I finish work, after 9 ... I am her mother, and it's my own responsibility ...'

Similar to the *familial conservative* lone mothers, the *individualized* ones, like Mandy, Nicole, and Iris had a full-time job with resources, would also exhaust their income to allow their children to participate in extracurricular activities or private tutorials so as to make their portfolio look better for them to enter better schools or university in future. Nicole said, 'I was not interested in my job, but for my daughter to be able to join more activities, I needed a stable job. I can choose jobs that I'm more interested in doing when my daughter grows up'. Similar to Nicole, Mandy expressed 'I have always wanted to study, but the costs would be high, so I'd rather spare the money for my daughter to join in more activities. I can study later'. Iris also said 'I just want to leave all the money to my daughters so that they can enrol in more activities'.

The *familial* lone mothers without resources, like Rose, Olivia, Heidi, and Cathy believed that it was important to help the children become competitive and win at the starting line by sending them to expensive extracurricular activities and after-tutorial schools to boost their academic results. When the money was not there, they blamed themselves for ruining their children's future. Often, after exhausting all avenues, they made sacrifices for their children's sake. In Rose's case, she gave up her portion of the CSSA to pay for expensive piano lessons, hoping that it would be a way to shake off the experience of a CSSA recipient.

Basically, I have to take my share of CSSA and pay for my son's piano lessons because he is talented, scoring a distinction in his Grade 5 piano exam. I allocate all the resources on him. His teacher even entered him in the Listz competition overseas. I just want him to be outstanding despite CSSA. He won a second-runner-up in the competition. It is \$1,600 for an hour lesson. I spread myself so thin to pay for his piano lessons. I have high hope on him ...

Olivia was both on CSSA and felt guilty for not being able to help her children to compete. Short-term subsidies from NGOs and other charity groups did not provide steady help as they ran out after a short period of time. Ultimately, the lone mothers found ways to squeeze the dollar.

It is the lack of money that excludes my son from competing even at the starting line. There is just no money to send my son to treatment (a mild case of autism) and tutorial classes. I just don't see any future for him. It's such a big headache. I try to stretch the dollar by not going out.

The idea of an imaginary starting line stemmed from the belief that elite status was there to be achieved from early childhood. On top of the fierce competition existing in an elite education system, the government also initiated flexible but unsustainable welfare schemes to promote extracurricular learning. In Joan's case, her son received a subsidy for clarinet lesson for a year, and his parents were expected to pay for subsequent lessons. After a year's free lessons, Joan realized, 'My son was deprived of a chance to perform clarinet in the school as he didn't pass the instrument exam in music because I couldn't afford the lessons.' She felt her son's pain, 'I feel his unhappiness. I feel sorry for him...' Children started to compete and parents believed that the only way to win was through expensive extra classes. When the lone mothers failed to cough up the extra money for lessons, they felt guilty towards their children and blamed themselves for depriving their children a future. Katy regarded not being

able to send her daughter for piano lessons as meaning ‘she won’t even reach the starting line.’ Abby ‘I really want to provide a better start for my daughter ... but I just couldn’t afford it now ... I have no idea what my daughter’s future is ...’ Since the ability to provide competitiveness at the starting line was so strongly tied to their children’s future, the lone mothers who could not afford to pay for extra lessons and activities could not help feeling dejected, and blamed themselves.

Similar to those above without resources, Yanki, who was an *individualized* lone mother, also felt guilty for not being able to provide extra resources for their children to compete. Yanki concurred, ‘In a society like this, my son will have no future if he doesn’t have an education ... a better education will mean a better future, but I don’t have the money to let attend extra-curricular activities and after-school tutorials ... I feel guilty for being unable to provide him with better education’. Yanki also looked at her divorce in retrospect and wished she would have done differently for her son’s sake. She thought that her son would have been better provided for, ‘Only if I had stayed, I would have the money to provide for his classes ... all I can do now is to work hard and really keep a tight budget ...’

Gloria said,

CSSA basically provides a solution to our food and housing problem. But all the other kids are attending extracurricular lessons. CSSA does not provide extra money for my children to such lessons. My children come home and ask if they can attend the same, and they are unhappy when I tell them our situation. The only thing that may help is charity funds but they are inconsistent. They may get to go to extracurricular activities one year but have to stop the next when the funds ran out. I just feel so unfair to my children while there are other kids attending four after school activities, and none for mine. You can just see the joy on their faces when they get the opportunity to participate in these classes.

Success of Mother Comes from Children’s Achievements

There was one common theme among the various characteristics described as achievement by the lone mothers, their children’s achievements and well-being. Katy said she was still able to go on because her children were doing well at school, and her daughter even became ‘the monitor in her class’, which made her feel ‘confident and capable.’ Nicole said, ‘My daughter’s accomplishment is also mine ... her future

achievement is equivalent to mine.’ Xandra called herself a ‘tough woman’, and she was ‘speechless to see my sick son’s result at school ... he is the class monitor specially appointed by the class teacher ... a lone family like ours, being able to produce such an outstanding son ... it’s a glory.’ Gloria used to worry about the negative and unhealthy outlook her children might be exposed to, but found inspiration in President Obama who had also grown up in a lone family. She said. ‘It’s OK as a lone mother, no big deal.’

EMPLOYMENT CONSTRAINTS

After the divorce, the greatest concern of lone mothers was ‘money’, so in the absence of a welfare state most of them would search for work. However, no matter how high their qualification was or how much working experience they had, these lone mothers would still face social structural constraints (such as limited work choice, discrimination against working mothers) and are unable to secure a job. Therefore, most of them were forced into choosing casual work (such as cleaning). Even though some of them might have been able to find an elementary level job, they still needed to face the dilemma between work pressure and caring responsibilities due to the long working hours. Their plight was not only based on economic status, social support, and other resources but also the motherhood perception, which would influence how they faced or responded to the structural constraints of the labour market. The following will first describe the structural problems faced by lone mothers when searching for work, and then will explain their strategies to deal with employment issues by the two groups of lone mothers, the *familial conservative* and *individualized conservative*.

COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT EMPLOYMENT

Depreciated Employability

After staying home to raise the family for a few years the lone mothers shocked when they had to seek employment again. They found that the type of work they used to do, especially office jobs, had disappeared and it was really difficult to gain employment again even if they were willing to start from entry level, due to the complete

metamorphosis of the economy into a service industry one requiring skilled workers who were willing to work long hours. They were no longer able to find decent employment except for the aversive industry despite the fact that they might possess a middle range education level and some working experience. To make the situation more palatable, some blamed it on fate or talked themselves into a psychological victory such as providing a service to the public even when they had to clean lavatories. The *familial* lone mother like Teresa held a management job but stopped working after the birth of her child. She was not able to find work after the divorce except for a toilet cleaning job. 'When I first started doing this job as a toilet cleaner, it was hard for me to accept it. Eventually, I told myself to be thankful for having this job as it gave me a livelihood. Being a lone mother and being able to survive means that I am able to contribute to the community and I am worth something.' Fiona had to accept an unfairly low paying job, 'Form 5 graduates used to be able to work as a clerk, but it's difficult now, unless you don't mind the low salary, like me.' Rose would rather go on CSSA than to work long hours as a security guard or salesperson because of her university education: 'Even though I have a first-year university education it is hard for me to find a job now as I haven't been working for a long time ... after serious weighing the pros and cons, I decided to go on CSSA to care for my children before I consider working again.' The consequence of being forced to undertake minimal casual labour reduced the lone mothers' self-worth. Depreciated employability happened mostly to the *familial conservative* lone mothers who had been out of the job market for a period of time. However, in Xandra's case, an *individualized conservative* stay-home mother of a sick child, she was also caught in the situation of not being able to find a decent job despite her qualifications. She lamented the inevitable situation by bowing to reality, 'I guess one has to resort to walking when the horse dies and take whatever comes along.'

Limited Job Opportunities

The common difficulty faced was the harsh and highly restricted job opportunities open to lone mothers. Employers were unwilling to hire part-time lone mother workers leaving them with low-end jobs which were poorly paid and without work security. Even educated lone mothers were unable to find suitable jobs.

As far as employment was concerned, the lone mothers, regardless of their degree of conservatism were also placed in difficult situations. Some of them had little job opportunities, as in Bobo (*familial*) and Xandra's cases (*Individualized*).

Bobo: There is not work that allows you to make a living as well as looking after the kids. If I were to finish at 3 p.m. to pick up the kids after school and work close to home, what chance would I have to find such a job? Anyway, there is no such job. I tried McDonald's who wanted me to work 9 – 5 at \$38/hr. Despite the low pay, my child finishes school at 4:30 p.m., which makes it impossible to take up the job. Later, I applied for a job in a bakery, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Again, it was not possible because my son's school bus picked him up at 8:30. What it boils down to is, there is just nothing available that I can work and look after my child. I have no choice.

Xandra ran into problems in finding even a part-time job at a neighborhood café. The employer's concern was genuine, 'We need someone who can also do delivery. If you had to take time off frequently, there would be no way for us to find substitutes. You are making so much demand. This is only a part-time job.' As there was not much alternative job opportunities.'

Long Working Hours

The inflexibility of the working time was also a problem to the lone mothers when they had to take time off to handle emergencies at home. Vanessa used to have a waitressing job but her employer was unhappy about her taking time off to pick up her sick child from school. Failing to recruit support from other sources, she was forced to take up several domestic helper jobs so that she had more leeway over her time. Vanessa felt powerless in her employment choice as she said, 'The pay is low but you can't help it ... there is not much help from the government. So if you want to make a living, you have no choice.'

Furthermore, there is a tacit understanding in the Hong Kong job market that employees are expected to work long hours as well as overtime. Employers also use the employees' willingness to work overtime as a yardstick for promotion. As being a lone mother is regarded a personal choice, employers are not likely to make concessions in the workplace to allow them flexibility for their caring duties. Regardless of the type of work they were in such as Carrie, a journalist, Eva, an

accountant, and Vanessa, a waitress, they all faced the same treatment. They were all expected to work the same long hours as other workers. Carrie was told by her boss ‘no employees could escape working overtime ... a pay raise would depend on performance (not working overtime is viewed unfavorable)’. Carrie did what she could with a bottom line, her son was the priority. Eva felt that she had to compensate her caring for her daughter and made self-sacrifices tapping into her own resting and sleeping time because it was made clear to her she would be ‘the first one on the chopping board if there’s a downturn on the economy’ if she did not work overtime. Some unfair practices against lone mothers are not uncommon in the labour market. As a lone mother, there is little bargaining power in negotiating for a job. There was practically nothing they could do, and there was nowhere for them to turn to for help when encountering injustice at work. Ula decided to quit her job when the business was taken over and the new owner said to her, ‘In fact ... I want to find out if ... whether you would accept an adjustment to your pay. At this moment ... your job can probably be replaced by a junior person.’ Ula felt it was unfair on her because she had shown loyalty and devotion to her job and was slighted in the end. Iris shared Ula’s view and she was quite prepared to suffer through the pressure of work.

Iris: The working hours became longer and longer. My boss said that I should put the company as priority ... I was given a \$500 raise and I was supposed to be so grateful that I had to be there even typhoon #8 was hoisted ... I couldn’t look after my daughters. Eventually, I found another job in the neighborhood ...

Wendy’s experience was extreme. ‘My boss told me to get rid of the baby as soon as she found out that I was pregnant, claiming that it would affect my work. I think that she was concerned about the maternity leave that I was entitled to,’ said Wendy. When she refused the proposal, her employer made it difficult for her as a pregnant worker. For example, she was not granted regular lunch hours and made to carry heavy loads at work. She consulted the Labour Department but to no avail because there was no evidence of unfairness. In the end, she had to make a choice between her unborn baby and her job, and she chose the former.

Stigmatization in the Labour Market

Abby (*familial*) and Xandra (*individualized*) were hindered by gender stereotyping in the labour market. Women were assumed not capable of handling heavy labour work.

Abby: I tried to work in a warehouse but was rejected because of my tiny physique. I live day by day now, no plans, one day at a time ...

Xandra: I went to interview as a warehouse staff...the interview looked at me and asked if I was capable...said it is very hard work and need to move things...I replied I was capable, then they said the job needs hardworking staff and can't easily take leaves or have any special requests. It felt that they really wanted me to leave...and stop wasting their time...in the end they told me to wait for any notice, but they didn't find me afterwards...

Objectively, the stereotyping extended to the society at large. If a woman decided to take up a 'man's' job such as a bus driver or a construction-site worker, as in Yanki's case, she would be open to jeering and derogatory remarks. Her male colleagues might complain that she was overstepping the line and robbing them of their livelihood. In milder cases, people she came into contact with would question why she took up a 'man's' job. If the woman was persistent and stayed at the job for a while, the negative treatment would subside.

I felt that I was being picked on because I am a woman who was transgressing to the man's domain as a bus driver. They taunted me for being five minutes late, 'How come you are so slow?' I said it was because of a traffic jam, and then he said why I didn't try to fly. Working at the construction site, both men and women would say, 'Why would a woman take up such a job ... it's not your job ... go home and raise you children. Why are you doing this job?' Some nosy men would say, 'Well, sister, this job is so hard. You are robbing us of our job. We have no more jobs.' Don't pick on me. I can do what anyone else can do. It may take me ten years to learn to do what you can do in a year, but I am confident that I can do it.

Some of the women would not disclose their lone status to their superiors at work fearing that their boss might think that their priority was not work, and somehow, the women's ability in work was linked to her lone mother status as in Susan, Katy and Vanessa's cases.

Susan: I just won't let my employer know about my lone status. Some of my friends disclose the lone mother status in an interview, it is likely that they will not be hired as employers feel that you will be taking time off frequently to manage the caring duties. Even if you don't disclose the lone status, the

employer will ask whether you have children or not if you say you are married. First priority will not be given to a lone mother despite her experience.

Katy: I used to work as a promoter but I told people that I had never been married let alone being a divorced lone mother. Most people thought that I was still single. I wasn't sure how they would look at me, perhaps discriminate me, and also they might be worried that I might have to take frequent time off to look after my children ... some of my friends have the same experience ... my mom always reminds me that people laugh at divorcees and they look down on them ... I just wouldn't tell ...

Vanessa: I don't want the agency (cleaning company) to think that I might take frequent leaves and lay me off ... I won't let them know ... because I don't want to be discriminated against ...

In Abby's case she shared the experience of being discriminated as her employer who might worry that she might steal because of poverty with her lone status.

Abby: No ... I dare not to tell my employers that I am a lone mother. If they know that I am lone mother and poor ... they would immediately presume that I might steal from them (Abby is a domestic helper). It happened to me ... everything ... even if I was cleaning the bathroom, I was asked to leave the door open so that they could watch what I was doing. It's so uncomfortable ... lone mothers are associated with poverty ... likely to steal.

Insecurities in Employment

As the labour market was not welcoming to lone mothers in need of a job, they were only able to find lower end employment and forced to remain as the working poor. They had to work long hours to secure employment in order to maintain a sufficient income. In some cases, the lone mothers had to decline promotions to avoid added responsibilities getting in the way of their child caring duties, even though it meant remaining in poverty with the meager income. For example, Nicole settled for a low paying job in a small outfit so that she could look after her daughter over the uncertainties of a higher position in a big company: 'It is a stable job, getting paid on time and finishing work on time so that I can look after my children. I thought about changing to a better paid job in the government of a bigger company but there are unknown factors ... I have no choice even the pay is poor as I have no credentials and a young daughter.' Nicole also has this thought. 'I worry about being laid-off ... you can't find another job at the drop of the hat. There are so many unknowns ...'. Xandra 'took up a cleaning job that I had to do washrooms.' Later on, she landed a school-bus nanny job hoping to fit in with her son's schedule. However, the job was treated

as casual work, not only was the pay extremely low without security, other harsh terms included that the employee had to find her own replacement at her own expense if she wanted time off. 'It is minimal but it helps even though there is no security in the job. You only get the minimum pay for an hour or so on school days only. On top of that, if I have to take time off, I am responsible for paying someone else to replace me.'

Caring as Individual Responsibility Adds Burden to Employment

Lone mothers who were brought up to regard caring as an individual responsibility bear certain burdens in employment. Cathy, Eva and Carrie took up employment at the price of self-blame, worries and a sense of inevitability towards their duty as a mother. Cathy took up several part-time jobs but she was so worried about her sons that the situation 'seems like all dead-ends ... as I am alone ... the sole support of the family ... I am worried to leave my son alone at home when I'm working, I often had to reject some jobs assigned to me to take care of my son, eventually my boss stopped assigning work for me'. Eva felt so guilty because 'I am not fulfilling a mother's responsibility. I tried to apply for a leave to help my daughter revise for exam, but my boss claimed that I would be the first to be fired if the company needs to cut manpower. I couldn't help her with her school work. It's so hard, I cannot stop working, nor can I neglect my daughter.' Carrie was in a worse situation with an ADHD child. She was quite helpless, 'Work pressure is high ... there is frequent overtime, my boss would look upset when I want to take leaves to take care of my ill son... but no choice ... no one can help you find a job that allows you to look after the (ADHD) son ... no one will help you look after the child'. Teresa was on the same wavelength with Carrie, she said, 'No one will care and help you, I have no choice as no employee would concern your situation (what situation?) ... caring duty ...

Many of the women, like Eva, Zara and Fiona (*familial*) and Lara (*individualized*), felt alone and had no choice but to rely on themselves to shoulder their caring responsibilities. The feeling of inevitability and helplessness left them with very little choice about whether to continue working or not. They did not think that childcare was the government responsibility.

Eva: I thought about quitting my job ... often ... especially recent years ... the pressure is high at work and my daughter is experiencing some emotional

disorder. I thought about remortgaging selling the house, quitting my job and withdrawing my retirement fund and living off it for the next ten years. That way, I can look after my daughter ... no one, nothing to depend on ... the government? I would not rely on the government to support but myself. The reality is that the government has done nothing to help us.

Zara: As a single mother, I am the only one who takes up the responsibility simply because I am a mother. Relatively, a man may feel less responsible ... but not the government ... as it's a family issue. Therefore, I sold the flat and apply the money to renting ... and live on the money ... quit my full time work and take up a part-time job ...

Fiona: I am a lone mother with the role of breadwinner and carer, no one would help but to rely on myself ... should anything happen, I still have a flat ... at least I have a property, otherwise, it will be so worrisome ... I never thought the government would help me to solve the caring problem.

Lara: I feel so tired to take up the caring duty ... it's my own issue the government would not help you to take care of your children ... I have acquired another flat and planned to make it into subdivided housing for renting out. My thinking is, the rent I collect from it will pay for the mortgage with a little leftover to subsidize the rent on the flat I am living in now. If I purchase another flat, the return will cover all my expenses, rent and living. When I was told that I was red headed and unwise, I disagreed. I feel that I am quite pragmatic. I would never buy impractical things ... like some decorative things and waste money on it ... I'd even buy gold to counter inflation.

Daphne engaged in full-time work and undertaking training for further advancement at work. Apart from the lack of time and energy to perform the caring duties, she faced blames from her parents for putting her priority in work rather than her child and monopolizing her parents' time in helping her to look after the granddaughter. 'It's stressful ... my mother feels that I should devote more time to my daughter and relieve some of her pressure so that she can have some time to herself and my father ... what can I do? My mother would say, 'Shouldn't you be looking after your daughter ... Shouldn't you be taking up some responsibilities as a mother?' I sacrifice my chance for advancement at work for my daughter.'

In Zara's case, her mother helped out in caring for her son but she blamed herself for not being able to control the behavior of her grandson. As a result, Zara's siblings questioned whether it was her fault for poor parenting and passing over her own responsibility to their mother.

My mother helps with the caring ... so I work full time ... but my mother is not very good at looking after little children ... she blames herself for not being able to help me ... when she mentions that to my siblings, they tell me off for my son's unruly behavior ... they think I am the culprit ... and that brings immense pressure on me.

Abby was criticized by her father for not being able to take up the caring duty.

I asked my mother to help out but my father told me to pay her \$3,000 but I only earned \$6,000 as a security guard at that time. There was just no way. It was hard, and I was under such pressure. Subsequently, a friend introduced me to work as a domestic assistant, which allows me to schedule time to look after my children. Occasionally, I still ask my mother to help risking my father's complaint that I am irresponsible.

Consequence: Health Issues and Low Protection

Both the conservatively *familial* and *individualized* lone mothers focused on finding work to fit into their children's schedules, which might involve choosing specific work locations and times. Sometimes, the lone mothers had to take up several part-time jobs in order to make ends meet. Unfortunately, there was not much in the job market for this particular group to choose from, leaving them with low paying, restrictive and labour intensive work types. Caught in such a predicament, this group of women claimed that there was nothing they could do but submit and suffer both physically and mentally to the cards dealt by fate. Teresa was one such example, 'I was a part-time worker before ... even I was in pain because of my spine ... but I had no choice even it hurt ... no sick leaves and no compensation.' Vanessa suffered 'from sciatica which was so painful that I had to see the doctor who told me to stop squatting so much. Well, you know everything is a rush in the restaurant that needs to be done quickly, especially during lunch and breakfast time. I also suffered from a frozen shoulder. Maybe it was because I had to carry and lift heavy things, so I suffered from sciatica and a frozen shoulder. It wasn't an easy job. The work related injuries have no compensation ... and you would lose money and leaves if I had to take leaves due to injuries ... there is no such thing as sick leaves ...'

Xandra was in the same boat, 'I work hard so that I won't get laid off ... this is how you earn a living ... so I work long hours ... eventually, I ended up with serious neck problems.' Bonnie held down two jobs, 'and sleep only a few hours ... as a result, my

spine suffers for it. It was ok in the beginning but it gets worse after a couple of years. My doctor told me not to exert myself, not to bend down.’

Queenie risked heavy physical wear and tear because such jobs were usually labour intensive. As a result, her aches and pains would sometimes interfere with their caring duties and the quality of time spent with the children.

The nature of the work is labor intensive, and I suffer physical wear and tear, which also affects my ability to look after the children.

Making a difference

The dire employment situation experienced by the *familial and individualized conservative* lone mothers could be alleviated if there had been sympathetic employers, alimony, after-school caring and family support.

Sympathetic Employers

Zara, a professional, Fiona, an office clerk, Teresa, a janitor in an NGO, were all grateful to their understanding employers.

Zara: My ex-employer is wonderful. I did not have to work night shift. If I had to work weekends, the jobs were always scheduled in the morning so that I could spend time with my son.

Fiona: My employer is good to me. For example, he gives me a few days off to help my daughter study before an examination. He would even give me urgent leave of absence if there is an emergency with the children. He would phone me if he needs something urgent at work. The remote control mode of work is acceptable to my boss. Despite the accommodating employer and low pay, I have remained in this job for years and have no plans to leave because of the security and stability it provides.

Teresa : Now, my superiors are fairly considerate ... when I returned with the back problem, he didn't mind and went further to tell me to take it easy and take my time and charge to the restaurant. So, if it took me three hours to finish a job, it would be up to me to clock in three hours, no need to rush. This way, I can look after my children and there is no need to quit.

With flexible hours and time off for emergencies at home, these lone mothers were able to balance work and caring so they could work and take care of their children

regardless of the type of work they did, which also included the CSSA lone mothers, like Queenie, a busperson in a restaurant, a CSSA recipient, who worked part-time to subsidize her income.

I have a part-time and I work Monday to Friday only leaving the weekend free. During the summer holiday, the restaurant allows me to take a longer leave to be with the children.

Similar to the *familial conservative* lone mothers, some of the *individualized conservative* ones also benefited from sympathetic employers. Iris and Nicole were able to choose between full-time and part-time work to suit their needs.

Iris: my employer told me that she would try to accommodate my needs ... I was even allow time off without pay ...for any emergencies. I'm happy when I get a decent job, even feel at ease ... and I got support from my boss ... it's very important to get support from my boss ... and colleagues ...

Nicole: The pay in this job is low but the time is stable, 9:30 to 5:30. The company practice flex hours. If I have to be absent for whatever reason, they just deduct the time off from my annual holiday. It works fine for me as I can leave anytime if my child gets sick.

Stable Alimony

Lone mothers like Heidi and Fiona (*familial*), who received alimony on a regular basis, were able to find more flexibility and freedom in work.

Heidi: The alimony and my part-time job will cover the expenses. That way, I have the choice of looking after my children and holding down a job.

Fiona: Luckily the alimony we receive is stable and it can financially cover most expenses as my income isn't high, so even if I lose my job, I still have the alimony to support our living costs during the period when I'm searching for a new job ... I feel less stressed knowing that I have a stable alimony.

Susan (*individualized*) also received stable alimony payments so she could afford to study and work part-time.

The alimony I receive allows me to take up the low-paying part-time job and enrol in the course while taking care of my child. I have a future with my job ... There is advancement opportunity in this job if I complete a course.

After-school caring support

A steady pay-cheque enabled Fiona (*familial*) and Nicole's cases (*individualized*) to place her children in after-school tutoring centers for a few hours until she picked them up after work.

Fiona: I arrange for my children to attend afterschool tutoring schools and pick them up after work.

Nicole: I found a tutoring center with a nanny who can pick up my daughter from the school bus stop after school as there is no one available to pick her up at that hour.

Family Support

Some of the lone mothers as in Pauline, Wendy and Fiona's cases (*familial*), were able to work full time with the support of their parents.

Pauline: My mother is the only person who helps me to take care of my son.

Wendy: My parents are very important because they share my caring duties so that I can work and make a living.

Fiona: The only gap is when the children have special days off at school, such as teacher development days. Then I'll recruit my mother's help to look after them.

Iris, Daphne and Lara (*individualized*) were able to focus on work with support at home.

Iris: I am lucky I have my mother-in-law to support my caring duties...my elder daughter goes home by herself after school, which is downstairs in our building. Sometimes my mother-in-law helps out.

Daphne: I am living with my parents and my father has retired so he also helps me to take care of my daughter.

Lara: I am still living with my ex-husband and he works afternoon so he helps take care of my son as well.

HOUSING PROBLEMS

Housing was a problem for the majority of the lone mothers and often became the foremost concern. With the unique housing market in Hong Kong, the lone mothers who could not afford private housing were left with three choices, public housing,

making the most of one income, and lastly, receiving housing subsidy from the CSSA. Each group had its specific problems and often, they had to settle with compromised solutions. The 'lucky' ones with public housing were better off except that they had to be careful not to earn more than the ceiling to qualify for public housing, or risk being evicted. Some women were forced to stay with in-laws or their own parents after the divorce or consider renting in the private housing market. With one income, no income or CSSA subsidy, the choice was limited to sub-divided housing, cubicle flats or tin-box make shift housing in remote rural areas. Most of these alternative types of housing were unsatisfactory and cramped, involving poor hygiene and leaky roof, and in some cases, snakes and insects. Since the lone mothers were women with children without a distinct voice in society for protection, they became easy prey for unscrupulous landlords who justified their greed by thinking that they were not depriving their tenants who received rent subsidies from the government. In reality, the victims were not only the women but their children who had to suffer the anguish of the detrimental environment.

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Home is Family

To the *familial conservative* women the ideal was a home where they could have stability and can function as a family.

Bobo: I hope I can have a 'home' to bring up my children ... all I think of is how to bring up my child. At that time, I didn't think of myself, I just focused on how to bring up my child ... (what's the meaning of home?) a home should have at least a roof over our head ... even though it is public housing ... something we can call home ... it's important to have a home we call our own ... so that the kids can settle down.

Joan: No gold or silver bed can compare with the straw bed at home. It is a home ... despite being a lone mother, I can have a place called home ... having a home means that we are a family ... It can let my children have a secure place to grow up.

Queenie: What I wanted most ... being a lone mother ... the front and foremost problem is housing ... before any talk of a future... no future ... because I don't have my own house ... I want a family with my children ... without 'home', without future ...

Ula: It is important to have a home to provide a sense of security ... no matter what happens, I could go home and relax ... now I have nothing ... property sold ... I can only live under somebody else's roof ... I feel so desperate ... I don't really want to return home after work. If I were to build a family for myself and my daughter after the divorce, home is very important and also money is the essential part (rent is so high).

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

Home is Security

Compared to the less traditional lone mothers, the home bears more meanings, and they see it as a solution to certain issues such as autonomy, finance and security.

Yanki: To have some stability, you need to have a house ... it's important ... then I don't have to worry ... right? ... (What do you worry about?) ... I worry about my son's safety ... my belongings ...

Xandra: After all, it's a place I can call my own ... then I don't have to move all the time ... it's impossible without a fixed home ... (as the saying goes) every time you move, you lose a creel of rice ... you need to spend a long of money ... it's distressing ...

Iris: I need my home to let me put my children in safety and let me go out to work without worrying about my children.

COMMON CONCERNS ON HOUSING

Compromising for Public Housing

Some of the lone mothers who were 'fortunate' enough to obtain public housing, as in Nicole's case, had to decline pay-raises in order to pass the income mean test. Consequently, they remained under the poverty line in exchange for a roof over their heads.

In order to stay in low-cost public housing, capping income at \$12,000 a month, I had to be careful with my income ... I had to ask my boss not to give me a raise ... it's not fair because I have to provide for my daughter, I feel the financial pressure. If I make more than the prescribed amount, I will have to move. There are so many restrictions with public housing.

Worse Off without Public Housing

For those who did not have public housing, as in Bobo and Queenie's cases, their major expense was rent after which very little was left over for other expenses. In the end, there was not even enough to live on, so they had to quit their jobs and go on CSSA in order to receive housing allowance.

Vanesa: The hard part is housing. Almost all money is used to rent an apartment as I wouldn't buy one. The full amount of CSSA goes to rent for the sub-divided housing with under a thousand dollars for other expenses ... I can't buy anything for my child. As long as we don't have public housing, we have to suffer from high rent, never a good living ...

Queenie: I make about \$6,000 but half of it goes to the rent for sub-divided housing. It's just not enough to live on with the \$3,000. I was counting on my saving and some part-time work but it was really impossible. Then I applied for CSSA through the social worker.

Since rental property for decent housing started at around \$12,000 per month, equivalent to most lone mothers' monthly income, some of them like Iris, Joan and Ula, had to live with families, which included their own parents as well as their ex-in-laws. In Joan's and Ula's cases, the divorced couple lived under the same roof, making it awkward for the women and confusing the children.

Iris: It's rather complicated ... I have to live with my ex-husband's family, his parents and brother. I had nowhere to go ... I only have \$15,000 income ... I have to pay them living expenses ... there's just no way I can move. In the long run, it is not possible to stay with the ex-in-laws ... I have to think about my daughters ... However, the social workers were so slack in their job. They only told me to go to the housing department to fill in some forms. They didn't really help.

Joan: At present, I live with my ex-husband. In fact, there's no way out because I am not a permanent citizen and do not qualify to apply for public housing. I don't have discretion from immigration to stay to look after my children. I tried to rent a separate place but my ex-husband would not support the idea financially. I also tried to seek help from a social worker and was told that I had to fork out the deposit and the rent first and later claim it back from SWD. However, it just wouldn't work because I simply did not have that money as the government only provide for the children, \$3,000 in total, I have to top up the rest, which is impossible because I can't obtain a job without a HKID card. If I were to rent sub-divided housing, the environment would be bad, being small and crowded. As a mother, I'd rather suffer staying and fighting with my ex-husband than seeing them in such environment.

Ula: I am forced to live with my ex-in-laws and my ex-husband although we are divorced. I really want to move out so that my mother-in-law and my daughter will not hold the hope that we can be back together again. In Hong Kong, the expensive rent is the key thing. With my income, I figure that I can only afford to rent sub-divided housing. I don't really want to come to this. I hope I can save enough money to move out, but I don't think that I could. I figure that if I had to pay two-thirds of my wages for rent, we just would not be able to survive on the one-third left. I tried to apply for public housing but my income is above the ceiling for the mean test.

If the lone mothers had to move back in with parents, their situation worsened as it was regarded as a family shame, which would become the source of endless conflicts around child rearing style and sharing of expenses in particular. The coping strategy of moving back in with parents thus opened doors to further conflicts, as Daphne and Pauline illustrate.

Daphne: As I may finish work and coming home late, my mother has to look after my daughter after work, she may start to complain. Then my father would get upset too because he also helps in caring for my daughter like driving her to school every day. Any further demand on them intensifies their frustration of the situation, and they feel that I am ungrateful. Normally, I keep my mouth shut, except when I get so tired and ask them what they expect me to do. I understand that such verbal slapping is a short cut to problems in our communication.

Pauline: I moved back after my parents showed support to my decision to divorce. However, whenever we disagree on the parenting style, I am told to leave if I am not happy with their way. It's not that I don't want to be independent, I just cannot afford it. You can imagine how bad it is.

Olivia and Cathy suffered from the lack of control over their rents because of unscrupulous landlords.

Olivia: Since I am on CSSA, the landlord of the sub-divided housing I am renting keeps raising the rent every year especially when there are raises in the CSSA amount.

Cathy: I receive \$12,000 for my family of three including \$4,500 for rent subsidy. My landlord keeps raising the rent and we can barely make do.

The majority of the lone mothers were left with no choice but to move into cubicle apartments with shared toilets and kitchens and subdivided housing with the toilet and kitchen in the same room of less than 100 square feet. Apart from hygiene questions, the condition of such housing was generally poor in older buildings with security and leakage problems. In fact, this housing market prospered as landlords thrived on

renting out units to CSSA recipients who were receiving \$1,500 per head in housing subsidies. A lone mother and her child would receive \$3,000 a month from CSSA, whereas the average price for a unit had risen to \$5,000 to \$6,000 per month in recent years. Each time when the CSSA decided to increase the allowance, the price of the cubicle and subdivided rooms followed suit. The lone mothers were forever playing the catching game, digging deeper into other allowances and cutting corners to feed the insatiable landlords because the Hong Kong government did not practice rent control in the property market. Queenie, Vanessa, Bobo and Bonnie were representative of the poor housing choices some of the lone mothers were forced into.

Queenie: Living in a cubicle room, we have to share the bathroom and kitchen. It leaks when it rains. You have to pay more if you want a bigger unit. I just couldn't afford four or five thousand dollars a month. CSSA only pays \$3,000 for rent for a two-person household, and you have to top up the rest. I would have to take it out from our food money to pay for it, which I don't want to do. Whenever it rains, I have to take out a pail to catch the water or put a pile of clothings to absorb the water. I have to get up in the middle of the night to empty the buckets. My children have to bend down to do their school work on the bed on a small table. It will affect their performance for sure.

Vanessa: I get really frustrated every time I get home (sub-divided flat) because the place is so small and cramped. There is so much friction between my daughter and me. She couldn't understand why I am always in a bad mood, and so is she.

Bobo: The difficulty is housing ... rent hike every six month ... a leaking ceiling ... the cement is falling and water coming through. I tried to talk to the landlord but was told that nothing could be done since we were living there. I just taped some plastic sheets around the leaks so that the cement will not drop into our food when we eat.

Bonnie: We found something around \$4,500, but after two or three months, the ceiling started to come off and leak. Renting a place to live can exert so much pressure. Eventually, I have to move into a more decent place for \$6,000. Of course, I have to top up the difference, taking money out from our food budget. I took up a part-time job to make up for the difference.

Yanki insisted on not applying for CSSA to avoid the stigma, and tried to escape from an unmanageable rent by choosing to move to tin-box housing in a remote rural area in the New Territories. However, she was trapped in a worse situation because the area was infested with insects and snakes and stray dogs and risked flooding. Her son developed a phobia after being bitten by a dog. Meanwhile, her landlord was trying to squeeze the last cent out of her by imposing unreasonable utility charges.

It is really warm in the tin house in the summer (in a remote area in the New Territories) but it is cheap. Actually, I know many single families are in the same boat. It floods and leaks when there is a rain storm. On top of that, there are all kinds of insects and snakes. My son is really scared. He was bitten once by the neighbour's dog. The worst problem is mosquitos. My son's arms and legs are full of mosquito bites. I have even killed two snakes myself. I used to get goosebumps even seeing ants before. I was really scared but there's nothing I could do because it is cheap. I just have to overcome the fear. In fact, this used to be a pig sty but now people have to live in it. It is indecent for a society as affluent as Hong Kong. Since this is a rural area, there is no monitoring on utility charges, and we have to pay a higher cost than folks in the city.

Housing has always been a controversial issue in Hong Kong. It was a major concern for the lone mothers who were forced into moving into cheaply subdivided housing. Gloria told of her joy when she found out that she was able to move away from her less than 100 sq. ft. subdivided unit into public housing, and recalled her miserable years with no room even for a chair to sit on.

My life has brightened up since we moved into public housing ... before, the subdivided housing was so cramped that we could only fit a bunk bed and a table with four little stools. I hadn't sit on a proper chair for a meal for years. My children ate and did their homework on the bed, and the three of us slept sideways on the lower bunk. It was hard.

Some women like Rose, Xandra and Katy, who were victims of domestic violence, lived in shelter centres. During their stay there, they knew they could have priority to public housing from the social worker. In the end, they were moved up the queue and were distributed a public house with the assistance from the social worker. Here is a quote from Rose:

I don't know if I'm lucky or not. I'm unlucky to be a victim of domestic violence, and was arranged to stay at the women shelter centre with the help of a medical social worker. Afterwards, the social worker informed me that I could queue in the fast queue to get a public housing. Since my son has a little autistic, they even gave us a bigger apartment as the 3 of us were originally allocated a 2-3 person apartment, but the housing authority official informed me that we could be allocated a 4-6 person apartment due to my son's condition. I only knew that when they told me!

Katy: I am lucky because I was given public housing due to violence at home. Now I don't have to worry about rent but food and my children's education.

CONCLUSION

The degree of difficulties confronting the lone mothers partly hinged on their perceptions of motherhood and work. Some women prioritized the family over the self while some strived for a balance between the family and the self. In a more tangible way, their social backgrounds in the accessibility of resources and support also affected the outcome of hardship. Those with means fared better in terms of finance, unemployment, age and health issues while those without resources were bounded by such structural constraints. The advent of rapid social changes has compounded the uncertainties shaping the individual's conduct and response to situations. From the data collected in the study the lone mothers displayed a spectrum of coping strategies to the circumstances they found themselves in. The nature of their responses were highly complex as they were already exhausted within the existing structural constraints and, on top of that, they had to deal with new issues arising from changes in the family, employment, housing and welfare retrenchment. Secondly, their approach to problems was often pragmatically goal oriented but not guaranteed, sometimes not even rational. As a result, their choices and decisions were unstable and unpredictable. In other words, they often deployed strategies which were incongruent with their perceptions. Finally, underpinning everything was the shared notion of personal obligation to deal with problems because of the traditional belief in motherhood and the capitalistic ideological idea of individualized responsibility.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LONE MOTHER FAMILIES AT RISK

INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 3 Beck's risk society thesis was further developed into the idea of new social risks under welfare retrenchment. Beck (1995) set a backdrop for the understanding of risks generated as a result of detraditionalization and individualization. In his theory, detraditionalization liberates women, but at the same time creates risks. As men and women are released from prescribed gendered roles in the post-industrial society, the nuclear family is decentered and women are required to shoulder the responsibility as well. Men are no longer the sole providers for the family, working women are also charged with earning an income on top of their caring duties. While this gender evolution encourages women to create self-biographies through education, work and personal choice amidst the destabilizing patriarchic society, they are exposed to risks associated with individualization which links individual choices to responsibilities. Distinguished from the definition of old risks as discussed in Chapter 3, the impact of retrenchment on welfare for the unemployed and aged, the new risks arose from economic and social changes and were manifested in two areas. First, low skilled workers with low education are at risk in the labour market due to the advancement in technology and growth in scale and intensity of cross-national competition (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2003; 2005). The other risk of poverty surfaces among the one income family. When women started entering the labour market, 'the two earners maintained a satisfactory income' (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006), and the two income family became the norm. In the meantime, care responsibilities borne mainly by women also impact on the family income as they become an obstacle for employment, and leaving the family with one income. Finally, due to the privatization of social services, new risks were generated. Expensive childcare services provided by the private sector became inaccessible partly because of ineffective regulation of standards (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006). Several of these new risks bear heavily on gender roles in terms of the family, employment and the privatization of social services. In the family, a major new risk rests on the balancing of work and family responsibilities, especially

childcare. In the labour market, workers may lack the skills or possess out-dated skills to find satisfactory employment which is an old risk (Chapter 3). Consequently, the lack of employment record may compromise their entitlement to social security. Also, they may become citizen-consumers of services provided by commercial entities and have to endure unsatisfactory services. Among the various disadvantaged groups women emerge as one of those particularly adversely affected.

To study the issue in context the endemic nature of risks is addressed. As risks are perceived and constructed under the influence of ideologies which pervade in particular societies, it is necessary to view new social risks in their social context. The society in Hong Kong has been experiencing such risks due to rapid economic and social changes in the past decades into a post-industrial society (Chapter 3). In the discussion of endemic risks, lone motherhood presents itself as a new topic. Conventionally, disadvantaged groups have been studied and analyzed from class and structural perspectives, as discussed in Chapter 3, neglecting the impact of social changes and the newly emerged family unit, the lone mother family. Lone mothers in Hong Kong are also confronted with difficulties in the family, employment and welfare retrenchment by the neo-liberal government. To better understand their situation, a new perspective is added to assess these disadvantages. In Chapter 3, the gender role of motherhood was introduced based on a discussion of gendered moral rationality (Duncan, 1991, 2003; Duncan and Edwards, 1999, Duncan et al, 2003; Duncan and Irwin 2004) and gendered social practices of caring duties (Oakley, 1972, 1974; Graham, 1983; Ungerson, 1990; Walby, 1990; Pascall and Kwak, 2005; Einhorn, 2006). Guidelines on motherhood are constructed under traditions, neighbour and social practices, and women's perceptions have been chained to these guiding principles. Our research findings show that many of the lone mothers were compelled to compensate for the absence of a father because one of the fundamental responsibilities of the mother is to provide for the children a complete family. Another highlight to the study also points to varying degrees of adherence to motherhood among the lone mothers despite their shared conservatism. The affecting forces driving the difference can be explained by the concept of detraditionalization and individualization (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck-Gernsheim, 1998). For the purpose of easier denotation of the groups, they have been termed the familial and the individualized groups. However these two main types of

conservatism could be presented as the two ends of a range of viewpoints on which different interviewees are located rather than as always being clearly separate positions.

In turn, the findings also reflect a difference in their coping strategies in accordance to their perception of the risks involved in lone motherhood. This chapter undertakes a closer look into lone motherhood, and the various degrees of impact of detraditionalization and individualization in the areas of marriage, family and work. It also analyzes the social and economic environment contributing to the differences in perception and coping strategies we found in response to motherhood.

ENGENDERING ENDEMIC SOCIAL RISKS

As discussed in Chapter 3, conventional Hong Kong studies of lone motherhood tended to individualize the problem resulting in blaming the victim. The structural approach emphasizes the lone mother's welfare needs, leading to the discourse of welfare dependency. A more recent approach stemming from social constructionism looks not to the root of the issue, but focuses its concern on the actual experience of the lone mothers from a gender perspective. Nonetheless, it does not address the element of rapid social changes taking place in a previous colonial society. Despite sporadic discussion on the issue employing the risk society theory the women's perspective has not been explored as it misses the contextualization of a gender perspective in a particular social conjuncture, in this case, the integration of traditional Chinese culture with a Western individualistic perspective on top of neo-liberalist capitalism ideology with little social welfare support. This study intended to pioneer a new perspective viewing lone motherhood from a risk society perspective but with a gender dimension within the Hong Kong context.

The later decades of the twentieth century saw a challenge to the traditional social order as women were emancipated into the labour market. From 'living for others', women are believed to be making linear or at least wave-like, progress against traditional inequalities towards 'a life of one's own'. Not only did education open up a wider scope and new horizons to women, it also equipped them for more opportunities in the job market as well as the freedom to choose and make their own

decisions (Chapter 3). In theory, detraditionalization has created a force for women towards individualization. And accordingly, from an ascribed role, women now have the choice to acquire roles such as work, marriage, having children, and even divorce. Hong Kong is a traditional society, despite the veneer of westernization, infused with a heavy dose of capitalism, detraditionalization and individualization. At the same time, the traditional patriarchal Chinese culture still persists, in which the separation of public and private spheres bears heavily on gender, with men working in the public sphere and women in the private. This distinction has long created an imbalance of power with women as subordinate to men. This arrangement has not changed in modernity, and the distinction has not been blurred between the spheres of men and women whose roles are still bounded by traditions and the perception of motherhood. The emancipation of women prompting them to work in the public sphere has inadvertently plunged them into shouldering double burdens as they are still bound by the traditional ethics of care. The caring duties of the family, especially children, are strongly connected to women under the constraint of a gendered culture. While detraditionalization is progressing sluggishly in Hong Kong, women, especially lone mothers, remain far from emancipated. The patriarchal society in Hong Kong is still thriving. Not only are the social risks a reality, the lone mothers are experiencing escalated gendered social risks arising from the power of traditional beliefs. The perception of risks is tied to a subjective reception of normative social practice. Detraditionalization touches individuals in various degrees and their responses to risks denote subjectivity, a modified view on the gendered tradition. Nonetheless, detraditionalization in Hong Kong is merely the veneer of an obstinately patriarchal society, so much so that women carry the baggage of gendered traditions into their new roles. Objectively, the highly capitalistic society emphasizing economic supremacy tips the balance of individualized responsibility against choice.

Individualization, being borne out of detraditionalization in the transitional process of social and economic changes in a post-industrial society, is an inevitable phenomenon, whereby women are believed to be 'emancipated' and free to create their own biographies (Chapter 3). It may not be a conscious effort to follow the trend but women in Hong Kong have been swept up by a wave of social changes to undertake individual responsibilities. Theoretically, detraditionalization is expected to take place gradually so that women can be freed from traditional restraints and make the

transition into taking charge of their own life. In Hong Kong, detraditionalization has only made a peripheral change to the society so ingrained with Confucianism revered by the Chinese people for thousands of years. Furthermore, the resistance to detraditionalization is fuelled by capitalism which functions through the family as the basis of social stability. The prevalent residues of tradition reinforced by capitalism strengthen the patriarchal society, and women in Hong Kong have little chance of breaking through the gendered traditional restraints in the perception of risks regarding marriage, family and even work.

Most of the women, supposedly entering the individualization process, are only lingering in front of the gates and yet to start creating their own biographies, because the social and economic environment conducive to complete individualization is lacking. In acquiring new roles, women are compelled to enter into new risks and uncertainties requiring coping strategies which may cause further risks and unintended consequences. This is especially true with the newly acquired role of lone mothers. The case studies in this research reveal that the new possibilities also created new risks, uncertainties, conflicts and difficulties. The lone mothers were caught on a fast running treadmill, and they were pushed and pulled by the capitalistic ideology of individualized responsibility and the traditional views of gendered roles. The study also showed that there is a spectrum of various degrees of detraditionalization the lone mothers are experiencing in Hong Kong (Chapters 2, 3 5 and 6). On one hand, the lone mothers accepted the traditional Chinese culture of gender role in motherhood and family, and on the other hand, they were coerced into individual responsibilities under the presumption of autonomy and personal choice to create a self-biography. The findings show that class still matters, and yet there are other factors at work beyond class (Chapters 5 and 6). The objective circumstances in their situations under the guise of normalization and standardization drive them into voluntary compulsion to find preventive measures to avoid failure. Their only concern was the family at the cost of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Rational calculation based on limited experience and knowledge will appear inconsequential in managing the subsequent risks and uncertainties. Meanwhile, the gendered traditional values together with the concept of individualization of choice impact on women's perception of the risks. As a result, coping strategies will be

deployed according to individual experience and knowledge or the lack of it. In Taylor-Gooby's (1999, 2006) words, their coping strategy is heuristic, not guaranteed to be the best, but to provide an immediate solution based on the individual's belief, traditions or emotion. This response to risks cannot be viewed simplistically as a rational calculation but is a complex and practical process of subjectivity. The lone mothers regardless the class were compelled to deploy heuristic responses to fulfil their responsibilities to avoid feeling guilt, self-blame and stigmatization in failure (Chapter 3). The lone mothers would do their best within their experience and hope for the best. However, the data show that the lone mothers displayed a variety of individualistic responses to the old and new risks and uncertainties they perceived and, for ease of understanding, they are divided into two conservative approaches based on individual development of action and behavior under the new social changes. Consequently, the social risks generated possess characteristics that are indigenous to the Hong Kong culture. The perception of risks and coping strategies of the lone mothers reflects the deeply gendered traditional values they were socialised into. The *familial* and *individualized* approaches of the lone mothers have been observed in this research highlighting a gendered perspective in viewing the effects of detraditionalization and individualization.

FAMILIAL CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

In Hong Kong, despite the thrust of westernization and modernization, there are groups of women still strongly influenced by discursively constructed traditions of an age-old patriarchal society, who display gendered perceptions and responses to many aspects of their lives. The ideas of the complete family and female subordination dominate this view. As a result, the self is overshadowed by the well-being of children in any decision making process. On top of that, the idea of the complete family is venerated at all levels of society, from the neo-liberal government which promotes individualized responsibility for family harmony through the media to individuals. Ultimately, many women internalize the idea and accept a subordinate position without challenge. It is at this point that traditional and neo-liberal ideologies merge. On the one hand, Chinese traditional thinking, which leans heavily on Confucian philosophy, upholds distinct gendered roles within society (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). On the other hand, the neo-liberal government promotes the same idea in the process of

individualization as a form of patriarchy (Chapters 3 and 4). Families with well-defined roles are more likely inadvertently to be able to handle individual responsibilities. By highlighting the gendered roles, both new and old ideologies prolong the subordination of women in a 'complete family' (Chapter 5).

INHERENT SUBORDINATION IN MARRIAGE

In the traditional Chinese society, women's subordination in marriage derives from patriarchy and the need to belong. In the past, unmarried women had no status, and they gained it through marriage and producing male heirs. This way of thinking prevails even in current social norms and practices. Influenced by parents, friends and the media, women uphold dependency and subordination in marriage (Chapters 3 and 5). In this study, more mature lone mothers talked about how they were influenced by their parents about getting married (Chapter 5) which is a process of socialization through their parents, neighbourhood and friends plays the role of 'constructors' as discussed in Chapter 3. An 'over-aged' daughter is regarded as 'a wedge in the crack of the stove' by parents eager to find a husband and marry off their daughters (Chapter 5). They also believed that a woman is like 'a falling leaf returning to the roots where it belongs', where marriage is the root. For the younger lone mothers, the term 'left-over woman' is constructed to slight unmarried women at a certain age with the connotation that the women have been picked-over or have no saleable value (Chapter 5). Some of the women, regardless of age and occupation, reflected patriarchal domination and spelled out their subordination as financial dependency: once married they should no longer have to worry about making a living which is the men's job (Chapter 5). This subordination extended to some women who were not happy in their parents' home before marriage, and they tried to escape the unhappy situation by getting married, shifting the subordination from parents to the husband. Hoping to 'gain freedom and autonomy through marriage', they were greatly disappointed in the 'Mr Right' as well as the marriage itself (Chapter 5). Subordination is inherent in marriage as far as the traditional lone mothers were concerned.

GENDER ROLE AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Women with this perspective are bounded by internalized traditions, which accept age-old patriarchal treatment of women as chattels and vessels of reproduction, believing in male superiority. Furthermore, they regard that it is natural for women to accept the gender division of labour in the family. They are socially conditioned to believe that it is natural feminine instinct for a wife and mother to take care of the husband and children (Chapters 3 and 4). With this approach, women's quest for a harmonious family is deeply ingrained with a gendered orientation. Their self-sacrifice and blind tolerance demonstrates the traditional view of the women who believe in the idea of a complete family and their need to strive strategies to retain their men as the family head at all costs (Chapter 5). While the men are breadwinners in the public sphere, women are placed in the private sphere as carers with responsibility for the family's needs. They accept an inferior position being women, and therefore, they are charged with keeping a harmonious family, as the saying goes 'harmony brings prosperity in family'. Accordingly, they have to perform as a 'good mother'. The Confucian phrase describing the 'three submissions and four virtues of women' is a fundamental to this gendered moral perspective (Chapters 3 and 4). Before marriage, women should submit to the father, then to the husband and eventually in old age, to the son. To become a prudent or decent wife, the woman has to obey the husband and fulfil the four virtues of behaviour, speech, appearance and domestic skills. Therefore, women who practise the traditional approach tend to submit to gender subordination, and they uphold such moral rules. On the other hand, this subordination also serves as a mechanism to switch off the subordinate's resistance in the power relationship, leaving her to believe that she is fully responsible in holding together the complete family, so divorce is totally out of the question. This subordination is best reflected in Duncan et al.'s (2003) gendered moral rationality in context (Chapter 3) as well as the post-structuralist feminist (Williams 2001; May 2006) discussion on power and discourse (Chapters 3 and 4), whereby this group of women establish their identity and responsibilities in the context of the society they live in (Chapter 4). The women studied reflected the same way of thinking through distinct descriptions of the division of labour in the family (Chapters 2 and 5). Men would repair electrical appliances and plumbing at home while the women's job was to serve and care for the husband and children's day-to-day living, which included cooking, cleaning and making sure the

children behaved and did well at school. The man was not supposed to be attentive and do well in the carer's job at home (Chapters 2 and 5). Instead, his talents were reserved for performing his job in the public sphere.

COMPLETE FAMILY AS A NORM

The normative family to the familial conservative woman is a complete family with father, mother and children living harmoniously under one roof, and the woman's sole responsibility is to maintain the complete family. The ideal situation is that the man's responsibility lies in the public sphere while the woman's is in the private (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5). There is a well-defined distinction separating the wage earner and the carer as far as the tasks they are to perform. The complete family also has dichotomous bearings on children: good children come from a complete family and problematic children from incomplete one (Chapter 3). To the woman, success is being able to uphold the complete family because the children's well-being relies on it. A 'good woman or good wife' becomes an albatross that burdens the woman with inescapable moral and emotional burdens. Failing to maintain the complete family brings guilt and self-blame to the woman who believes in the constructed role of the defender of the family (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). The familial conservative lone mothers displayed strong ties to old ideologies in women's mission to uphold a complete family at all costs (Chapter 5). In this research as discussed in Chapter 5, the women went as far as blaming themselves for the husbands' extramarital affairs. They blamed themselves for devoting too much time and attention to the children and neglecting their husbands. This way of thinking can be confirmed by many cases in the research with women striving to hold the complete family together in a family crisis.

Hoping to save the marriage, some women went to extremes to cater to their men even if it meant twisting their lives around as in one case the woman hired a maid to free herself to keep the husband company. She tried to make herself more attractive to cater to her husband's desires in the hope that this would persuade him to remain in the family (Chapter 5). Another professional woman in her twenties left her job to stay at home hoping to save the marriage. The moral obligation in upholding the complete family includes catering to the husbands, undertaking financial burdens, and

tolerance of both overbearing patriarchal behaviour and domestic violence (Chapter 5).

The gendered moral rationality in the belief of the complete family apparently knows no age and class boundaries (Duncan, 1991; Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Duncan and Edwards et, al. 2003) (Chapter 3). Women of various ages shared the ultimate goal of keeping the family complete at all costs. One woman in her early thirties risked borrowing from loan-sharks to repay her husband's debts. Her guiding principle was the age-old saying 'marry a chicken, the woman follows the chicken for life; marry a dog, the woman follows the dog for life' (Chapter 5). Therefore, she would go beyond her means to rescue her husband from sinking financially. Under the new gendered ideologies, the women would take it upon themselves in the task of fixing problems in the marriage so that it does not fall apart. They regularly made personal sacrifices to shoulder the risks themselves, selling their personal belongings, inheritance, and even incurring personal debts from loan sharks to help their husbands. In other cases of women with some means, they would exhaust their savings by selling inherited property or jewellery (Chapter 5). The 'married to a chicken' notion has extended to even younger and more educated women. One young mother with tertiary education tolerated her husband's abuse for years despite her disbelief that it was happening to her. Like other traditional women she chose to tolerate it until he started to beat the child (Chapter 5).

Traditionally in Chinese society women had no right to divorce their husbands. In contrast, there were seven criteria the men could cite to divorce their wives. The residue of such patriarchal ideology lingered and men could do no wrong in the marriage. If there was a divorce, the blame fell on the woman; there had to be something wrong with her causing the breakdown of the family. One of the consequences of divorce is the stigmatization of failure. As a result, drastic measures are taken to maintain a status quo in the marriage to avoid family breakdowns. An incomplete family will deem the woman abandoned, and the children less precious and more likely to become delinquents (Chapters 2 and 3). The guilt feelings for not being able to provide a complete family for the children and the self-blame for not doing enough to please the husband lingered. All in all, the women perceived the incomplete family as the ultimate risk in the family, and therefore, the traditional wife

should avoid a divorce by the use of coping strategies at all cost. The coping strategies employed by the group of familial conservative wives were largely ineffective (Chapter 5). Their fixation on the complete family and submission to the idea of subordination in the perception of family risks eventually led them down the path of divorce. Traditions formed under the age-old patriarchal system can no longer guard against the rapid thrust of modern ideologies of changing times. Consequently, being stuck in one set of beliefs, some of the lone mothers with the traditional approach in this research faced unavoidable divorce.

CARING EQUATED TO WORK

Under the old ideologies women's work in the domestic sphere was recognized. In return, they would be provided for by their husband. New ideologies regard stay at home mothers as a personal choice, similar to divorce. For the familial conservative women, motherhood and caring duties restricted their view of paid work. The women were pulled by two forces, old ideologies in motherhood and ethics of care, and new ideologies in the ethics of work in a capitalistic society. On top of these two forces, contributing factors to the women's coping strategies lay in the added risks created by the institutionalization of individualism (Chapter 3). When the lone mothers were confronted by the immediate problem of providing for the family and finding an income to support the children and themselves, we see clearly heuristic responses by the women to achieve the immediate goal of resolving their financial problem (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006; Zinn and Taylor-Gooby, 2006).

As discussed in Chapter 5 some women believed in motherhood and the inalienable caring duties which could not be shared or transferred. They claimed that looking after their children was their own responsibility, and it would be irresponsible to leave them to someone else. They felt guilty if they failed to care for their children themselves. Contrary to the rest of the society, this particular group of lone mothers equated caring to work. Society at large regards caring as being instinctive to mothers. Their caring duties have been taken for granted, not fitting into the definition of 'work' (ideal worker) in the capitalistic society (Chapter 3). In other words, the lone mothers did not get paid for performing their duties at home alone, and they must secure employment in order to earn an income. The disparity of the two approaches to work

again exposed the lone mothers to further risks of the feminization of poverty and dependency (Chapters 2 and 3). Consequently, when the lone mothers were forced to earn an income to support the children and themselves, they had to compromise their belief in motherhood and infringe on gendered moral rationality (Chapter 3).

REMARRIAGE FOR A COMPLETE FAMILY

Some lone mothers ventured into remarriage as a strategy for a number of reasons ranging from security to providing a complete family for the children. In the traditional Chinese society remarriage is gendered. While it is acceptable for men to remarry, divorced women who try to marry again are often frowned upon. Divorced women with children were regarded as second-hand commodities with known liabilities deeming the women worthless, while a man who was financially independent, had never married before and was eager to get married was regarded a good catch and hard to come by (Chapter 5). Most of the men available were also divorced men, as in Olivia and Bobo's cases. The women were expected to serve their new husband's ageing parents and children from their previous marriages (Chapter 3). The reconstructed families encountered a lot of difficulties. The chance of another failure in marriage added to the already battered self-esteem. Pauline and Wendy were about to remarry but they were approaching it with caution and regarded it as a gamble (Chapter 5). New ideologies emerged here when they tried to re-evaluate the need for complete family, and stood up to the parents' coercing into remarriage. However, the women's parents especially their mothers were keen on hurrying them into remarriage, and reminded their daughters of their inferior position as divorced lone mothers. Some, such as Queenie and Abby, were not so lucky. Both women had hopes of remarriage only to get pregnant and then their intendeds disappeared (Chapter 5). As a result, they had to bear the consequence of an extra child on top of being viewed as naïve. As shown from the data, tradition and remarriage did not necessarily go hand in hand for the lone mothers. Employing remarriage as a strategy sometimes backfired and created unforeseen consequences (Chapter 5).

INDIVIDUALIZED CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

The traditional society of Hong Kong has always been under attack from new ideas and ideologies, and capitalism has been an invincible force penetrating all aspects of the society. The ideology of individualized responsibility, so advocated by the neo-liberal government, has had a far-reaching effect on some women to varying degrees (Chapter 3). The idea of self-managed biography anchors, creating a struggle between tradition and the newly added realization of the self as an individual responsible for her own life course. Nonetheless, the newfound idea of the self did not necessarily coincide with Beck's (1995) concept of individualization but was a practical response to social changes amidst Western individualistic attitudes on top of neo-liberalist capitalism ideology (Beck, 1992; Beck-Gernsheim, 1998; 2002; Beck et, al., 1994). As a result, the self becomes an added factor in the calculations apart from the family and children in any decision making process (Chapter 3). It can be seen that the idea of the traditional belief starts to teeter between tradition and the self. Some of the women started to question traditional beliefs which ranged from the division of labour within the family, the power to make decisions, and ultimately, to the key issue of subordination.

The profile of this particular group ranged from full-time wage earners to part-time workers with specific bottom lines which were likely a combination of traditional beliefs and the newfound idea of the self. They were quick to reach a decision when their bottom line was touched (Chapter 5). While the concept of individual responsibility offered freedom and equity on the one hand, it bred uncertainties and insecurities on the other hand. Consequently, they may appear calculating and self-interested when they made decisions after evaluating the pros and cons of a situation. The so-called calculation may not necessarily lead to most effective decision as they are heuristic and often based on situated knowledge, unlike rational choices taken by seasoned capitalists with a comprehensive understanding of the full picture (Taylor-Gooby, 2006; Zinn and Taylor-Gooby, 2006) (Chapter 3). Nonetheless, the concept of equity extends to the family and challenges the traditional gender division of labour and demands an equal share of contribution both in financial and caring terms. When these terms are not met divorce is considered.

BOTTOM-LINED SUBORDINATION IN MARRIAGE

In facing their husbands' demand of total submission, one group of women instinctively responded with tolerance, a traditional belief that women were subordinate to the men they married, but with a bottom-line instilled by the new ideologies of a woman's new identity that she was an autonomous individual. In retrospect they saw marriage as a destination for women. Some women believed that they had found where they belonged and they did not have to worry about their livelihood as they could rely on the men they married (Chapter 3). In doing so, the women mainly factored in the personality of the men and their financial situation to reach the decision of getting married. Lara had a chronic back problem, so she had to take into consideration the three suitors' financial situation to determine who would be able to provide for her. However, some women, like Mandy, Susan, Nicole Iris, Daphne and Yanki, were drawn into marriage by traditional beliefs but they soon realized that they did not have to rely on men to make their lives complete, and marriage was not essential for women. They claimed that they could manage on their own and dependency was unnecessary once they got divorced (Chapter 5).

QUESTIONING AND REDEFINING GENDER ROLES

While this group of women still upheld the belief of the traditional complete family, they were influenced by the pressure of individualized responsibility (Chapter 3). This group of women held the traditional view of the wife and motherhood, performing a good mother's role, and they also regarded it their duty to support their husbands and sacrifice for their children. On one hand, they seemed to have been emancipated in creating their own individual biographies, having the choice and work opportunities in the labour market and contributing financially to the family, which made it equitable for them to have more say in the family. From the data (Chapter 5), some women even went further to trade places with the men. The traditional gender division of labour was challenged and redefined to allow the women to break through the boundary between the public and private spheres so that they would be able to pursue their career aspirations and personal interests, and thus fulfilling the idea of individual biography in some cases of this study. As a result, the hybrid element of individual biography gave rise to the questioning of the gender division of labour, a redistribution

of power within the family structure. They expected the men to share the building of a complete family by involving themselves in caring duties and being present as a fatherly figure in the family picture. At the same time, they were prepared to fulfil the role of the wife and mother. Furthermore, they tended to be more independent financially and they had the control of their own earnings and sharing of the household expenses. Yet, despite the newly found financial independence, very few of the women would spend money on themselves. Instead, most of their money went on the children and the family, and the only difference was that the women made the decision on what it was spent, differing from the familial conservative women the use of whose earnings was decided by the men alone. The grey area between the familial and individualized approaches rests on the apparent emancipation of women and the invisible shackles of traditional thinking that the core of women's biography is the family and children. Ideally, the women hoped for emotional support from their spouses and they avoided the idea of divorce, considering it stigmatizing, and endeavoured not to 'air dirty laundry' in public. The element of subordination in this group was qualified, challenging the men's contribution in the complete family financially as well as emotionally. In general, the women submitted to traditional thinking about family and children, yet they were not afraid to embrace divorce as the last resort if there was a prolonged period of time that the men failed to meet the expectations. Consequently, the women would evaluate the risks in the marriage carefully and realistically, and took steps to amend the situation before the final decision of divorce. In this case, the worst situation is uncertainty, in which the women could not measure the magnitude of the risks they faced. Unlike the familial conservative approach group this one took charge to proceed with a divorce if necessary.

The individualized conservative approach demonstrates the continuing influence of the post-industrialized society and the gradual erosion of traditions. As individuals are made more aware of individual responsibilities to create their biographies, inherent ideas in traditional thinking start to crumble. The women in this group were informed by the new social norms and order in terms of wealth, competitiveness and rationality through education and work experience, so it is inevitable that they started to question the gender division of labour in the family (Chapter 5). However, grafting the idea of

individualization onto a traditional view of the role of a wife and mother is likely to lead to struggles and burdens for the group of women with the individualized approach.

COMPLETE FAMILY NOT NECESSARILY A NORM

For the individualized conservative group, the concept of the complete family was still based on traditional interpretation of father, mother and child under one roof. However, this group has an added element in defining the complete family, under the new idea of gender equality. They quoted equal contributions, companionship, respect, a common goal and financial security (Chapter 5). In one case, the woman even expected the man to assist her in starting her own business. In another case, the woman considered the complete family as a choice, and the woman had the right to demand these added elements in the complete family. When the bottom line was violated, unlike the familial conservative group of women who chose to be tolerant and maintain the status quo, the individualized conservative group would exercise the option to abandon the complete family and seek a divorce.

Yanki, who was divorced 10 years ago, regretted that she had left the home (Chapter 5). She thought that it would have been better for her son if they had taken a different settlement by remaining under the same roof with the ex-husband after the divorce. Her rationale was that that way she would be able to have the cake and eat it, having the freedom and the ex's resources to raise the child. There is a Chinese saying that she is making her calculations on a smug abacus to her favour (如意算盤). It may seem that she had hijacked the individualization ideology, a rational process of weighing the pros and cons to her favour. Yet, this is just an afterthought, wishful thinking after the fact that she had struggled for years to raise her son. In fact, she was merely making decisions according to the knowledge and resources accessible to her at the time, a heuristic response (Chapter 3).

Another sub-group who had taken an individualized approach seemed to have submitted to the traditional thinking of the complete family to the extent that they were willing to compromise and tolerate the husband's non-contribution to the household finances or even domestic violence and extra-marital affairs (Chapter 5). However, traditional subordination was redefined and renegotiated, resulting in a challenge and

reversal of the traditional gender division of labour within the family (Chapter 3). In exchange, the men were expected to contribute to the family in other areas. For instance, in Chapter 5, Daphne and Xandra's cases, sick children were involved. As long as the men took care of the children at home while the women went out to work to support the family, the barter was in balance. Should the scale be tipped when men fail to contribute domestically, the women may carefully measure the pros and cons and terminate the marriage. With this approach, the men are functionally valued by the service or resources they are able to produce as an equal partner. Despite the fact that the implication of motherhood was the same in two groups of women with familial conservative or individualized conservative approach challenges fatherhood in the equal partnership, and they would not hesitate to withdraw from the partnership if necessary.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Lara remained living under the same roof and utilized her ex-husband's work schedule to take care of her child in the initial stage of the divorce despite the fact that she had custody of the child. At the same time, she was planning to move out leaving the child to his care and become a weekend mother. The reason for leaving the child behind is that she decided that she needed to give full attention to her career, and when she thought she had gathered enough resources, she would exercise the custody right. Throughout the decision making process, it appears that she was preoccupied with her own interests but her preoccupation was to generate enough wealth for economic security. She intended to relinquish custody of her child in pursuit of self-interest. A similar case was Emily who decided to return the custody to her ex-husband in order to marry a man who was living overseas.

The individualized approach is in fact the tip of the iceberg of a larger social phenomenon in Hong Kong. Submerged are the effects of capitalism whereby individualism and institutionalized resources are upheld, leaving individuals in the society desperate for security in terms of wealth, while the retrenchment of institutionalized responsibilities from the government is accepted tacitly. Therefore, it would be irresponsible to view the lone mothers as calculating 'economic women' vested only with self-interest (Chapter 3). The underlying structure of the decision making process of the individualized approach is mere reflexivity in the calculation of risk bearing. Instead of thinking that the women were out to challenge the structural

role of women in the gendered division of labour, they were merely seeking a more equitable distribution of time and tasks between the two sexes. With the new capitalistic economic norm and order, more women are endowed with the power to provide for the family, especially those who are in a high-income bracket. With this new found power, many women are made aware of the self and its worth, and the need to create individual biographies. On the home front, it is only natural for some of the working women to seek equal partnership in their marriages. Subsequently, the unequal power relationship prescribed in the traditional gender division of labour is challenged and in some cases reversed. Apart from an equal relationship, we have to bear in mind that there are commonalities in capitalism and patriarchy in terms of power relationships – subordination to the one who brings home the bacon. In this sense, the individualized approach can be viewed as a perpetuation of the relationship of power under the combination of capitalism and patriarchy (Chapters 3 and 4).

WORK AS IMPORTANT AS CARING/ WORK IS PRIORITY

As far as work is concerned the data show deviations in the lone mothers' views (Chapter 5). While the majority of the women regarded work as being as important as the family, two women stood out in treating work as their priority. The concept of individual responsibility was the driving force for the lone mothers to undertake paid work in order to be self-sufficient (ideal worker) as discussed in Chapter 3. Besides motherhood, most of the women desired for more, and they tried to extend their world through work. Compared to the familial conservative group who equated motherhood to work, they tended to strive for a balance between caring and work (Chapter 5). The tendency to remain working was strong, and when there was a conflict between caring and work, they tried to outsource the caring duties to the grandparents including their ex-in-laws in Daphne and Iris's Cases (Chapter 5). Those who could afford domestic help would entrust their children to the helpers, like Daphne. Many of them chose to send their children to afterschool tutorial schools, like Yanki and Doris, while some of them resorted to remote control through the phone in the cases of Nicole and Yanki (Chapter 5). The twin faces of motherhood bore the duties of caring and provider for the family as discussed in Chapter 3 under 'gendered moral rationality'. In the same chapter, the ethic of work is also discussed to shed light on the importance of work the women felt in measuring their self-value in the capitalistic society, a yardstick for self-

worth in a patriarchal world. Unfortunately, the balancing act between work and caring proved to be paradoxical as the women were left to deal with their 'choice' on their own without help. The working lone mothers were often blamed both for lagging behind in their caring duties at home and slacking at work.

As noted in the previous section, two of the lone mothers studied displayed a tendency of gender role reversal in treating work as priority over their caring duties in order to forge a self-biography (Chapter 5). Lara upheld financial independence for women so it was extremely important for her to continue to work. She claimed that she stressed the quality, not quantity of the time she spent with her son. Emily compromised motherhood to actualize her goal as an entrepreneur. Both women gave up custody so that they could engage fully in work to achieve autonomy and control (Chapter 5). They appeared to be under the strong influence of hyper-capitalism in the pursuit of self-reliance and self-interest.

REMARRIAGE, APPREHENSION AND BREAKING INHIBITIONS

Akin to the familial conservative lone mothers, the individualized conservative lone mothers also expressed the desire to build another complete family. However, some of the women would not venture into new relationships because of past failure. Even when they did, they entered the relationship with low self-worth regarding themselves as second-hand merchandise, one aspect of their life stage (Chapter 5). Mandy and Yanki went out with young men who had never been married but broke off the relationship feeling inferior in front of the men's parents' objections. Xandra and Daphne felt extremely nervous and sensitive in their new found relationships, and they were both ready to quit at the first sign of trouble. They were unwilling to invest in the relationships based on past experience (Chapter 5). On top of that, they could not afford another relationship going wrong because they still had their children to think about.

Lara enjoyed the freedom and excitement in casual liaisons but was apprehensive at getting married again. She was concerned with the loss of control in marriage. In contrast Emily demonstrated enthusiasm in remarriage. She gave the impression of

having bought into the self-reliance and self-interest aspects of capitalism displaying control and choices with caution and calculation. She had plans to emigrate to another country, get married again and start up a business. She was counting on keeping contact with her son through technology, face-time over the telephone, even though she would be starting another family with the new man (Chapter 5).

A CUT-ACROSS CLASS RISK: PARENTING

Despite what were distinct views from the two groups of lone mothers on various dimensions of gendered roles, marking their degree of conservatism, there were overlaps in their perceptions of parenting risks. The existence of cut-across class new risks, as discussed in the risk society thesis, was well demonstrated here (Chapter 5). The concept of prescribed gender roles in a complete family is continuously reinforced, leaving the lone family outside the norm. This belief not only affected the lone mothers but the children as well. The father is supposed to act as a role model for boys to become men and provide nurturing attention and affection to girls to feel loved. Lacking a male role model, both groups of lone mothers worried about their sons falling prey to gang activities seeking identities while daughters might enter into premature relationships with the opposite sex to make up for the lack of male affection (Chapter 5).

Most women did not think they could play both roles, father and mother, which thus resulted in parenting concerns. The women believed that sons needed their fathers' guidance which mothers could not provide. As discussed in Chapter 5, some women found it embarrassing to talk to their sons about puberty. This thinking transpires into risks at family breakdowns. In coping, the lone mothers tended to agree that boys needed a male role model (Chapter 5). Some of the women therefore resorted to asking their male friends to talk to their sons and daughters to compensate for their loss for the traditional women, like Zara and Heidi (Chapter 5). On the other hand, Xandra, an individualized lone mother on CSSA, felt that her son had grown attached to the man in her new relationship and believed that he could set a male role model to her son.

The lone mothers with daughters had their worries too as far as their parenting was concerned. However, a sense of inevitability prevailed as there was not much that could be done. The lone mothers were apprehensive in introducing a new man into the daughter's life in fear of many horror stories of young girls being molested. Yet, many of them thought that their daughters had emotional problem in the absence of the father. Normally, the mother would play the disciplinary role with girls while the father would play the indulgent, part for balance. With the father out of the picture, Iris felt that both her daughters had emotional problems because she was too harsh on them and there was no balance in parenting. Vanessa, a familial domestic helper, worried about her daughter getting involved in premature romantic relationships because of the lack of attention and affection from the father. They felt quite helpless, and the only thing they could do were to tip-toe around their teenage daughters. They believed that their daughters were emotional because they no longer had a father. Doris, with individualized beliefs, even expressed relief that she had two sons instead of a daughter (Chapter 5).

The distinct division of labour in the family surpasses the concept of the ethics of care (Chapters 2 and 3). Not only did the mothers endeavor to fulfil their responsibility as carers at home, it also impacted on their perception of risks to encompass gendered parenting and guidance concerns beyond the marriage. The familial and individualized conservative lone mothers responded with a gendered heuristic solution based on their understanding of the functions of the fatherly role (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Zinn and Taylor-Gooby, 2006) (Chapter 3). It is generally believed that younger children are more demanding in terms of caring and parenting, yet many of the lone mothers expressed difficulties in parenting their adolescent children. Such concerns are not exclusive to class belief. In fact, parenting was a common risk to all.

OVERLAPS AND FLUIDITY IN COPING

The separation into familial and individualized groups of lone mothers does not mean dichotomization. In fact, there were many overlaps and fluidity in their perception of risks and coping strategies depending on a complex range of factors and the social location of the individual (chapters 3 and 4). Although their perception of the gender role of motherhood would affect their perception of risk and decision making, the

overlaps and fluidity would be affected by other factors including class, resources, and access to knowledge (Chapter 3). Class has been undeniably regarded as a determining factor of risks. Yet, the study suggests that class cannot be equated to the distribution of risks (Chapters 5 and 6). In fact, different classes would experience different risks. The access to knowledge and resources entailing support from various facets of society will be reflected in the coping strategies (Chapter 3). Nonetheless, there are areas of overlap of risks within the familial and individualized groups in terms of the risk impact, perception and the coping strategies, through which they may share the same transitional experience. Another trait of the two groups' perception and coping strategies is its fluidity, the tendency to cross over from one group to the other. During the transition, a familial lone mother may act similarly to an individualized lone mother and vice versa in response to the impact of the various factors in risk such as the concern for security and children's competitiveness. The familial lone mother may take up employment and compromise on the caring of her children in order to provide as much as possible to the child's education (Chapter 6). Of course, the support of a considerate employer played a key role in the crossing over from staying home to taking up employment by the familial lone mother. But, without a supportive employer to allow for flexible hours, an individualized lone mother may be forced to sacrifice her work choice to fulfil her caring duties. The fluidity in the lone mothers' responses to risks reveals various ways of subjective thinking and circumstances affecting their decisions (Chapter 4). The overlaps and fluidity therefore highlight the approximate nature of the two groups. However this division serves as a way to describe the complexity of the issue and individual responses in separate dimensions of social reality. In fact, there were strong links between the circumstances and the lone mothers' responses to strive for autonomy and free choice. Despite commonalities of a gendered role view, the two familial and individualized conservative groups displayed varied perceptions and coping strategies to risks in finance, employment and housing.

SOCIAL LOCATION – INTERACTION OF CLASS, RESOURCES AND KNOWLEDGE ON INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES

As discussed in the preceding section, two groups of conservative lone mothers surfaced, the familial and individualized. Their individual perceptions and coping strategies varied in degree to family risks which may in turn place them in disadvantaged positions. In analyzing inequality, as discussed in Chapter 3 and revealed by the findings in Chapters 5 and 6, class still matters, and inequality cuts across class as pointed out in Beck's theory. Yet the findings also concur with the concept of heuristic coping strategies performed by the lone mothers who were affected by traditional beliefs and other factors such as access to resources as discussed in Chapter 3 (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006; Lewis and Sarre, 2006). In the lone mothers studied the underlying difference in the two groups lay in the individual's view on traditional gender roles in the family. Nevertheless, since both groups shared the status of being conservative, motherhood became the foreground of any considerations for the women, reinforced by the ethics of care (good mother) and work ethic (ideal worker) pushing the lone mothers to take more risks (Chapter 3). The coping strategies the lone mothers deployed have been described as rational choice. However, it would not be fair to consider the lone mothers' coping strategies as severely individualized calculating tactics. In fact, the findings support the fact that their coping was determined by their access to resources, which included both tangible and intangible support from family, society and the government Chapter 6). The complexity in the constant negotiation between a gendered belief of motherhood and limited resources is nothing rational but actually exasperating. Disadvantaged positions in the context of the risk society will be discussed through various dimensions in individual experience to demonstrate that the divorced lone mothers bear more risks with the considerations of class, access to resources and knowledge, and social location, which stand as constraining factors to the choices and strategies made by the lone mothers from different backgrounds (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6).

FINANCIAL RISKS AND COPING

Finance is a vital factor in generating and mitigating risks. It is commonly believed that male breadwinners in the traditional families are the sole providers for protection against financial risks for women and children. With rapid social changes in the past decades, as women are better educated and gradually inducted into the labour market, they no longer have to rely on marriage to secure financial support from their husbands. On top of that, individualization heralded by capitalism to create one's own biography has had an impact on women's behavior and attitude towards taking charge and responsibility for one's own life (Chapter 3). However, in Hong Kong, traditions contribute heavily to normative prescriptions, which at the same time are reinforced by institutions, and many women display a tendency towards dependency under the traditional gendered role perspective (Chapters 2 and 3). This research on lone mothers in Hong Kong also revealed what looks like a linear relationship between dependency and financial risks – the more dependent the women were in the marriage, the more financial risks they were exposed to when divorced regardless of education and social circumstances, as with Rose and Katy (Chapter 6). Although they had attained university education levels, they became dependent on the husbands since they became full-time housewives after getting married. Subsequently, they faced greater risks especially financial ones.

CSSA

In practice, the gendered perception of motherhood and family necessitated the lone mothers to consider their financial situation as a high priority in the highly capitalistic society of Hong Kong. It contributed to voluntary compulsion as they had to provide for their children. It then became the lone mother's individual responsibility because society views divorce a personal choice and the lone mother family is still sanctioned as it is outside the norm, upon which institutions are based as discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 6). Consequently, the familial lone mothers who had leaned heavily on their husbands for financial support before their divorces, tended to shift to dependency on the CSSA, to fulfil their definitions of motherhood. Since the CSSA lacks a gender perspective and is a standardized scheme given to all disadvantaged groups in society

to provide minimal assistance, the lone mothers and their children were placed in poverty as the CSSA only provides for the bare minimum (Chapters 2 and 6). Their strategy was to seek additional funding so that they could remain at home to look after their children on a full-time basis. Yet, most funding provided by government schemes and the private sector are sporadic in nature (Chapters 3 and 6). The lone mothers could only treat it as a windfall with an undignified undertone of waiting for hand-outs from charity (Chapter 6). Meanwhile, the women made sacrifices on their own needs and tried to provide for their children.

As shown in Chapter 6, in some cases the women only ate one meal a day, walked to save on bus fares and only shopped for cheap groceries in the market at closing time. Some of the CSSA lone mothers responded to the institutionalized poverty by breaking the rules and taking up paid jobs illicitly. If they were to report the income the same amount would have been deducted from the CSSA. When they were away from home at work they further risked breaking child negligence laws. The transitional period for the lone mothers may be made easier if they had a decent and stable income. While the CSSA can be viewed as a lifebuoy it also entailed an added institutionalized risk reinforcing the feminization of poverty (Chapters 2 and 6). Many of the women in the study lamented the stigmatization of CSSA lone mothers associating them with poverty.

Work

As discussed in Chapter 6, even if the lone mothers were working full time, this did not provide them with a guaranteed life protection. In the complex negotiating process, the better off without financial worries might choose to become week-end mothers in response to the long working hours they had to devote to her job. For those at the bottom of the scale who were not able to find suitable employment, they either suffered exploitation or chose to exit from the job market. It was clearly exhausting to hold down a full time job or several part-time ones while fulfilling the caring duties as a 'good mother' (Chapter 3) (Lewis, 1992; 1997b; Pascall and Kwak, 2005). As shown in Chapter 6, they worked full time and was in desperate need to find afterschool childcare for her son that would fit her budget before she could pick him

up after work. Subsequently, for the familial conservative lone mothers who equated their caring duties with work, they were exposed to further risks in finance, stigmatization, their children's education and perhaps other unexpected difficulties due to the fact that their contribution was not recognized by society, and resulted in a lack of public childcare support. Meanwhile, the women were also disadvantaged due to the disappearance of extended family support. Ironically, work was not able to resolve the lone mother's financial problems. They remained half floating and half sinking on the poverty line (Chapter 6). Not only are these activities costly, they tend to stifle children, leaving them no free time to play. In some cases, in order to compensate for the lack of time spent with their children, the lone mothers stayed up late helping with homework and revision until after midnight during the week and filled the weekends with private tutorial lessons and other learning activities (Chapter 6).

Some of the women undertook low paid and low prospect jobs, and even went as far as declining promotions. The only thing they asked was a stable income to feed the family. This way of thinking cut across class, and included even professional women, as discussed in Chapter 5. The lone mothers who might not be in dire situations to find jobs, like the desperate group at the bottom of the income scale, would find work to provide extras for their children owing to their familial view on motherhood. They had to suffer long working hours as requested by their employer, or risk being laid off. As for the lowest class of lone mothers who had to work to provide for the family, they were further penalized by heavy physical and time demands in the jobs they could find (Chapters 5 and 6).

Alimony

Other added factors included alimony. A few women responded to motherhood taking the choice of staying home to look after the children, and it was made possible by a stable flow of alimony (Chapter 6). Yet, in most alimony cases, since there was no enforcement on the judgment because the courts felt that, again, the decision to divorce was a personal choice, it would be the individual's responsibility to chase after the money (Chapters 2 and 6). There was very little chance of the lone mother receiving

timely alimony income, or for that matter, any income at all. After a long struggle in vain through the civil courts, the women felt humiliated by begging and gave up (Chapters 2 and 6). Relinquishing the alimony, the women might qualify for CSSA or they would have to rely on themselves to take up paid work. It may appear that the women had the choice of CSSA, alimony or work to resolve their financial situations. They were expected to make some sort of calculation and make a choice, and indeed they did, but was it really a rational choice? Were they really free to choose? The answer is painstakingly obvious and paradoxical. If the women chose to go on CSSA they put themselves and the children in poverty. Should they dare to work to subsidize the shortfall of CSSA, they would either face breaking the rules and losing the CSSA or a reduction of the assistance (Chapters 2 and 6). As there was no childcare support for working mothers, they also risked child neglect charges for leaving children alone at home while they were out working (Chapters 2, 3 and 6). The manipulation of numbers may appear rational, yet the complexity and further risks entailed are beyond simple calculations (Chapter 3).

To a large extent class matters as far as alimony is concerned. The lone mothers who had a sound financial background were likely not to demand alimony so that they did not have to deal with the hassles involved. Those who lacked financial support might consider alimony seriously but often they were forced to give up because of the humiliation and heartache in chasing down their ex-husband. A few lone mothers who were lucky enough to receive steady alimony income were in a better position to decide whether they wanted to stay home to look after the children or pursue a career outside the home, and naturally their transition became easier without money worries (Chapter 6). However, without law enforcement on the women's side, alimony can be illusory. Overlapping the familial and individualized groups, the majority of the lone mothers who were promised alimony were left with frustration, and eventually decided to forfeit the claim and rely on themselves for money. Some women who were on alimony chose to relinquish it so that they could go on CSSA as the process of chasing after the men for money was felt to be humiliating. Here you may find the familial lone mothers compromising their caring duties and crossing over to the other side to take up employment. Some who were on CSSA took it upon themselves to take up part-time jobs to subsidize the CSSA deficiency (Chapter 6). This coping strategy meant working part-time jobs secretly and the job had to fit into their caring

schedule, which left them with very little choice except for low paying and low prospect work (Chapters 2 and 3).

Elite Education

A financially related risk confronting the lone mothers in Hong Kong is the elite education system. The highly capitalistic society emphasizes individualization (Beck, 1992; 1999), and individual success is tied to the ability to generate wealth. It is generally believed the pre-requisite to wealth is qualifications obtained through education. In Hong Kong, the education system follows an elitist ideology which is shown throughout the various levels of schooling, kindergarten, primary, secondary, and the ultimate goal – university. In Hong Kong, apart from private schools catering to privileged students, aided and direct subsidy schools for the rest runs on an elite system. The competition to enter higher banding schools is fierce. The criteria for admission depend on the student's academic results, the district they live in, the number of extracurricular activities undertaken, religion, and finally an old boy system. To ensure good academic results, almost every Hong Kong student attends afterschool tutorials as discussed in Chapter 6. Some parents will also go as far as borrowing someone else's address or paying exorbitant rent for an address in their desired school district. Children are sent to learn a number of musical instruments and participate in sports. The rat-race in the elite school system puts a heavy burden on parents even for two-income households which face various financial risks in the post-industrial era. Lone parent families with one income are likely to suffer more. When this is applied to lone mothers in Hong Kong, their risks increase as they feel compelled to provide their children with costly extracurricular activities in order to help them succeed (Chapter 6).

Under the elite education system, there is no doubt the lone mothers with fewer resources were marginalized and they blamed themselves for inability to provide more for their children to win at the starting line. Under this light, class still matters. However, we see another facet of class at work here in that the financial risk to provide extras for children's success cuts across class. The need to maintain a stable income added to the burden to the lone mothers who held decent paying jobs. Some of them

expressed fear of losing the financial resources and not being able to send their children to after-school classes, and eventually depriving them an edge at the starting line (Chapter 6). As a result, they put in longer hours to show loyalty so that they could avoid being the first to go in an economic downturn (Chapter 5). The lone mothers' responded to the financial risks in different ways, and in turn, the impact of the risks varied as well.

An overlapping financial risk to win at the starting line, regardless of class and belief in conservatism, the familial and individualized, increased as the lone mothers felt compelled to provide their children with costly extracurricular activities in order to help them succeed (Chapter 6). The underlying factor for the compulsion is that both groups of lone mothers equated their children's success to their own. The overlapping coping strategies used by the lone mothers with low financial resources in both groups would try to fit in more patch-work to make extra money. They would also try to look for flexible welfare from government or NGOs so that their children would at least get some benefits getting ahead. In extreme cases, they would go the extra mile to squeeze the dollar and like Bobo, Terresa and Vanessa, cut down to eat one meal a day and walk to save the bus fare so that they could send their children to after school tutorial classes (Chapter 6). As to the lone mothers with resources, the overlapping coping strategies were to provide as much as possible to their children. Both the familial and individualized lone mothers who were engaged in full-time work tended to work harder and devote their resources to the children's education.

We also see fluidity from familial lone mothers who were engaged in full-time employment comprising their caring duties in exchange for resources to help their children win at the starting line. Like Carrie and Eva, they would take up employment to pay for their children's extracurricular learning and activities (Chapter 6). In order to secure a stable income, some of them would work longer hours. The strategies included outsourcing the caring duties by hiring domestic helps or leaving the children in tutorial class longer. However, the price for the decision was self-blame and guilt. For example, Eva tried to compensate for her absence by purchasing all kinds of books for her eleven-year-old daughter and staying up late until one a.m. to help her schoolwork, even though both of them might be falling asleep at the desk (Chapter 6).

EMPLOYMENT RISKS AND COPING

The lone mothers, both the familial and individualized conservative groups, found it difficult securing suitable employment because only lower-end long hour work types were available to them. One reason was that their qualifications were outdated and there was a gap in their working experience in the workplace. Since they were voluntarily compelled to undertake the role of the 'provider' or 'ideal worker', they were forced into taking up less desirable jobs.

Job Opportunity

Theoretically, a worker with an education and relevant job experience should be able to secure a reasonably well paid full-time permanent job. The other side of the spectrum is that a worker with low education and little job experience would be stuck in a dead end job with no job security. Such an assumption, still holding true, has divided the labour market into categories, and we are seeing that employment risks have cut across class and are manifested in outdated education and changing employment practices (Chapters 2, 3 and 6). Employers are leaning more towards contract instead of permanent staff, and mid-level employees are more at risk of replacement. The lone mothers, regardless of class in employment, were placed in the same disadvantaged position. Moreover, many of them had gaps in their education and work experience during the years they were married and stayed home to rear a family. In this sense, employment risks know no boundaries of stratum and affected the lone mothers as a group (Chapter 6). The lone mothers who held permanent jobs would feel threatened by the lone status as they knew employers would not look favourably on staff that could not work overtime or took frequent leave to handle domestic emergencies. In addition, the women would go to extremes to make sure their children had somewhere to go before they were able to pick them up after work.

Gendered Workplace

The workplace is gendered (Chapters 2, 3 and 6), the conventional market caters for a patriarchal society with men as bread-winners, as discussed in Chapter 3. They were expected to be devoted workers who were willing to work long hours and perform

physically demanding jobs while their female counterparts stayed home to perform wifely duties. The release of women into the labour market alleviated the demand for manpower, yet the male oriented model did not change (Evans et al., 2004; Stewart, 2007; Ridge and Millar, 2011). There was no consideration given to working women who had the double burden of caring for the family as well, let alone the newly emerged lone-mother family. In addition, there was gender bias in the workplace as discussed in Chapters 2, 3 (Millar and Ridge, 2018) and 6. Women were not supposed to perform certain 'men's' jobs, such as construction workers, heavy duty casual labours or bus drivers (Chapter 6). As a result, there were limited job opportunities for the lone mothers except for low paying and low security jobs for those who lacked education and experience. The majority of the lone mothers were resilient as they had the compulsion to take up the individualized responsibility for the family and prove their worth through work. Regardless of the level of jobs they undertook, they were required to work long hours and had the difficult task of juggling work and caring (Chapter 6).

The ideology of patriarchy socially constructed women as carers, and legitimized the superior status of men, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 (Weedon, 1987; Walby, 1990 and Butler, 1990). Traditional beliefs restrict women to believe that they have the responsibility to take up caring duties. In the labour market, the isolation of gender occupation makes women not favourable in the labour market, and strengthens their role as a carer at home. Social construction analysis shows that traditional beliefs and restrictions, especially the definition of gender roles and the restriction of close-relationship responsibility, the labour market, patriarchy, and capitalism mutually create and strengthen the process for women to become carers (Duncan et al, 2003; Walby, 1990 and Butler, 1990).

Stigmatization in Workplace

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, their lone status stigmatization is another risk the lone mothers faced in employment. Employers almost equate the lone status to trouble at work as they are more likely to have to ask for time off to fulfil their caring duties at home and for emergencies as there is no spouse to share the responsibility. Furthermore, employers tend to measure employee loyalty with the willingness to

work long or overtime hours. Failing to measure up to this yardstick, lone mother employees are deemed to be non-loyal workers (Chapter 6). A related risk of the lone status stigmatization is poverty, which in turn causes employers to be suspicious. Some of the lone mothers who took up part-time domestic work reported that they were constantly under the watchful eyes of their employers assuming that they were poor and thus more likely to steal (Chapter 6). The third facet of stigmatization found its root in the capitalistic ideas of individuals creating their own self-biographies and ascertaining self-worth through economic activities. If a lone mother stays at home to fulfil her duties as a mother, she is termed unemployed, a stigma in itself (Chapter 6). The result of subjectivity was compulsion, a 'must' in finding employment in order to generate wealth (Chapters 3 and 4). Nevertheless, the post-industrialized labour market was not ready to accommodate the newly emerged lone mothers (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; 2006; Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006; Bonoli, 2005).

Overlaps and Fluidity in Coping

In view of the various factors, the interplay causing overlaps and fluidity in the lone mothers' coping strategies will be taken into consideration. For the familial group of lone mothers, their children were regarded as priority. As a result, the lone mothers with less employability were more likely to undertake part-time lower end jobs in order to cope with their caring duties. They were also more ready to quit when conflicts developed between work and their caring duties. However, with the mitigation of an understanding employer or family, some of them were able to gain stable employment as in Fiona and Abby's cases when they had to make a decision whether to go on CSSA or taking up paid work (Chapter 6). Within the group of the familial lone mothers, some of them with 'middle-class' jobs shared the same concerns with the individualized lone mothers in their full-time employment (Chapter 6). The overlapping risk lies in the fear of being replaced, and in coping, they tended to appease the employers by putting in long hours so that they could secure the job and maintain the same standard of living. However, there were cases where the full-time employed lone mothers might have to cross over to the other side to accommodate a sick child or in the absence of support for childcare (Chapter 6). Zara, a familial lone mother, responded by foregoing her full-time professional job and took up part-time work to attend to her child. Carrie and Eva, despite their familial beliefs, crossed over

to the individualized side to take up full-time employment and out-source the caring duties so that they could afford better and more expensive education for their children. Cathy, a familial lone mother crossed to the individualized side, and took a great risk when she had to leave her child alone at home overnight so that she could take up another part-time job to repay her divorced husband's debts. She was worn down by the work and anxiety at leaving the children alone at home overnight. Heidi had to sacrifice security from her permanent full-time job to move to contract employment.

Also, vice versa, some of the individualized lone mothers showed fluidity in their employment pattern by coping with strategies typically deployed by the familial group. Instead of maintaining full-time employment, Xandra decided to leave her full-time job and take up part-time work so that she could accompany her sick child on frequent trips to the hospital. In Yanki's case, she left her job as a bus driver and worked several part-time domestic helper jobs after her son suffered an electric shock when left alone at home. Daphne, another individualized lone mother, displayed greater fluidity in her employment decisions. At one point, she sacrificed her career for a less demanding job to help her disabled child. Later, with her father's help, she was able to gain a more promising job again. Similar to Daphne, with her family's help, Susan was able to further her education so that she could find better employment and better provide for her child. These back and forth choices of employment underscore the various factors at play which created great instability and uncertainty.

Social Location and Employment Risk

On top of class, social location should also be considered as this can minimize the plight of the lone mothers by relying on a more accepting market for women through understanding employers, flexible working hours, the opening up of more work types and finally childcare support while the lone mothers are working (Chapters 3 and 4) (May 2006; Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006). In this research, several women confirmed the positive impact of these circumstances (Chapter 6). For example, Abby secured a stable income holding down several part-time domestic helper jobs including at weekends with the help of her mother looking after her children. As a result, she was to be able to provide for her own lone family. Fiona had an understanding employer who allowed her flexible hours and emergency time off. She

saw herself taking charge at work as well as her own life, which gave her satisfaction and confidence. Even in a dead-end job an understanding employer made a difference. In Queenie's case, she was a part-time waitress in a restaurant and was given time off even at weekends if she could not find baby sitters for her children, which made it possible for her to stay employed during her transitional stage. Not only did Iris have an understanding employer, her ex-in-laws also helped her to look after the children. This helped Iris to recover and step out from the trauma of divorce and move on to a more normal social life. Finally, Daphne had a special needs child. Her father helped her out with the caring and she remained hopeful despite the fact that she had to repay debts incurred by her ex-husband.

As the data reveal, the coping strategies undertaken by the lone mothers were complex, in the face of uncertainty, with constant reflexivity. The perception of motherhood, class, resources available in employment and other support were elements in the negotiation of a heuristic response, doing what you have to do to make do (Chapters 3 and 6). The process was often paradoxical, coping with one risk and generating new risks physically as well as psychologically. Subsequently, there was no algorithm in weighing the pros and cons of the solutions, and it was never a rational choice but a heuristic approach. Only the added factors of family and employer support would serve as mediators in the process of negotiation with employment and related risks.

HOUSING RISK AND COPING

Hong Kong has been notorious for its housing problems and this is deteriorating further. Residents in general suffer from the property monopoly of a handful of developers. Despite policies advocated by the past three and current Chief Executive Officers of the SAR, property prices continue to soar to the extent that even a two-income family finds it difficult to rent decent housing. Furthermore, the housing policy and housing practices are based on gender blind assumptions favouring the complete family as a unit (Chan, 1997; Patricia and Chan, 2011). Neither the housing market nor the finance institutions make concessions to new diversified family units. Namely, housing prices and mortgages are aimed at families with two incomes. Those who cannot afford private housing can join the long queue for subsidized public housing, which takes from five to ten years wait before a unit is available. A lone

mother may find herself in a difficult situation as soon as she has to look for a place to stay after the divorce. Besides their inferior labour market position and low income, the tenancy exclusion in public housing once they are divorced plunges them further into a disadvantaged position. The situation is further exacerbated by the women's desire to have a home to house the family in. Many of the lone mothers did not feel that they could raise a family without a place they could settle down in as a home. In policy terms the lone mothers' need for housing has been ignored.

Engendered Housing Risks

As the lone mothers have been loosely divided into two groups, both conservative but one familial and the other individualized, the data show the various views they held and new risks they encountered (Chapter 6). To the familial lone mothers, the home was engendered with the man as the bread winner, decision maker and protector of the family. The woman's job was to provide stability in the family under the man's directives and protection, and they continued to perceive the same gender role beyond the marriage. Being a lone mother, the only consideration they clung on to was the home where she and the children still shared some stability despite the fact that the man was no longer there and she had to make decisions, provide an income, and protect the children. Nevertheless, she seemed to have no other considerations except for the desire to have a roof over her head where she could keep the family together (Chapter 6). For the individualized lone mothers, their consideration for a place to live with her children meant more than a place to keep the family together. As the man was dispensable and she could readily step in and fulfil the bread-winner role, the lone mother was likely to consider the family's finances, her own security and autonomy aside from keeping the children safe in a home environment. As many of them were working lone mothers, they were concerned not only about the children but the safety of their own and their belongings as well. Some of them even wished that their home would serve and function as a home-base for business. The women thought that they would be more at ease and able to focus on work without the worry of housing problems which included rent increases, poor living conditions, security and having to move frequently (Chapter 6).

The ideal situation for the lone mothers was to be able to obtain public housing where the rent was around one-tenth of the market price. However, there were drawbacks since public housing was based on a gendered policy and social practices whereby the tenancy was granted to the head of the household, usually the man. The income baseline was calculated for a household consisting of a man and wife and child or children. While the man was working, the wife stayed home to look after the children, and the income was calculated accordingly. Officially, the public housing unit would be granted to the party who was taking care of the children. However, if the husband refused to move out (which is a common situation), the Housing Department would regard this as 'internal family affair' and refuse to take action. The alternative would be for the woman to apply on her own merits to qualify and wait her turn to get back into public housing. The wait could be as long as six years. Even if she was lucky enough to obtain public housing, the income baseline would be lowered further for her because there was one less member in the household with the man gone. No consideration was given to the lone mother's situation. For example, she would have to incur extra cost to provide for childcare while she was at work. Inevitably, in order to retain the unit in public housing, some women chose to decline pay rises and promotions to remain within the income baseline to qualify for public housing. Thus the public housing policy has served to reinforce the feminization of poverty especially for lone mothers (Chan, 1997).

As discussed in Chapter 6 some of the lone mothers who were on CSSA received a \$1,500 per head housing allowance. While the average rent for a small flat for three people to live in is around \$15,000 to \$20,000 per month, the \$4,500 CSSA housing subsidy hardly covered a third of it. Many of them had no choice but turn to sub-divided housing or tin-roof shacks in remote rural areas. Even so, they might have to dig into other resources to cover the rent as there was simply nothing available below \$6,000. The living conditions in such housing were so poor that the children would have nowhere to eat, sleep or study. They had no privacy because of shared facilities with several units using one bathroom and kitchen. One woman who moved to the New Territories had to fight insects and snakes which ventured into her tin-roof shack, and her son was bitten by stray dogs. To make things worse, there is no rent control in Hong Kong, and greedy landlords raise the rent each time the CSSA makes an adjustment to the subsidies. Renting out sub-standard sub-divided housing has

become a lucrative business for landlords, and the CSSA has actually boosted the slum housing market (Chapter 6).

The current housing policy in Hong Kong does not cover diverse needs. Tenants have to pass a mean test based on income, after which they join the long queue waiting from five to ten years. Basically, there are two queues, one for family as a unit and the other for singletons. The problem lies with the 'family' interpretation, a gendered conventional norm of husband and wife and children. On top of that, tenancy is normally given to the man as discussed previously. The needs of new immigrants, women and lone families are neglected (Chan, 1997; 2004). One of these lone family units is lone mother families. In this situation, the gendered nature of housing policy affects both two groups of lone mothers in various degrees. The former's need for housing is a place to hold the family together, and without which, they have nowhere to fulfil their caring duties. To the individualized conservative group, housing would mean a safe place for the lone mothers to leave their children in while they have to go out to make an income to support the family. Regardless of the interpretation of housing both groups faced the same housing risk (Chapter 6).

Some of the lone mothers had a great need for housing because of threats from loan sharks demanding the payment of debts incurred by their husbands. Fearing physical harm to the children and themselves, they had to find other lodgings (Chapters 5 and 6). If these women were to apply for public housing, they had to go through the normal procedure and wait for years as no special considerations are given to their situations. Again, the policy is gendered because it is often that the women are the victims who had it ingrained in their minds that it was their inherent duties to protect and care for the children (Chapter 3). Consequently, we see diversified needs requiring diversified interpretations in housing policy in Hong Kong. The lone mothers in this study came from different social location with individual reasons for their lone status, thus creating various housing needs. A conventional gendered take-for-granted approach excluding the lone mother family reveals social inequality in society.

Social Location and Housing Risks

Despite the division between the two groups of lone mothers, there were commonalities they shared such as housing. Both the familial and individualized lone mother groups consisted of different financial and educational backgrounds, namely, different classes. The unusual housing market generates risks which cut across class affecting all residents in the district. That being said class still mattered to the lone mothers (Chapter 3). A few of them in this research enjoyed the privilege of a different class owning properties (Chapter 6). In Fiona's case, having full ownership of a property freed her from any major concerns about the divorce. Not having to worry about the immediate problem of housing provided great relief and a sense of security. Furthermore, the property they owned also gave them freedom to choose how they wanted to fulfil their caring duties. In Eva's case, to fulfil a conservatively familial role in motherhood, she had the option of selling the property so that she could afford to become a full-time mother to her daughter. As in Zara's case, her decision to liquify the asset brought her freedom to choose a less demanding part-time jobs so that she could spend more time looking after her son. Yet, were the property owner lone mothers freed of further risks? Not necessarily, as it is extremely difficult and expensive to rent in the housing environment in Hong Kong. Whether the property was sold or not, the lone mothers had to find ways of bringing in an income to replenish the money spent on daily expenses, otherwise they would be faced with future security concerns. Another problem was that once the property was sold, they would not be able to purchase another at a later date as housing prices rose at a very rapid rate, and the price of a flat might triple within five years (Chapter 6).

Public housing, regardless of the class and belief groups, was a lifesaver for most lone mothers in Hong Kong. Whether it is a home, a shelter or a base for the woman to regroup and rebuild a new family unit, housing is a significant risk in the local distorted housing market. Some of the lone mothers like familial Gloria, Heidi, Kitty, and Rose, and individualized Nicole and Xandra who had obtained public housing felt so relieved that they compared it to clear sky with all worries dispelled and swept away (Chapter 6). The implication is that the lone mother no longer has to anticipate the fluctuation in rent or mortgage payment or the threat of having to house the family

in sub-standard conditions. The extraordinary housing situation in Hong Kong was definitely an added risk confronting all lone mothers.

Another aspect of risks cutting across class lies in the access to the resources in government's housing policy, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2004; Lewis and Sarre, 2006). In the long queue of public housing, priority is given to domestic violence victims. In this research, there were three victims of domestic violence (Chapters 5 and 6). Two of the lone mothers were able to obtain public housing after they were told by the social worker in the shelter home about the compassionate rehousing scheme. The women were first sent to stay at sheltered homes awaiting court judgments, medical proof and social worker referrals before they were given a permanent unit in on public housing estates. The third lone mother was less fortunate because she had no knowledge of the scheme and had to wait years for a unit. In fact, there were twice this number of domestic violence cases in the study but they did not obtain public housing because they were not aware of the compassionate rehousing scheme, did not go through the courts, or were simply too ashamed to wash their dirty laundry in public. In addition, the compassionate rehousing scheme is so ambiguous that many of the lone mothers in this situation are not aware that they may qualify for priority housing. Apart from Rose, who was told by the staff in the Housing Authority that she qualified for a larger unit because of her autistic child, Cathy and Vanessa had no knowledge of the policy, and they were still waiting in the long queue (Chapter 6). The alternative is subdivided housing in slums.

Settling for sub-standard housing was one of the overlapping strategies both the familial and individualized lone mothers had to consider if public housing was not obtainable (Chapter 6). Some women chose to move back in with families including their ex-in-laws. Such less than satisfactory solutions could be attributed to risks common to all lone mothers that they were stigmatized in the rent market. Landlords typically did not look favourably on lone mothers who were often associated with poverty. Moreover, all the lone mothers were faced with the exorbitant rents in the private housing market. Any half decent housing even in remote areas might cost the entirety of an individual's median monthly income. It was simply impossible for most lone mothers to rent, let alone own a flat. It was calculated in Hong Kong that a worker would have to live without food or lodging or any expenses for years in order to save

up for the down-payment of a flat. Under such circumstances, the lone mothers would have to turn to dismal alternatives, waiting for years for public housing or rooms in sub-divided flats.

With so many overlaps in the risks facing both groups of lone mothers, we saw great fluidity in their approaches in coping. In Nicole's case, she showed changeability from an individualized approach to career and self-biography to relinquishing promotions and pay rises as trade offs to remain within the income mean test for her unit in public housing. Daphne and Iris, who were individualized in thinking, chose to sacrifice independence and moved back in with family and even family of the ex-in-laws. On the other hand, Zara, a familial lone mother, chose to sell the family home in exchange for cash in order to afford expensive training courses for her autistic child. The fluidity in response between the two groups extended further. Instead of prioritizing the caring duties of their children, some familial lone mothers who owned properties employed paradoxical strategies and worked even harder so that they could pay off the mortgage sooner in exchange for security of the home. In the meantime, they were compelled to work longer hours and spend less time with their children. Clearly, there were other factors affecting the coping strategies of housing risks. Public housing and other support helped to mediate the negotiation for housing risks. Yet, the process was far more complicated than it appeared as each solution seemed to bring forward other uncertainties (Chapter 3). Such are the further risks described by Beck (1992) and Taylor-Gooby (2004) individuals are constantly having reflexive dialogues as every single decision brings forth unintended and potentially unlimited consequences which have to be dealt with limited resources of the individual and a range of heuristic approaches (Chapter 3).

Regardless of the apparent distinction between the familial and individualized categorization of the lone mothers in terms of their degree of conservativeness, the framework of analysis highlighted a structural bias skewed in favour of the male in gender norms in the ranking of power and privileges, resulting in constraints and undermining women's chances of self-actualization. The protean nature of such structural favouritism of the male gender is omnipresent and embedded in social constructs and policies with a tendency towards traditions and patriarchy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the lone mothers I interviewed in Hong Kong can all be considered conservative in respect of their views on motherhood. However, the concepts of detraditionalization and individualization have had an impact on their interpretation of the meaning and duties associated with being a mother. The lone mothers in this study were basically conservative in view but roughly divided into the two familial and individualized groups for the purposes of analysis. These two groups of lone mothers are not distinguished rigidly into two distinct groups nor entirely separate positions. Instead, they are presented as different degrees of traditional beliefs/values. Although there was fluidity between them this distinction held true throughout the analysis. Their responses to risks have been discussed in three main themes, marriage, family and social and economic environment, in terms of the risks they face, and the perceptions of risk leading to the way they cope.

With regard to marriage and family, their perception of marriage and how to perform as a good mother and good wife are based on prescribed gender roles. They would think it is their responsibility for being unable to fulfil such roles and would blame themselves for being unable to maintain a complete family. These beliefs are further reinforced by the society as a whole. Despite the fact that new family units have been a fact due to changes in social conditions and value, Hong Kong society is not yet ready to accept family units outside of the norm. The two-parents family is still being promoted as 'normal', which means the lone family will be classed as being outside the norm and stigmatized. This socially constructed 'complete family' affects both the lone mothers and their children to the degree that the familial and individualized lone mothers would be self-aware of their status of being lone and poor, and resulted in alienation to hide their lone status. At this point, we see that Beck's theory of detraditionalization is lingering in the Hong Kong society with some women still holding steadfast to the traditional beliefs, while others displayed a wide range of detraditionalized and individualized views depending on the individuals' experience in the context of their social position.

With men out of the picture another across the board problem the lone mothers faced was parenting. The gendered parenting risk was often the traditional belief that without fatherly attention, the daughters would enter into premature romantic relationships, while the sons would suffer from not knowing how to behave like a man due to the lack of a male role model. A few of the lone mothers considered remarriage but there were unintended consequences and further risk of concerns that the new man might not be well received by the children, or he might exploit the girls. Some of the lone mothers recruited the help of male friends to coach their sons, which seemed effective at times. However, such coping strategies may appear to help perpetuate the underlying gendered belief.

With regard to the social and economic environment, the most immediate problem was finance, which often meant poverty once the women got divorced. In terms of finance, the dependency factor overrode all others, meaning that the lone mothers who were the most at risk were those who had relied on the husbands for financial support before the divorce. After the divorce, the main sources of income were CSSA, alimony or work. The familial lone mothers, regarding their childcare duties as priority, tended to shift the dependency to CSSA and alimony or patch-work to make ends meet; while the individualized lone mothers, desiring to create a self-biography, would be more eager to hold down a job. Yet, there were unintended consequences of these coping strategies. Some of the lone mothers might risk the lack of enforcement for alimony payment while the working women had to bear a heavy double burden of work and caring duties at home. Another dimension of risks was the winning at the starting line elite education system which also cut across class and affected all the lone mothers. Taking over the men's responsibility, the familial lone mothers would reach beyond their resources by self-sacrificing their own needs, yet still blamed themselves for not providing enough. On the other hand, since the individualized lone mothers were more likely to be engaged with work, they tended to exhaust their income and resources on their children's extracurricular activities. Somehow, the individualized educational responsibility had manifested itself as voluntary compulsion in the lone mothers' desire to help their children succeed in life.

The next dimension was employment in an unfavourable labour market where the lone mothers did not have the appropriate qualifications. Workers were expected to work

long hours, and the casualization of employment diminished their value and opportunity to get a decent job. The familial group of lone mothers tried to work as a means to make fulfilling caring duties possible while the individualized worried about the ethics of care as well as work. Instead of a rational choice, it was a constantly reflexive negotiation to deal with the risks surrounding employment.

Furthermore, the lone mothers were confronted with the unique housing market and policy environment in Hong Kong. For the familial lone mothers a place to call home was essential for the transition to lone motherhood. The individualized lone mothers required a safe place to leave their children so that they could go to work. In the housing dimension, we saw that while class still matters but it cut across class threatening all levels of the lone mothers. Those who owned property might seem to have had more freedom to liquefy their assets so that they could look after their children full-time, yet they were faced with future risks if the proceeds from the sale was spent on paying out daily expenses and not replenished. Moreover, they were in the same boat as the other lone mothers who had to enter the extremely difficult and expensive rental market. Many of the lone mothers turned to public housing but they had to pass a means-test and wait for years in a long queue for a unit. Some of them should have benefited from the compassion rehousing scheme as victims of domestic violence or family with autistic children but because of the lack of knowledge of these considerations, missed out on obtaining suitable housing. A few women took advantage of family support and move back in with their parents or ex-in-laws risking jeopardizing family relationship living together.

In sum, we see that class still matters in the lone mothers' perceptions and responses to risks in motherhood, which does not coincide with the traditional view of class inequality, but leans heavily on their moral decisions in responding to motherhood when at risk in the lone family. As Bobo said 'It is a deep-rooted traditional way of thinking that once you marry, regardless it is a good or bad husband, I have to treat him well ... to help the family. I try to do as much as I can for him to fulfil the wife's duty. If you are a woman, you have to submit to fate ... in Chinese saying, (畫地為牢) drawing a circle to stand inside, imprisoning myself within the walls ... self-imposed restrictions/limitations.' And Cathy said, 'Marry a chicken, follow the

chicken ... Since I am married to him, I should perform a wife's duty ... Also ... if there is a problem, it's not only his problem. I am responsible for it too. This is my interpretation from the beginning of marrying a chicken and following the chicken.' Another example is Zara who is professional but a familial lone mother, responded to the risk by giving up her full-time professional job and took up part-time work to attend to her child. She even sold out the flat which was important for her in order to spend money to her son for academic improvement. It is an extremely complex process of constant negotiation between identifiable risks based on individual experience and socially constructed contexts in areas of access to resources and knowledge, social location and beliefs.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The traditional portrayal of marriage in Chinese society is as a safe haven for women and children in terms of the risks faced by families, with the male breadwinner holding the fort and protecting the family. Gendered norms prescribe the roles men and women play with regard to earning and caring. In Hong Kong the male oriented economic structure pushes the husband to the position of the head of the household, with the wife and children as his dependents. Following the breakdown of a family, women are supposed to be able to rely on family laws and alimony to provide for themselves and their children. Yet, the enforcement of alimony payments is weak in Hong Kong, and it is left to individual women to chase after defaults through the civil courts, which many of them deem to be almost ineffective cost wise. Failing that, women are forced to switch their financial dependency to the meagre welfare provision of the state. This shift has an impact on the welfare provider, namely the government, in terms of the fiscal budget; the rest of society, which responds with a dependency discourse; and ultimately, the women and children who bear the low incomes and stigmatization. The mother, the unpaid carer in the family, often has very little capacity to cope with the consequent risks once the male figurehead has left.

Post-industrialization is said, in theory, to have lifted the constraints of tradition and emancipated women to pursue and manage individual biographies. Nonetheless, even with the range of choices presented to women giving the impression of freedom and the end of dependency on men, the theory cannot be further from reality as more choices simultaneously point to more responsibilities, accompanied by more risks and uncertainties. While women are emancipated in the labour market, the hegemony of tradition has not lifted on the home front as far as most Chinese families are concerned. Consequently, women are trapped in a double burden of being a wage earner as well as a carer at home. It is believed that women have the choice to make decisions in a calculated way amidst family breakdowns. Sociologists have applied Beck's macro theory in micro level studies to link the calculation to rational choice (Douglas, 1992;

Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982). Selfish individualism is also blamed when children are involved in a divorce.

This research on lone mothers' responses and coping strategies in Hong Kong examined the topic in the three key dimensions that emerged empirically: marriage, family and social and economic environment. The key themes that emerged from the research all point to the disadvantaged position of lone mothers. Conventionally, the lone mother issue has been viewed under functional, individualized and victimized perspectives, yet these fail to fully disclose the inequality facing this disadvantaged group. Viewed through the risk framework, the researcher found old risks were still pertinent, and that in several respects, class still matters. In addition, a series of new risks have surfaced cutting across class, and affecting the lone mothers in various ways, which in turn attract diverse responses from individuals. A post-structuralist feminist perspective was employed to reveal the subjective narratives of risks socially constructed through the ethics of care and work. The post-structuralist feminist point of view was added to the qualitative method of face to face individual interviews in data collection. Apart from the contributions to knowledge and methodology of the research this concluding chapter discusses policy implications, further research needed and offers some reflection on the research process. First the main findings are summarised.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

A major finding of the research was to distinguish, for the first time, two groups of lone mothers, the familial and individualized conservative. They displayed various degrees of adherence to tradition. For the sake of discussion they are roughly grouped into two. The rationale behind the classification of these two groups of lone mothers is according to the type of conservatism they hold. This classification is indicative and not intended to be clear-cut nor to suggest that they occupy separate positions. However, it must be noted that tradition is not the only factor in determining the risks they faced. Class, social location and access to resources and support must be taken into consideration to understand their personal negotiations in response to risks in

marriage, remarriage, family and gender roles, prioritising of work and caring, finance, children's education, employment and housing.

Upon examination of the lone mother perceptions of and coping strategies towards the risks they faced, the common theme identified was that they are fundamentally subject to Chinese traditions. However, the data point to two distinct groups in the three dimensions explored. The familial lone mothers accepted marriage as fulfilment and reinforcement of a social practice that unmarried women had no status in the parents' home, and they only established status through marriage, establishing roots and belonging to the husband's family. In popular discourses, the term 'left-over' women bears negative connotations for unmarried women past a certain age. They also believed that a complete woman, a natural state, was a married woman who bore children, and male children were regarded as a bonus. Consequently, the timing of marriage was important because of the female biological clock for child bearing. Since marriage is 'permanent', the choice of a husband focused on his dependability in character and material resources. On the other hand, much diversity could be seen in the individualized lone mothers' views towards marriage. While most of them were financially self-sufficient, material resourcefulness was still a concern for some of them. Looking for companionship in marriage and a decent character in the man were key considerations. Despite various expectations, the individualized group of lone mothers desired freedom in creating their own self-biographies, and resisted control and restraint from the marriage.

As far as remarriage was concerned, both the familial and individualized groups had the subjective perception of the stigma of a second-hand commodity. On top of that, the lone mothers also felt that there was almost no time for a new relationship after work and caring duties. With a failed experience and the responsibility of the children, they were cautious about remarriage. The individualized lone mothers were swift in terminating a relationship at the first sign of conflict. However, believing in the idea of complete family and eager to substitute a fatherly figure for their children, some women in the familial group plunged into remarriage. Two of the familial lone mothers purposely got pregnant as a strategy for remarriage. Unfortunately this backfired in both cases as there were further risks involved in the second marriages.

The second dimension explored was family. Here the themes centred on the lone mothers' perceptions of family-related risks and the complete family. The family-related risks included divorce, finance, extramarital affairs, domestic violence and overbearing patriarchal behaviour. The individualized group regarded the complete family as ideal but not necessary. Therefore, the women would initiate divorce if their bottom-line was violated or when their children were threatened. On the other hand, the familial group would tolerate violations, as a complete family was necessary because of the children, and their need for financial support. Some women went to extremes to save the marriage and hold the family together. Yet the effort often proved futile and the women were driven to face further risks.

Two further themes emerged in the dimension of family, the gender roles of the mother and the father, and the prioritizing of work and family. The familial lone mothers would perceive motherhood as a natural instinct, and her role in the family was to serve the children and husband as a gendered moral rationality (Duncan, 1991) whose responsibility as wife and mother – the ethics of care lay in providing for the family and setting a fatherly role model for the children especially the male child (Williams 2001; Pascall and Kwak, 2005; Einhorn, 2006; May 2006). When the father was out of the picture after the divorce, the women tried to compensate by devoting more time and effort to their caring duties, to the extent that caring took precedent over work. Subsequently their caring duties became the priority. Some of the lone mothers had to take up paid work to support the lone family, and when there were conflicts between work and caring, they would most likely choose caring by subsisting on CSSA or part-time work. For the individualized lone mothers, a majority of them acknowledged their role as a mother and wife in the family. Nevertheless, they expected their husbands to participate and contribute to the raising of the children and running of the household. Failing that, the individualized lone mothers would question the men's role in the family. Once divorced, they placed equal importance on caring and work, hoping to keep a balance by out-sourcing caring, finding a job that would accommodate their caring duties, getting help from parents or utilizing remote control of their children. As a result, motherhood became one of the factors in a double burden on the lone mothers. From the findings, both groups of the lone mothers' perceptions and responses to risks reflected a conservative view displaying residues of old ideologies, notably a belief in women's subordination in the patriarchal society. The

difference lay in the degree of individualized responsibility individual lone mothers felt. It is actually a state of stagnancy where the lone mothers seemed to be marooned between detraditionalization and individualization. Their perceptions and coping strategies towards marriage, remarriage, the complete family and gender roles in the family were still traditional instead of displaying control and autonomy in their understanding and coping with the risks. In fact, they were not truly emancipated from traditions sufficiently to enter the state of individualization which would have allowed them freedom to manage their self-biographies. In the process of divorce and becoming a lone mother, a woman was exposed to further risks resulting from motherhood against the barriers of institutional constraints. In the meantime, the idea of individualized responsibility under capitalism was deeply ingrained in the lone mothers' minds. When marriages broke down, it was often the women who had to shoulder both the risk of caring duties at home, and of taking up paid work to provide for the family in the vacuum of kinship and social support. Subsequently, the lone mothers bore an unfair distribution of risks without the support of their spouses or the state. One can only imagine the hardship and struggles the lone mothers faced in the social and economic environment where they had to negotiate a socially constructed and traditionally hegemonized social and economic structure with only their own individual resources.

The third dimension was social and economic environment. The main themes here were a mixture of old and new risks in finance, employment and housing. To start with, financial risk has always been an immediate threat to lone mothers once they were divorced and lost the support of the husbands. Pressing needs to provide for herself and the children necessitated venturing into part-time employment to subsidize the household income, but at the same time, they risked violating CSSA rules and suffered retributions as a consequence. For the lone mothers who undertook paid work, the highly capitalistic economy was largely indifferent to their plight. Both the familial and individualized lone mothers had to work long hours and suffer health hazards juggling work and caring duties. A relieving factor in finance was alimony. A few lucky ones were able to receive the promised amount and they all agreed that it was a relief. However, owing to the fact that the courts had no jurisdiction in the enforcement of alimony, it was up to the women to take the wild goose chase in their own hands. Often, the result was futile as the women had to go through the civil courts

treating it as a debt. Many of them chose to relinquish the struggle because of the heartache and headaches involved. Another reason was that the promise of alimony impeded their eligibility of CSSA. Lastly, the 'winning at starting line' idea was another financial trap which the lone mothers fell prey to. In Hong Kong, parents are committed to helping their children succeed in the elite education system by sending them to numerous extracurricular activities, as if money is no concern. The lone mothers were no exception, and they were motivated by the guilt of depriving the children without a complete family and insufficient caring to provide as much as possible in this respect, ranging from self-sacrifice to self-abnegation. The familial lone mothers with no resources would look for flexible welfare. However, the drawback was that it was only a meagre windfall and there was no permanence. When the welfare ran out, the children would be disappointed for having started with something and not able to go on like the other kids. The working lone mothers tended to exhaust all their earnings in paying for expensive music, dancing, sports and language lessons. Clearly, under such circumstances there was no light at the end of the tunnel as far as finance was concerned.

The data collected also showed that regardless of income brackets, both the familial and individualized lone mothers were faced with new risks in employment, such as depreciated employability, stigmatization in the job market and a lack of suitable jobs that would accommodate their caring duties. For some, their qualifications would no longer enable them to secure a paid job, especially for those who had left the job market for a period of time and were full-time carers before the divorce. Similarly, those with low education had limited job opportunities that could suit their caring duties. Even if they could find a job, it would likely be unstable, low paid and lack fringe benefits. For those who were able to find a seemingly good job, they had to work hard by minimizing absences and mistakes so that their employer would be less inclined to fire them. It was commonly found from the findings that the lone mothers believed that caring was an individual responsibility, which added the burden to employment as they would need to take urgent or frequent absences to care for their children especially those with special needs such as ADHD or long-term illnesses. As a result, the lone mothers would further need to face physical and mental health issues. For those who were unable to cope with these, they would have to leave their jobs and create other unexpected risks. Despite the above risks faced with regard to

employment, one factor helped to minimize them. A sympathetic employer who was willing to suit their needs and family support would make a huge difference to the lone mothers, regardless to the group they belonged to and the resources they possessed.

Following finance, new risks in housing, a unique situation in Hong Kong, were thought to be the second most important risk after divorce. Both the familial and individualized lone mothers had different interpretations of the concept of 'home' based on their degree of conservativeness. The familial conservatives believed that a home was a place with stability and which functioned as a family. On the other hand, individualized conservatives thought that a home had additional meanings, which included the function to provide autonomy, finance, and security. Both groups of mothers would treat public housing as their most favoured solution to housing risks. While waiting to get a public housing, which would generally take a few years, they could only afford to live in sub-divided units that are typically very small and have a poor living environment.

Those with relatively less resources would have no choice but to live in even worse units called 'tin boxes'. What made matters even worse was that their landlords would increase their rent every few months, such practice also happened to CSSA recipients as the landlords would increase the rent when the government announced an increase in the amount of the CSSA. Sadly, even when public housing was finally allocated to the lone mothers, they would have to face a paradox – to ensure that they do not exceed the financial limit that makes them eligible to stay in a public house, their dominant coping strategy was to refuse to get a promotion or pay raise. Contrary, those with relatively more resources and already own a private house would need to face the risk of being able to continue paying the mortgage, so their coping strategy would be to work extra hard to ensure that they do not lose their job and earn enough to pay off their expenses. A point to highlight is that knowledge about the policies surrounding government welfare would result in a different outcome. The lone mothers said that they had heard of people that were victims of domestic violence and families that had children with special needs (autistic children) were able to get a public house without waiting and could also get a larger house as well. Therefore, it can be assumed if these lone mothers who had similar backgrounds had been more knowledgeable about such 'rules', they would have been better treated under a more fair and equitable procedure.

It was believed that lone mothers with resources face relatively lower risks. However, according to the findings, risks existed in both groups of lone mothers and differed based on the amount of resources they had, which also affected their coping strategies. In addition, the findings revealed that not only does the class and gender role of motherhood affect the perception of risks and the coping strategies adopted, but their social location such as resources, knowledge, and personal support network, also have the same effect on the decision process. This results in a high degree of complexity in the choices they had to make.

The risk society theory was adopted in this research to reflect the inequality, disadvantaged position, and the risks confronting the lone mothers in Hong Kong. In theory, women are emancipated, detraditionalized and compelled to cope with risks voluntarily, displaying the rational calculation of self-interest. Since divorce was a personal choice, the concept of individualized responsibility was reinforced by the highly capitalistic society. The idea of new social risks sheds light on viewing the lone mothers' perception and coping strategies towards risks. Instead of rational calculations, they showed heuristic responses especially when their children were involved, as the women were still bound by the traditional view of gender roles and motherhood. Endemically, the pace of detraditionalization was very slow in the predominantly Chinese society, and the lone mothers lingered at the gate of the second modernity. At the same time, the assault of capitalism and the disappearance of the large family safety net robbed them of social and family support amidst the double burden of work and caring. They became a disadvantaged group trying to fend off the risks facing them and their children with only their own individual resources. With an added post-structuralist feminist dimension, the study found that class still matters in regard to the old risks with an emphasis on the distribution of risks instead of wealth, opposite to the logic of a vertical distinction of upper vs. lower class. Instead, the logic of risk distribution appears to be a horizontal netting mode with risks reproducing without limit, and spreading to individuals beyond class. The class analysis also pinpointed women in one locale focusing on economic positions, either in the family or the labour market while in reality, there were diversified social locations, such as resources, access to knowledge, and support networks. The lone mothers' process of decision making and their ways of coping towards risks were socially constructed and they were digging into the discourses of the ethics of care and

work and dispelled the notion that caring is exclusively gendered. On the other hand, new risks were identified with the uniquely notorious housing market and the government's privatization housing policy. The extent of adherence to traditions pointed to two main groups of lone mothers, the familial and individualized. Despite overlaps and fluidity of the two groups there was great diversity and subjectivity in their coping.

The qualitative method of individual in-depth interviews for data collection benefitted the research tremendously in understanding individual narratives around risk and the links to social location. Subsequently, the risk society framework with the added dimensions of new social risks and post-structuralist feminist perspectives, enabled the study to propose a more realistic approach to the problems confronting lone mothers than previous research in Hong Kong.

Relevance of Findings to Research Questions

The main findings have ramifications in three dimensions in respect to the research questions namely, marriage and remarriage, family and gender role, and social and economic environment. The first research question concerned the current situation and status of the lone mothers in Hong Kong. Secondly, the research looked into the risks the lone mothers faced and how they perceived and responded to them. Finally, the effectiveness of the policies implemented by the Hong Kong government in tackling the problems faced by lone mother families were examined.

For the first research question, the lone mother issue emerged amidst a conventional class society in HK whereby adversity is determined by class, and based mainly on economic interpretations. Previous studies on the subject, under the class assumption, leaned towards the findings that the rich as a class have less problems while the poor are more at risk. However, this study uncovered significant additional findings to previous studies especially in the exploration into the issues of families at risk. These findings point to the fact that the lone mothers bear most of the risks, both old and new. These risks are not limited to a specific class but they occur in different strata of society, and individuals are faced with individual risks according to their social

location and lived experiences. Therefore, risks are no longer limited to particular classes in a vertical fashion, they exist horizontally cutting across class and are distributed across different classes. Having said that, it must be reiterated that class still matters, but it is no longer an exclusive determinant of risks. Hong Kong society is a mixed version of class and risk. While an individual's unfavourable position is determined by wealth in the class analysis, the risk analysis encompasses other factors such as family relationships, support from the family, the state and employment, access to resources and the knowledge possessed about the resources, and the degree of traditionalism, which are all part of the individual's lived experiences. In other words, wealth is still crucial in solving problems but there is no doubt there are increasing situations which cannot be resolved by finances alone, and involve the distribution of risks. Very often, such risks are not visible from a class perspective or vice versa, and the nature of the relationship between class and risk is not exclusive but coexisting.

An immediate adversity the lone mothers face is finance as they lose the main source of income from the husband after the divorce. From the findings of the study, the low income lone mothers, regardless of the type they were - familial or individualized conservative – existed in an unfavourable social and economic environment in the post-industrial-capitalistic society in regard to finance. In carrying out the new role of breadwinner for the lone family, they are plunged into the dilemma of having to choose between working and caring. Therefore, in order to overcome their financial difficulties, some of the familial conservative lone mothers would choose to stay home and rely on CSSA to fulfil the caring duties even though they perceive CSSA as a risk of stigma. This alternative is to turn to CSSA, which pays only the minimum, pushing the family into poverty. At the other end of the spectrum, most of the familial lone mothers would work several part-time jobs in an attempt to wipe away the stigma of dependency. Most of the individualized conservative lone mothers, on the other hand and in an attempt to avoid stigma and poverty, would compromise caring by devoting more time to work to make ends meet. This explains and reinforces the class analysis as it reveals that low-income lone mothers are more at risk financially than their middle-income counterparts. Yet, it must be pointed out that having a middle-income by no means equates to freedom from risk, as it also entails long and inflexible working hours to show loyalty, and the fear of being laid-off during economic

downturns. Paradoxically, the hard working lone mothers also pay a price of guilt for not spending enough time with their children. For those who are burdened with a large mortgage, debts incurred from the previous marriage, and even a sick child, losing their employment income would mean further problems in housing, loan payment demands and medical expenses for the child. The employment and financial risks are not exclusive to the lower-income lone mothers, they are indiscriminately pertinent to the middle-income lone mothers as well.

Some of the lone mothers were entitled to alimony, yet in Hong Kong, there is no support in the enforcement of alimony and a complete hands-off approach by the government, leaving them at the mercy of the divorced men. As a result, alimony can be part of the problem rather than the solution to the lone mothers' plight. The research found that, despite the fact that some of the lone mothers are in the lower income bracket, they have the choice to balance caring and work provided that they receive stable alimony payments. Therefore, alimony could be a relief to the lower-income lone mothers and added security to the middle-class lone mothers in making the choices involved in balancing of caring and working.

Another significant risk situation in Hong Kong is employment. In general, the labour market has not been conducive to lone mothers who are willing to work. The constraints of qualifications, the lone mother status, long and inflexible working hours, low pay and poor protection, all contribute to the lone mothers' anxiety in employment. However, one important element that can alleviate these anxieties is an understanding employer, which is another factor that operated regardless of class. In this research, an understanding employer helped lower income lone mothers to minimise the risks related to caring duties if they provided flexible working hours or gave permission for lone mothers to take leave to take care of their children when it was necessary. In contrast, an employer that does not understand the middle class lone mother's situation, would prefer them to work long hours in order to show their loyalty to the company and would not permit her to take special leaves to perform caring duties.

Under the work first principle in modernity, lone mother families are often sacrificed when they try to maintain a balance between being a breadwinner (ideal worker) and

a carer (good mother). Not only does the lone mother family, a newly emerged family unit, have a higher tendency towards poverty because of the loss of the main source of income from men, they are also faced with more serious difficulties in balancing work and family life, because they are now tasked with being both the carer and breadwinner, and are constantly threatened by job instability and insufficient income. In addition, the lone mother has to find more time from the already limited after-work hours to take care of the children. In the lone family, women are faced with a two-folded problem of presumed home caring responsibilities and earning a living which is further compromised by the inequities of the job market. In the traditional Chinese society, women assume the responsibility of the carer adhering to a deep-rooted patriarchal belief. Chinese women are scorned for not attending to their family. Under no circumstances are they excused from the expected duties of caring, not even those lone mothers who have no alternatives as a result of the lack of kinship support and community resources, but to leave children at home alone, which in many cases have resulted in prosecution.

In practice, the old and new risks facing lone mothers co-exist in Hong Kong society. The old risks are related to financial factors and are analyzed under the class perspective. At the same time, they face new risks such as the lack of child care support which is crucial as it determines whether the lone mother can go to work. Otherwise, she would have to continue her caring duties full-time and remain in poverty. The lower-class lone mothers who have family support are able to get help to take care of their children. If she has good family relationships with other members then she can easily solve the issue of child care. The support factor is not class related but it will certainly alleviate the lone mothers' risk experience. Such support is not only limited to family, but also from the state and employers. As a result, to understand the current situation of the Hong Kong lone mothers, we should not only focus on class factors, but also on the risk factors they face depending a great deal on their social location. Ultimately, in the mixed mode of class and risk society in Hong Kong, much relies on the individual's risk experience and social location in the determination of an individual's adversity.

In response to the second research question, while class is still a reality in society, the lone mothers in Hong Kong are exposed to risks cutting across the upper, middle and

lower strata. The risks lone mothers are facing and their coping strategies are not only related to class, but other factors also come into play. According to the study, one of the factors is traditionalism, which exists in all classes. It has been found that different degrees of traditionalism occur in both the familial and individualised lone mothers, and also in the upper, middle, and lower classes. However, there are no research findings for the upper class as they declined to participate in the study, as they thought that only the poor face problems and would benefit from participation in such studies. In addition, it is a social taboo to discuss divorce, so this also led to their unwillingness to participate in the study. By the same token, the hegemony of traditionalism clutches tightly the lower and middle income groups as well, manifesting in practices and discourses that are socially constructed, customs and beliefs of past generations, neighbours' attitudes and gossips. The aggregation of these factors, together with class, contribute substantially to the lone mothers' perception of and coping strategies towards risks.

Currently, as far as status is concerned, women are constrained by the patriarchal traditional idea that marriage and children are essential for women in order to achieve the 'complete woman' status. Furthermore, regardless of age, the women, both the familial and individualized conservative groups, were steadfast in the pursuit of a 'complete family' which includes a father, mother and children. In general, women in the Chinese society of Hong Kong adhere to the conservative way of thinking and they are bound by traditional discourses.

To account for the risk perceptions and their coping strategies, the generally conservative lone mothers have been divided into two groups based on their dependency in marriage. The familial conservative lone mothers were both financially and emotionally dependent, and more submissive to their husband and children. To them, the utmost risk is any threat to the 'complete family', and they strive to maintain status quo at all costs, even at the price of self-sacrifice, or remarriage to create a new 'complete family' when necessary. As to the less dependent women, they still adhere to conservative ideas about the 'complete family' but displayed a desire to create their own self-biographies in answering the call of individualized responsibility in the capitalistic society. This group of individualized conservative women took a more subjective view in their perception of risk by setting

a bottom line in the maintenance of the 'complete family'. Their responses to risks also tended to be individualized to the extent of exhausting individual resources in coping.

For example, the lone mother may believe the reason for divorce is because she has not been able to fulfil her duties as a wife as traditionally prescribed. Moreover, the women equated a complete family to happiness and normality, failing which, stigma and discord would follow. Therefore, divorce was perceived as a high risk to be avoided at all costs. Some would spend all their savings to solve their husbands' financial problems, tolerate domestic violence or abuse, and bear another child to stop the man from leaving. Needless to say, there are unintended consequences from such passive strategies. Not only would the lone mothers find their coping strategies fruitless, in many cases they would backfire and expose the women to greater risks.

Furthermore, under the socially constructed idea of marriage being a private family matter, the lone mothers tended to regard the risks they faced after divorce as private matters: an individualised responsibility to resolve, and no help will be given or expected. In this respect there was much fluidity between the two groups. When the familial conservative lone mothers had to fend for themselves and their children, they showed resilience and crossed over to join the individualized conservatives. For instance, the familial lone mother would take up the responsibility as the breadwinner provider for the family, and give up the role of a stay-home housewife and take up employment without hesitation. Another example involves the sale of the marital home. For the familial lone mother, the home was not only a shelter but a symbol of security and family. One of the familial lone mothers sold her home in exchange for the financial freedom to work part-time and still be able to look after her child. In another case, an individualized mother also sold her home for the financial freedom not to undertake a full-time job so that she could spend more time with her sick child.

In the dimension of family and gender role, women function and operate under patriarchal gender constraints which prescribe and separate the roles for men and women. The husband deals with external affairs and the wife handles internal matters. In general, both the familial and individualized groups of women follow the conservative family mode and accept the prescribed roles. While the former adhered

to their wifely duties without question, the latter raised questions and desires about a sharing of responsibilities at home. The dividing line for the division of labour has been blurred by many women working outside to provide income for the family. The proposition of women's emancipation is only fulfilled to the extent that now there is an added burden for women to work both inside and outside the home because tradition still prevails at home, and the women still have to fulfil their caring duties after work. A double burden is created for the 'emancipated' women as they are still expected to perform caring duties at home, and receive no relief or support in the fiercely competitive capitalistic work environment.

A newly arisen risk confronting the two groups of lone mothers is their children's education. Despite the local sacred mission of education it has been transformed into a commodity with value in the determination of the materialistic future of the children. Parents are eager for their children to succeed and win at the starting line, so they scramble to equip their offspring, even beyond what they can afford. The perception of risk intensifies with a particular group of parents who have the need to ascertain the value of their own existence and erase the lone mother stigma through having successful children. Unfortunately, the local elite education system stratifies primary and secondary schools to create a bottleneck in tertiary education institutes. What might alleviate the lone mothers' plight about their children's education would be policies steered towards discouraging elitism to provide more opportunities in education.

Subsequently, the women in the newly emerged lone mother family unit are fully charged with the external and internal roles, worker and mother. With the disappearance of support from the spouse, the women perceive the imminent risks when they are confronted by the ethics of care and work, being a good mother and an ideal worker. The perception of risks varied as the familial conservative lone mothers had to make financial sacrifice in order to fulfil the role of the good mother, while the individualized conservative lone mothers had to find ways to balance the duties in caring and working. In either case the lone mothers are left to struggle and find ways to cope on their own.

Conclusively, the lone mothers' perception of risks and coping strategies coincide with the risk society theory with respect to individualised responsibilities. Individuals are persuaded to believe in and accept responsibilities for the creation of individual problems which are to be solved individually. In the case of the lone mothers in Hong Kong, the social risks effected by rapid social changes have been neglected. Not only will any attempt to resolve such social risks by individual resources be deemed ineffective, the lone mothers' effort often proves paradoxical when they take on the responsibility individually. Another contradiction to the risk society concept is the emancipation of women setting them free from tradition. In reality, women in Hong Kong can only be described, at best, as waiting at the gate of emancipation. On the one hand, the women are encouraged to join force in the labour market and share the bread-winning at home. On the other hand, they are held back by traditionalism and discriminated against in the workplace, especially the lone mothers. As a result, the Hong Kong society is Janus-headed, a two-sided gate with class on one side and risk society on the other, shutting women out from emancipation but squeezing them in with traditionalism and capitalism. It would be unfair to view the lone mothers' coping strategies as rational choices in view of the restraints upon their decisions. Instead, the group of women displayed a heuristic approach whereby they deployed solutions by wading the river and groping for stones.

For the last research question, the root of the problem lies in the Hong Kong government's outdated policies on the definition of family, originating from patriarchal traditionalism infused by neoliberalism. Policies were directed to the working men in the industrial society, women and children were all covered under the umbrella of the head of the household. The policies remain unchanged in the post-industrial society whereby women are emancipated and new family units are emerging. As a result, the combination of the two ideologies deems related policies ineffective amidst rapid social changes. With this in mind, it is obvious that the current policies are still embedded with prescribed stereotyped sex roles, which function so ineptly in supporting the lone mothers in Hong Kong, especially during the initial stage of the divorce. The women's plight is exacerbated by the internalisation of the deep-rooted neoliberal idea of individual responsibility pushing the lone mothers to take up the role of breadwinners and carer at the same time. In the meantime, not only are the outdated government welfare policies unsupportive of lone mothers, they are treated

indiscriminately as all other classifications of the down and outs in the CSSA system, which fails and refuses to recognise their special need in childcare and employment support. The meager assistance and restrictions further discourage the lone mothers from seeking support from the government. Subsequently, women-centered-approach policies are required to dispel the familial notion of the two-parent family as norm and acknowledge the needs of the lone mothers. Gender sensitive policies will help the lone mothers to overcome their difficulties in this transitional period by allowing them an opportunity to choose their path of carer and worker.

Housing is one of the most severe and immediate problems that lone mothers face once they are divorced. In most cases, the lone mothers are either eager or forced to find housing for themselves and their children away from the estranged husbands. The difficulties arise from the change of status from being dependent on their husbands to independent on their own. Since the husband is the head of most families and tenancy is traditionally in the husband's name, the change of status means that they are no longer tenants under the protection of the lease, both in private and public housing. In many cases, they can only afford to rent a small unit in a less ideal neighbourhood due to their financial situations. If they decide to improve their situation and apply for public housing, they would need to do so on their own merits and wait for a long time before a unit becomes available. The alternative is moving back to their parent's home, but for the Chinese, a woman returning to her parent's home after marriage is regarded as a disgrace, a choice with stressful consequences. In addition, a house is not only a shelter, but it is also regarded as a home, a psychological symbol for security and comfort. That is why housing is perceived as one of the main risks that lone mothers need to resolve immediately after the divorce. To make things worse, perceiving the divorce as a personal choice, the lone mothers tend to individualise the housing risks and deploy coping strategies individually exhausting their personal resources and eventually having to compromise and tolerate substandard living conditions with the children. Unfortunately, the lack of a gender perspective in current housing policy, which is based on familial ideologies, exacerbates the plight of lone mother families. Under the current housing policy, only two-parent families are regarded as a family unit, and the needs of the lone mother family units are not recognised. Having said that, the housing problem faced by the lone mothers is not one that can be resolved unilaterally by the Housing Bureau. The enforcement of alimony or tenancy act will

certainly make a difference in the lone mothers' quest for a home. In reality, it requires a united front and working together of interdepartmental government agencies to first acknowledge the new family units and then seek ways to accommodate and provide the lone mothers and their children a more equitable choice.

Another area where existing policies fail is the lack of support from employment policies or caring support from the government, leaving the lone mothers to fend for themselves in the balancing act between work and caring. It is at this junction where the lone mother is forced into prioritizing either work or the children. The current employment policies have been accommodating the highly capitalistic economy and emphasise the work ethic, and indirectly encourage and allow long working hours and low wages. The individuals with special needs, like lone mothers, have been ignored and this has forced them into dead-end jobs without choice. In fact, lone mothers are a particular group who have special needs because of their dual roles in caring and working. Flexible hours and decent wages would definitely help them. If the current labour laws were to take the lone mothers into consideration, like creating opportunities for the disabled or unemployed, their conditions would be transformed.

As far as childcare support policy is concerned, the lone mother family has been left out almost entirely. The existing policy operates on the familial ideology in relation to the discourse of the ethics of care. Not only is it regarded as a family issue, it is also the domain of the mother, the responsibility of the woman. Therefore, minimal support for childcare is provided to families in dire need. The state's rationale behind the minimal support is the acquisition of the capitalistic stand of individualised responsibility which is not to be interfered with by the government. The critique on the poorly administered privatization of childcare services include deficiencies in the number of childcare places available, operating hours not being coordinated with working parents, inflated costs and a lack of government monitoring. The fundamental ideology of ethics of care and work have to be deconstructed and policies changed before the risks facing lone mothers in Hong Kong can be reduced.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Previous studies on lone parenthood in Hong Kong did not distinguish lone motherhood as a separate category. Lone mothers were viewed as an indistinct group within the class system. Furthermore, the fact that the issue is a by-product of rapid social changes to be resolved collectively by the society has been neglected. Instead of viewing the lone mothers as a disadvantaged and diversified group, they have been seen as a problematic area under pathological, functional and individualized perspectives. As a result, attempts were made to resolve the issues as if they were old risks existing in the class-based system. In the meantime, the situation is further complicated with the emergence of new social risks, which have been dealt with unavailing patch-work piecemeal solutions. In recent years, although the risk society theory has been applied in viewing other social issues such as health, employment and the nuclear family unit, lone motherhood has not been addressed. The main theoretical contribution of this research is that it is the first in Hong Kong to apply the risk society framework to the study of lone motherhood from a gender perspective. In doing so, it identifies the familial conservative and individualized conservative trends of perception and coping strategies, and consequently, calls for women-centred policies.

The risk society approach aims to view the lone mothers' experiences amidst rapid social changes in Hong Kong. Rapid social changes have on one hand brought on the emancipation of women in the modern society allowing them the freedom to make decisions of their career and family, but on the other hand, altered the family structure shrinking its size as well as the net of family support. The concepts of detraditionalization and individualization delineate the idea of individual responsibility and the consistent reinforcement of self-reliance in society which discourages the lone mothers from seeking help from institutions or other support networks. Viewing the lone mothers under pathological and individualized perspectives further shirks the collective responsibility of society in rectifying the inequities experienced by this group. For this reason, it is essential to infuse equitable perspectives in viewing lone mothers before equitable solutions can be found.

Another theoretical contribution of this research rests on the distinction between the two groups of lone mothers, the familial and individualized in the Hong Kong context. The theory of 'old' and 'new' risks applies to the lone mothers. Characteristically, old risks exist within the class system whereby those who have higher incomes are able to fair better. With new risks, they cut across class affecting both the upper and lower class income earners. One of the new risks stems from the destandardization of work in terms of long working hours, job security and caring duties. Thus class is no longer the only factor in determining the risks the lone mothers face.

The research further looked at the construction of new social risks being endemic in nature with a gendered perspective, which resulted in the categorization of two groups of lone mothers, the familial and individualized. Their perceptions of and responses to the socially constructed risks denoted various degrees of conservatism and the influence of traditions, new ideas of individualization and a unique mixture of new and old, east and west ideologies. Together with the perceptions of patriarchal gender roles they bear heavily on the lone motherhood experience in terms of the ethics of care and work. The lone mothers' responses fell into two categories depending on the degree of conservatism. However, the categorization of the familial and individualized lone mother groups by no means placed them into indistinct categories, but served to point out the diversity displayed even in similar situations. The value of the categorization lies not in distinct policies to resolve lone mother issues, but women centred policies are necessary to effectively deal with the diversification of the issues experienced by the group.

The critical approach of the research informed by the post-structuralist feminist perspective and risk theory framework adds new knowledge in understanding the difficulties that lone mothers in Hong Kong are experiencing. It also highlights the feminist nature of lone motherhood as well as the relationship of discourses and the ethics of work and care around risk, and the exertion of the persistent power of patriarchy in these areas. The post-structuralist feminist perspective reveals the lone mothers subjectivity in the negotiation with the social environment based on their social location which in turn affects their perception of risk; dispels the notion of rational choice; and shows their responses with much fluidity and changeability.

The new found knowledge also reveals the weakness of existing gender-blind policies, which exacerbate the problem by emphasising on work coupled benefits handed out to the most deprived groups in society, but neglecting their genuine needs. The introductory discussion on diversity takes into consideration rapid social changes, the co-existence of old and new social risks, and an added gender view of women, such as dividing the lone mothers into familial and individualised groups. The added information sheds light on the diversification of the lone mothers' perceptions and responses, ergo a call for a women-centred policy, instead of piece-meal and sporadic quick-fixes, to ensure equity to this group of newly arisen family units.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In Hong Kong the half-century old existing family policy and the residual welfare regime, centers upon the traditional family structure. The policy itself, services provided and schemes administered have always focused on the traditional patriarchal family, heavily leaning on a gendered division of labour within the family. Despite rapid social changes in the 1980s, there has been very little change made to family policy to accommodate various new forms of family units. The social changes made to the traditional gendered division of labour 'emancipating' women to the labour market have led to the generation of new social risks putting women in a disadvantaged position. Women are given the opportunity to participate in the public sphere, yet the expectation of their contribution within the family has not been shared, and their gendered role as carers perpetuates, leading to gendered inequality, and opening up a spectrum of issues concerning women in the family especially lone mothers. Regardless of the women's position in terms of gendered roles, familial conservative or individualized conservative, they are left with very little choice in the transition at this particular time during their life course due to structural restraints in the outdated policy framework. The existing policy approach should be updated to encompass the diversity of family units and centered on the women in the family, then a spectrum of issues would be addressed. Subsequently, a women centered policy framework would enable lone mothers to choose and attain autonomy with dignity.

In some societies, especially in Western countries, the family is not necessarily defined in law by marriage. Many of them contain a variety of family units such as heterosexual, gay lesbian, singleton and lone families. In turn, their family policies have been broadened to accommodate each type of family's needs. In this way, family services are provided on a comprehensive basis for different family units. The inclusion of the various types of families potentially lifts the demarcation of normative and deviant types. Furthermore, such a policy allows the government to invest equally in all types of families to maintain a stable and healthy society for the benefit of all. Under this way of thinking and for a long time, family policy has not been a patch-work targeting certain types of families, the so-called 'disadvantaged', but broadened to accommodate all as citizens in family units. The government plays an important role in providing leadership and coordinating the public and private sectors in various channels such as housing, employment and welfare. For example, in Sweden, the government takes the lead in resolving housing by providing accommodation to the newly arisen family units. In contrast, the Hong Kong government has a rather limited view in its family policy which emphasizes the norm of a heterosexual household. The Hong Kong Census reinforces the statistic norm of the conventional family and all other types of family units are only represented as a footnote in the report. Accordingly, the so-called 'family friendly' policy centres on the conventional family with its distinct division of gender roles. Many women including the lone mothers who have been cast out of the conventional norm are likely to become the disadvantaged to be looked after by patch-work welfare policies. As a result, the conventional family policy has not only deprived women and the lone mothers of social support and services, it also reinforces patriarchal social and institutional practices and the feminization of poverty. Without the addition of a comprehensive women centered policy, subsequent patch-work commissions like the Equal Opportunity Commission and Women's Commission are of little use in helping especially lone women. Furthermore, the Commission members are politically appointed and consisted of neither scholars on gender issues nor persons with real life experience on the subject.

When family policy is opened up to include different types of family units, we see the issues confronting individual members of the family especially women as their position has long been compromised in the conventional family. With the new family

units, it becomes more important to introduce a women-centered policy to facilitate the new social changes in the family units. Women who are divorced with children are particularly penalized. Yet, regardless of the women's subjectivity, familial conservative or individualized conservative, each lone mother family has its unique transactional and routine operations requiring unique resources and support to function.

As revealed in previous chapters, one pressing issue the lone mothers were confronted with was housing. Data show that under the existing policy for public housing, tenancy is normally granted to the head of the household, a man, and it is based on the blue print of a conventional family unit. After the divorce, the lone mothers had to apply on their own merits as new applicants, and there was usually a long wait before being accepted. Many of the women were left with no choice but to turn to sub-divided housing or slums. Similarly, some of the lone mothers who used to live in private housing prior to their divorce were forced to turn to cheap alternatives since housing itself had always been an issue. Some of them had to return to their parents' home or stay with the ex-in-laws even after their divorces. Since the home is where the house is, under such circumstances, the transition to rebuild the family was almost impossible for the lone mothers. It is therefore necessary to introduce a women centered element to the housing policy especially for lone mothers. If a women centered element was added to the housing policy, some of the difficulties the lone mothers encountered during this transitional period would be addressed. To start with, women would be granted tenancies in public housing after their divorce, they would be able to remain in the housing unit with their children even when the husband has left. Furthermore, a women centered policy would also trigger the Equal Opportunity Commission to look into cases of landlords refusing to rent to lone mothers. Finally, rent control should be reinstated, so that the lone mothers on CSSA would not have to face rent increases by greedy landlords every time there is an upward adjustment to their allowance.

Another obstacle in the lone mothers' transition is the elite education system practiced in Hong Kong. Again, schools function on the premise of conventional families where children are raised by two-parents, either with two incomes or the mother staying home full time to look after the children. It is assumed that there are ample resources

devoted to the child or children at home. A women centered policy would open up the education system to accommodate different types of families including the lone mothers whose resources have been cut drastically. The lone mothers in the study felt extremely guilty when they could no longer afford to fulfil their children in various extracurricular activities or private tutoring to raise competitiveness. With the women in mind, an overhaul of the education system may curb the highly competitive race at the starting line, and make it an easier transition for the children as well as their mothers. The Education Bureau would have to review the existing policy, or the lack of it, on school banding and the number of subsidized university placements so that students do not have to compete for education. In a larger picture, deconstructing the myth of the starting line may lead to a change in the social atmosphere in Hong Kong.

A women centered policy in employment would provide women in various types of family units with choice and the hope for autonomy with dignity. Many lone mothers suffer under economic supremacy with big market and minimal government intervention both in the public and private sectors. Standardization, uniformity and fragmented policies fail to address women's needs caused by social changes. No allowance is made for lone mothers in the labour market as there is a lack of different types of work, hours and childcare support. The study showed that there are basically two groups of lone mothers, the familial conservative ones who wish to provide full time care to their children, and the individualized conservative lone mothers who wish to create their own biography as worker and mother. The former had to go on CSSA to meet their financial needs. Yet, CSSA is only a fragmented patch-work subsidy which was not created with lone mothers in mind. To start with, the allowance is barely enough to keep the lone mother family afloat on the poverty line let alone providing security and extras. Some of the lone mothers in the study risked losing the subsidy and faced potential child neglect charges when they ventured into undertaking part-time employment to make ends meet. Furthermore, they had very little work choices but low pay and low prospects odd jobs, as the labour market is hostile to lone mothers deeming them second-class workers not devoted to the capitalistic business world. Finally, the CSSA induces stigmatization on both the lone mothers and their children as they are viewed as problematic and a burden on the system. Thus there is a high price to pay for going on CSSA: poverty and stigmatization.

The individualized conservative lone mothers, who tried to become independent financially and fulfil motherhood, found it extremely difficult not only because of the demands of the capitalistic business world, but the lack of support for their plight. They were forced to pay heavily for childcare due to the retrenchment of welfare and the neo-liberal government's move to privatize childcare services. The study revealed serious exploitation of lone mothers in the labour market. Again, the job market is deeply rooted in the idea of conventional families with the man as the bread winner, devoting all his time at work in the public sphere, while the woman takes care of the family in the private sphere. Their contribution and round the clock labour taking care of children, the disabled and elderly in the family should be acknowledged and respected.

Even with the 'emancipation' of women in the labour market, there is no provision made for their double burden of domestic and paid employment. Women are expected to give the same devotion as men and work long hours. The advent of diverse family types and units further impacted on woman's burden in balancing work and the family, and the lone mothers suffered as employers were unwilling to hire them as they were often called away to attend to their children. On the other hand, the lone mothers were cautious and tried to stay on their toes at work because they could not afford to lose their jobs. Some of them had to decline promotions or pay rises for fear of added responsibilities, and therefore remained poor, thus encouraging the feminization of poverty. Many of the lone mothers found it exasperating having to juggle finance and time to fit their caring duties into work, and as a result, the working lone mothers often risked social alienation and emotional isolation. Meanwhile, the two organizations set up by the government, the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Women's Commission exerted very little influence on women's position in the workplace.

Currently, poor working families are under the charge of the Commission on Poverty, and minimal assistance is granted to workers in a family who work past a certain number of hours. The rules are standardized, making no allowance for the working lone mothers who do not have support at home if they have to work long hours. Instead of viewing poor working lone mothers as a disadvantaged group, consideration should be given to their unique circumstance which requires women centered policy to address their needs in the labour market.

In general lone mothers have some previous experience in the labour market but their employment experiences are closely bound up with their family circumstances and caring responsibilities. Most of the lone mothers in this research had had some breaks in employment when their children were young and /or had mainly worked part-time. Becoming a lone mother was also often disruptive to employment. Under the casualization of labour in the post-industrial and capitalistic society, women who had to return to the workforce after years of staying home to rear a family would find it extremely difficult to find suitable work. A single and compulsory employment policy cannot help to solve the different problems faced by different lone mothers in different areas. On the contrary, such one-end solution will make the families become more fragile. Therefore, a positive and effective employment policy for lone mothers should be able to lift them from poverty. In this regard, the transitional support should be continuous and that punitive policies should not be imposed. The government should monitor the labour market, especially vacancy and wage levels, so as to provide a favourable environment lifting the lone mothers from poverty. Furthermore, the government should take the initiative in persuading the employers to create a flexible working environment for the lone mothers. In addition, the childcare services are ineffective and insufficient for lone families. In fact, the childcare services implemented by the private sectors fail to meet the needs of the lone mother families. Problems like the relatively expensive price, the inflexibility for opening hours of the centre and the poor location occurs in the only support for working lone mothers (discussed in chapter 2), that is, the after-school care services. Thus, the government should evaluate the policies for childcare service integration. Also, more resources should be allocated for providing different supporting services to help lone mothers to have more choice to re-integrate to the labour market without difficulties.

Moreover, the research found that alimony and child support are key elements in ensuring the lone mothers' financial status. Currently the judicial system is not responsible for enforcing alimony and child support payments. It is up to the lone mothers to pursue the estranged ex-husband through the civil courts to extract payments. Some of the women simply gave up and suffered financially because of the frustration and shame in begging for money. If the alimony and child support were enforced by the courts the lone mothers would be given a genuine choice with dignity.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research was limited in terms of its sample selection, by the lack of a comprehensive representation of all groups of lone mothers. In the process of sample selection potential interviewees were not easy to identify as lone motherhood is a taboo in Hong Kong and they were located sporadically. Most of the low income lone mothers were referred by NGOs, and there were even difficulties locating the middle class income group. Two high income lone mothers refused the invitation giving reasons of time constraint and their reluctance to recall an incident that represented a 'blemish' on their lives. Thus the study was limited to the low and middle income groups. Despite the fact that class still matters in these two groups the research falls short of demonstrating the cutting across class feature of risk analysis.

During the course of data collection two two-way permit lone mothers were referred to me by other lone-mothers. They were classified into the familial group based on their interpretations of and narratives on family, marriage and the gender roles of motherhood. However, it was found that their coping strategies displayed extreme hardship, bordering on inhumane conditions, as they were persons with no status in Hong Kong. Queries were made to the researcher's network of NGOs and was told that there were indeed an abundance of such cases but handled by other agencies. Further queries were made to the Statistics Department, and they only had data on two-way permit holders but no data on two-way permit lone mothers in Hong Kong. The researcher feels that there are additional factors beyond the scope of this research requiring further investigation.

The research was purposely limited to the study of divorced lone mothers in order to investigate the interaction of traditions and social practices in constructing the perception of lone motherhood and their coping strategies amidst the objective circumstances of the social environment of Hong Kong. Consequently, other forms of lone parenthood such as lone fathers, never married lone mothers and ethnic minority lone mothers are not included. The exclusion by no means diminishes the value of the research nor the urgency to investigate the other groups of lone parents in Hong Kong.

To ensure a more comprehensive picture of the lone mother situations in Hong Kong, the researcher would have liked to include the upper class lone mothers who are elusive in the society. Initially, a successful business woman who was also a lone mother was contacted but she declined to be interviewed, claiming that she had no problems whatsoever because she could afford to raise the child on her own, and the researcher should study those who had (financial) problems. In retrospect, it is a reflection of the male breadwinner model assuming that women without men's support would fall into the categorization of the problematic, and still placing the issue under the old class perspective only the lower class are affected. Subsequently, it surfaced as a typical case that fractions of the society are uninformed about the cut-across-class nature of new social risks. The study has uncovered risks confronting the lone mothers which are unresolvable within class terms alone. Hence, the inclusion of upper class lone mothers would serve to support the existence of such risks. The new knowledge may be able to persuade the public as well as the lone mothers themselves that the new family unit is a collective responsibility instead of an individual responsibility to tackle.

Another concern in the research stems from the lack of involvement of the children in the lone mother families. As indicated in the study, the lone mothers' moral responsibility is to protect the interest of the children. Hence, nearly all the decisions concerning work and caring were made to accommodate the needs of the children. The ethics of care had direct influence on the lone mothers' decision in work. The type and nature of employment they undertook often depended on the caring duties the lone mothers believed that they were responsible for. Half of the lone mothers studied had children over the age of twelve, yet it appeared that the decision making process was often one-sided with the lone mother making decisions and shouldering the entire burden of the lone family. It would be interesting to see if the mothers' perspective concurs with their children's as the synchronization of needs would alleviate difficulties in areas of education, emotion and economics. For example, nearly all of the lone mothers studied were concerned about their children not winning at the starting line, and they tried to scrape up as much as they could to send the children to afterschool activities and learning. Would their children think the same way? Would there be a mutually agreed way of education be more effective? Would the money spent on afterschool learning be better spent in other areas? Emotionally, most of the lone mothers were laden with guilt for destroying the children's chance

for a complete family, and blamed themselves for their children's woes. Yet, the children might hold different views. The same goes for the lone mothers' concerns with stigmatization and remarriage, and if the children's view were known, they might be able to lend one another support and make better decisions concerning the family.

REFLECTION ON MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

My initial expectation of the research was building of knowledge in an academically orientated way. In that respect, there has been unequivocal knowledge gain in viewing the lone mother problem outside conventional perspectives. Half way into the research, it became clear that there are two types of responses shown by the lone mothers. One group of lone mothers struggled within the confines of traditions and social constructions, and in doing so, they continuously reinforced and imprisoned themselves within such constraints. On the other hand, the other group of women seemed to be more open to new ideas. Instead of struggling within the confines, they were willing to risk out of the self-restrictive boundaries. It was exciting to see the lone mothers' perceptions and their internal fluidity, shapelessness and changeability in response to rigid external structural constraints. It was also encouraging to witness resilience and determination of the human spirit against inevitability. The breakthrough has allowed many of them to attain freedom to move forward in accepting the lone family as a new family unit, and they were able to move forward. Witnessing this new kind of resilience, I looked back to many of my own personal difficulties and the realization of imprisonment dawned on me, a self-imprisonment within the confines of tradition and the socially internalized ego. In a way, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to access various literatures instrumental in the illumination on the construction of an individual's self-imprisonment. More importantly, there are several mentors who have generously guided me through by posing questions and offering dimensions and perspectives. Akin to the lone mothers, my journey towards freedom also relies on acceptance, a self-acceptance that allows courage and confidence to explore possibilities.

Despite the reality of age, my PhD journey can be seen as a bildungsroman. I was spurred by the social injustice exerted on this particular group of women, the lone

mothers in Hong Kong. I first came across the lone mother issue in a post-graduate program and also later on when I was working as research associate with Dr Chan Kam Wah, who is a scholar in the field of women studies. I became more involved with the lone mother issue and was quite disturbed to realise that the problem has lingered on. It became clear to me that the existing perspectives in viewing the problem are unavailing. There were difficulties along the way, for example in locating the lone mothers and struggling with conventional ways in explaining their situations by focusing on the lone mothers and discounting other factors. It was the risk society theory that inspired me to look at the larger picture of social changes, and subsequently new social risks and the post-structural feminist perspectives. Each hurdle on the journey has given me the opportunity to dig deeper and be more honest with my own views. There were moments of disappointment of self-doubts and elation of epiphany, delights in insights, as well as defeat at impasses. In my case, the building of knowledge was synchronized to intellectual maturity.

FINAL WORD

This research set out to dispel existing individualised and pathological perspectives on lone motherhood in Hong Kong. In answering the research questions to explore the difficulties the group is facing, the lone mothers' perception and coping strategies, and the effectiveness of policies, the research findings reveal the manifestation of gender norms from patriarchy and capitalism in the forms of social discourses and policies under a newly combined theoretical framework of risk society, informed by the post-structuralist feminist perspective. The findings also point to a more equitable view on the lone mother family as a newly emerged family unit, a by-product of rapid social changes, and hence discredit the individualised and pathological claims.

In essence, the issues concerning lone mother families are more complex. A lone mothers' perception and response to the risks of lone motherhood are basically of a hybrid nature stemming from conservative gender norms, which branches out into the familial and individualised groups. In fact, the two major types of conservatism lay on a spectrum. For the purposes of succinct description, the lone mothers are mapped into two groups according to the position of their viewpoints on the spectrum. Despite the categorisation, there is much fluidity between the two groups, which further

complicates attempts in resolving their issues. The existing policies addressing them as old risks do nothing but exacerbate their difficulties. In order to restore equity, the research has pinpointed immediate measures to be taken in respect of alimony, childcare and employment support, and housing for the lone mothers.

The conclusion of this research is by no means a conclusion to the lone mothers' plight as it only serves to propose a more equitable approach. Inputs from the children in lone mother families would have enriched the study as children are key considerations affecting the decisions of the lone mothers. The upper class lone mothers' input is also valuable because they seem to point to the lone mother issue as old risk solvable by class, which the researcher is keen on proving that new risk has indeed cut across class. Nonetheless, their reluctance to participate in the research poses as a blemish to the completeness of the research. Overall, the saving grace of the study is the realisation of the lone mothers' demonstrated unusual resilience despite subjectivity marked by often self-constructed boundaries. A deeper understanding of lone mothers will hopefully foster more equitable approaches in resolving the complex social risks they face.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Lone Mother Families in Hong Kong: Perception of Risks and Their Coping Strategies

Interview Guidelines for Family Risk of Lone Mother Research

Name of the interviewee:

Date of interview:

Time of interview:

Place of interview:

1. Family Situation

1.1 Briefly introduce current marriage situation and number of children

2. Employment Status

2.1 Are you working?

2.2 Can you please describe the nature of your work, for example, what type of business, full-time or part-time, if travelling is required, working hour, overtime, weekend shift?

2.3 How long have you been working on this job?

2.4 If it's a recent job change, what's your previous job and why have you had such change?

2.5 What is the reason for changing jobs or staying at the same job?

2.6 Do you feel secure or insecure with the current job? If insecure, what are the reasons?

3. Family problems before divorce

3.1 Please describe the circumstances of your divorce.

3.2 Could the following be some of the problems you were facing in your marriage?

a. Economic status (income, debt or other financial commitment)

b. Interaction with spouse

c. Extra-marital concerns

d. Working hours, workload, and work pressure

e. Prolonged or frequent business trips

f. Parenting style

g. Children academic support

h. Relationship with extended family members, for example, in-laws, siblings

i. Others

3.3 How would these problems affect you in these areas?

a. Emotional and physical health

b. Financial situation

- c. Personal development
 - d. Social life
 - e. Work, whether to take up employment or quit
 - f. Family relationship: children, other family members
 - g. Others
- 3.4 How did you cope with these problems
- a. Ignore (why and how)
 - b. Accept (why and how)
 - c. Find solutions
 - i. Pregnancy
 - ii. Self-improvement through further study or participate in vocational training
 - iii. Change of habit (reduced expenses/move house)
 - iv. Change of work (increased working hours/part-time/change job/change occupation/give up work)
 - v. Seek family support (care for children/emotion support/financial support)
 - vi. Use social service (child care service/community service/CSSA)
4. Family problems after divorce as a lone mother
- 4.1 What kinds of problems do/did you face as a lone mother after the divorce?
- a. Financial hardship
 - b. Increased working hours, workload, and work pressure
 - c. Prolonged or frequent business trips
 - d. Parenting style
 - e. Children academic support
 - f. Lack of support network
 - g. Others
5. Effect of family problems after becoming a lone mother
- 5.1 What effects do these problems have on you?
- a. Emotional and physical health
 - b. Financial situation
 - c. Personal development
 - d. Social life
 - e. Give up or take on extra work or change jobs
 - f. Family relationship: children, other family members
 - g. Concern over stigmatization (traditional values)
 - h. Others
6. Ways to prevent or cope with family problems after becoming a lone mother
- 6.1 Please describe how you cope with these problems.
Were they effective?
What was the experience?
- 6.2 Would you have coped with the problems with the following strategies?
- a. Remarriage/find another boyfriend
 - b. Further study or participate in vocational training
 - c. Change of habit (reduced expenses/move house)
 - d. Change of work (increased working hours/part-time/change job/change occupation/give up work)

- e. Seek family support (care for children/emotion support/financial support)
- f. Use social service (child care service/community service/CSSA)
- g. Avoid disclosing the lone mother status
- h. Others

7. How do you see yourself as a lone mother?

7.1 Do you take pride in lone motherhood?

7.2 How do you think the society response to you as a lone mother?

8. Comment on policy

8.1 Do you think the government helps or hinders you and in what way?

8.2 What can the government do to help?

9. Personal Background

Age

Education level

Occupation

Individual income, family income (be aware of any alimony/CSSA/other income)

Marriage/single situation (divorced/widowed/others)

When did you become a lone mother

Number of children, their age and sex, and whether they live together

Housing type

APPENDIX B

OVERVIEW OF THE 31 LONE MOTHERS

1. Ada

Ada, chairperson of subdivided housing committee fighting for residents' rights, used to think that marriage would provide security to her and her children, and as a wife, she should do her best to protect her husband's pride. When her husband stopped bringing money home, she borrowed from her own family and friends to make do. After the divorce, Ada relied on CSSA to support her family. She thought she was being resourceful collecting leftover food from buffet restaurant for her children but they refused to live like beggars. Despite adversities, Ada still looked forward to a new relationship and hoped for a new complete family.

2. Bonnie

Bonnie always wore a ring on her right finger to hide her divorced status. When she first got divorced, the stigma of being a CSSA recipient was enough to drive Bonnie to work one and a half times around the o'clock and literally breaking her back to stay away from relying on welfare. Eventually, Bonnie had to apply for CSSA when her back became too painful to continue to work 18 hours a day. Bonnie's teenage children were not sympathetic to her situation and they questioned why they had to live in poverty. So, once she got a little better, she resumed some of the part-time jobs but only to find out whatever she made would be deducted from her CSSA.

3. Carrie

Nightmarish was the word Cathy used to describe her life since she married to escape her overbearing mother at home. She tolerated her chauvinistic husband for a few years until the marriage ended with his extramarital affair. Cathy quitted her job as a journalist when her son was born and lived off her savings after the divorce. When the savings dried out and the landlord threw out all their belongings, she revisited her nightmare moving back with her mother. She thought she would go crazy staying home with her mother and looking after her son with ADHD. She attempted strangling

her son and suicide in desperation. Cathy later returned to work so that she could afford to send her son for special trainings but for the time being, her nightmare living with her mother had to continue.

4. Doris

Doris married a rich man's son who neither worked nor helped out at home. She tried in vain to change her husband by giving birth to another child seven years after the birth of their first born. She eventually made up her mind to divorce because of her concern that her husband was setting a bad example to her younger son. Doris found out that she was suffering from breast cancer and had to receive treatment for a period of time. Doris' family was extremely supportive and offered her a relatively well-paying job in her brother's business. It had been a year since the divorce and she thought her life had finally regained some stability. She was grateful to her brother's support through difficult times.

5. Eva

Eva, traditional, and divorced, with a gentle disposition, seemed to have little worries on the tangible sides of living during her 10 years of divorce. Through her persistent pursuit in education after the divorce, she was able to land a stable job with a moderate income to support herself and her eleven-year-old daughter. She was also one of the lucky Hong Kong residents who owned her own flat. The risks Eva faced are intangible; she claimed that the dragged-out 10-year bitter custody battle on top of parenting problem to an emotionally traumatized teenage girl were causes of her cancer.

6. Fiona

Fiona, traditional, clever, and survivor of a heart-wrenching divorce, appeared sociable and proud of her achievement both at work and with her two-child lone family. Her divorce story was well plotted with strategies in saving the marriage, pursuit of alimony, and eventually gaining a firm footing in a construction company from housewife to senior officer. Fiona's boss relied on her to run the company despite the fact that she only possessed a secondary education. The working hours also allowed

her to fit in her caring duties seamlessly. Her only concern was building a relationship with her children especially the son who still blamed himself for his parents' divorce.

7. Gloria

'Obama is my inspiration.' Gloria compared her two children with the ex-president of the United States, who also grew up in a lone mother family. She seemed hopeful and held a positive outlook on her lone status because she is a CSSA recipient with public housing. There were no immediate worries about accommodation and basic necessities. Yet, she was troubled by not being able to scrape up extra money for her children's extracurricular activities to give them a boost at the starting line.

8. Heidi

How does one live on a shoestring budget of \$11,000 alimony with two children? Heidi was a genius in her balancing act, juggling between alimony, low income subsidy, and her part-time low income job. Heidi had to keep an eye on her working hours making sure that she did not earn more than the amount low income subsidy allowed since she did not qualify for CSSA because of the alimony income. Working minimal hours also allowed her to care for her children despite the fact that they are older, teenagers. Heidi emphasized the need to keep an eye on the teens so that they do not become delinquents. Friends were also important to Heidi as they provided spiritual as well as physical support. Her friends kept her company when she felt lonely and lent a helping hand when there are repairs to be done in the house.

9. Iris

Should the relationship between in-laws be dissolved once the couple is divorced? In Iris's case, she was caught in an extremely awkward situation. Her ex-husband had moved away to cohabit with another woman, leaving her behind with two children aged 5 and 11, to stay with his parents and an adult unmarried brother in a three small room home ownership scheme housing unit. Earning slightly over the ceiling to apply for public housing, she did not qualify for a separate public housing unit, and she was forced into staying with the ex-in-laws. Apart from financial woes Iris' biggest difficulty was handling her 11-year-old's emotional problems.

10. Joan

'I am a no-status lone mother in Hong Kong,' said Joan helplessly. Her story started 14 years ago in the mainland when she married a Hong Kong resident. She was told at the border by immigration officers that her husband had committed bigamy and she could not enter Hong Kong as his wife and apply for resident status. By that time, she reapplied to come to Hong Kong on a two-way-permit to look after her children. Being a non-resident, not only was she not allowed to work in Hong Kong, Joan was not entitled to any government assistance. Joan had subsisted on her children's CSSA during the past 14 years. She blamed herself for not being able to send the children to extracurricular activities, a shortcut to winning at the starting line.

11. Katy

Katy thought she was tying a stone around her neck when she undertook to take care of her brother's children, one mentally retarded, on top of her twin daughters, and after being thrown out by her in-laws for not producing a male heir. Her sole purpose in life was to nurture these four children. Despite the adversity she faced, she looked forward to the challenges with a positive outlook. Katy was concentrating on making a better life for the five of them in the family, and she continued to improve herself in hope of making a life for herself after the children have grown up. She mentioned she was lucky to have public housing.

12. Lara

Lara's husband was a high stake gambler, and she decided to end the marriage when his gambling debts reached a seven-figure amount. Despite her family's objection to the divorce, Lara believed that she would have a better chance to start over at 36 rather than 10 years later when she is 46. True to her word, Lara had been involved in two relationships and was living her life to the fullest. Lara invited her ex-husband to live with the family so that he can look after the son and allowed her to become a weekend mother. She claimed that quality time is more important than the quantity of time spent with her child.

13. Mandy

When Mandy started to demand that she kept her own earnings, her husband split the household expense in half down to the last cent, and made her pay her share from her wages. He exercised total control over her financially to the extent that she had to choose the cheapest form of transportation. After 2 years careful planning, Mandy saved enough money to live independently with her daughter. She filed for divorce because she could no longer tolerate her husband's chauvinistic behavior. She blamed herself for not being able to provide a complete family for her daughter.

14. Nicole

'I was a mad woman when I first found out my husband had an affair,' Nicole said calmly across the table during the interview. 'I couldn't imagine that my marriage would come to an end. I was made to believe that divorce was the end of the world for a woman. Luckily, someone gave me a long list of names of women I knew who were divorced. You cannot imagine how calm I was when the divorce actually took place. It's nice to know that I am not alone and there are other women who are also divorced. After all, I have the support of my family and friends, so it's really no big deal.'

15. Olivia

Hoping to provide a complete family to her son, Olivia quickly remarried to start a new life despite her family's objection. The second marriage did not work either, and they got divorced six years later. Olivia labeled herself as a failure, and she was extremely sensitive to what others may think of her marital status. Olivia lived a life of seclusion, no friends, no family and with low self-esteem.

16. Pauline

Pauline had suicidal thoughts when her husband left until her psychologist showed her a reverse way of thinking. Instead of thinking how alienated she and her son were, she should count the blessing of how many people cared about them including her own siblings, friends and her son's god-mother. She was given a new definition of a complete family – not one where the parents were fighting all the time, but the thought

of other people loving and caring for them. More pressing for Pauline was her mother's insistence that her value was depreciating, married and with child, and she should remarry as the opportunity presents itself.

17. Queenie

Queenie's husband divorced her because she gave birth to a girl. After the divorce, she had a short relationship with another man. When she found out she was pregnant again, she thought that the man would stay and marry her but it turned out that he had other plans and disappeared. So Queenie had a daughter and a son to support but no husband. Surprising enough, she still looked forward to marrying and forming a 'complete family'.

18. Rose

Rose compared herself to 'a broken-wing bird that cannot fly.' With two young children, she relied on CSSA. Believing that she was responsible for her life, she wanted to establish herself in a career but she was restricted in many ways by the rules for receiving CSSA. She was working hard to build up a network for her career and hoped that it would land a secure job eventually and be free of CSSA. Meanwhile, she made strategic plans for herself and the children as far as housing, schooling and stigmatization were concerned.

19. Susan

Susan's marriage broke down when she tried to redefine marriage. She refused the traditional gendered roles of women and men, and she demanded that her husband to share and be involved in the day-to-day family life like cleaning, cooking and caring for the children. Supported by alimony, Susan planned to reestablish her life through further education to achieve better living. Susan was realistic in the amount of time she would be able to devote to the caring of her 4-year-old son, and made plans for it.

20. Teresa

To Teresa and her daughter, CSSA was a stigma. The mother and daughter shared a job so that they did not have to rely on CSSA, even though the work literally broke

their backs. To save money, Teresa would buy frozen meat instead of fresh ones, and looked for bargains at closing time in the market. In Teresa's case, stigma outweighed poverty, and they had no intention of sacrificing their pride to beg from the food bank.

21. Ula

Ula believed that her husband had single-handedly destroyed the complete family and her daughter's future by gambling away the family fortune. As she was not able to afford all kinds of extracurricular activities and training for her daughter, Ula thought that her daughter would not stand a chance in life. Ula had a full-time job with income over the mean test to qualify for public housing. Currently, she remained at her ex-in-laws' house with her ex-husband, which was depressing. Ula dreaded going home and tended to stay out as late as possible, which was kind of a vicious circle because she blamed herself for not being able to help with her daughter's school work in the evening.

22. Vanessa

Laughter hid Vanessa's heart wrenching story. Her divorce settlement was a lot of credit card and finance company debts to be repaid. Four years later, Vanessa finally managed to clear all the debts incurred by her husband before the divorce. She considered herself much better off now than before when she had to worry about harassment from debtors. She was also proud that her daughter had not gone astray despite growing up in a lone mother family.

23. Wendy

The last straw that prompted Wendy to jump off the ledge from a tall building three years ago was the scarcity of formula to feed her infant daughter. In the meantime, Wendy's traditional parents kept telling her to tolerate her husband's fooling around with ladies in compensated dating across the border as most men played around and it was no big deal. His excuse was Wendy's sagging body and orange peel childbirth marks on her tummy. Wendy's self-image plunged to a record low and she attempted suicide. Her brother saved her at the nick of time and made her see a psychologist and social worker. Gradually, Wendy recovered from the nightmare, still not believing

that she had made it through. Wendy had plans to remarry in the near future but she could not help feeling a bit skeptical about a second marriage.

24. Xandra

Xandra said she put on her armour to get through the day of a lone mother on CSSA, and retreated to her soft fragile shelf at night lamenting her unfortunate fate. Xandra divorced her husband on the grounds of abuse but the harassment and threats did not stop there because of the fight over the custody of their son. Financially, she relied on CSSA and minimal odd jobs to survive with her son with thalassaemia. Xandra joked that she was an environmentalist because she often picked over others' garbage to find useful objects. She strongly believed that even a CSSA recipient was entitled to show a small token of good-will but she was puzzled at mockery thrown at her when she gave the security guards in her building a small red packet at Chinese New Year. Despite the fact that she put on a brave appearance, Xandra always carried a streak of melancholic pessimism in her.

25. Yanki

Yanki felt that she was reborn after the divorce. Before she was divorced, her husband took complete control over the fair-skinned pretty woman and limited her to the domain of the home. After the divorce, she realized that she was able to step over the boundary of gendered roles to the extent that she became a bus driver and was currently working on a construction site, rubbing shoulders with macho male workers. However, she was not able to shake off the super-woman image when it came to motherhood. She would lament that she should have stayed with the man even after the divorce so that her son would be provided for.

26. Zara

In Zara's case, her mother's help in looking after her autistic son after her divorce became a burden to her as her siblings blamed her for the imposition. As there was a little help for the autistic children in the city, she resigned from her full time job and took up 3 part time jobs to make ends meet and look after the child herself. Zara

deployed strategic plans in finding Direct Subsidy Scheme Schools and other resources for her son.

27. Abby

Abby, a poor lone mother of two surviving on several part-time jobs, refused to apply for CSSA to avoid stigmatization. Abby equated poverty and the lone mother status to a death sentence. She avoided going out and meeting people in fear of being looked down upon. As a result, she had no friends and seldom ventured out after work. Her outlook was bleak and her only hope was for the children to grow up and make money. Till then, she had no hope.

28. Bobo

Bobo's husband divorced her as soon as they found out their two-year-old son was mentally retarded. Since Bobo was a mainlander bride on a two-way permit to Hong Kong, she had to return to the mainland. Fortunately, she was granted discretion from the immigration authority because of her son's special case. Consequently, she was allowed to stay and became a Hong Kong resident who qualifies for a series of assistance including housing, CSSA and a comprehensive medical plan for her son. However, Bobo did not see the silver lining in her lone status. She still pined for a complete family, without which she did not believe her fate will improve.

29. Cathy

Cathy had no regrets about her divorce. She described her married life as soaking in kerosene in hell and now she was walking on green grass after she regained her freedom. Her hair turned grey and fell out almost overnight having to repay her husband's debt. On top of that, she bore the risk of being mother to a slow learner child. She thought she would go crazy but she eventually paid off the debt several years after the divorce. She seemed to come to an epiphany after receiving enormous pressure from her son's school blaming her for not teaching her son properly. The last straw made her realize she should not be told it was her son's fault, and she really had to come to terms with the unfortunate events in her life and take it in her stride.

30. Daphne

Imagine having to move back in to your parents' home as a 25-year-old lone mother with a daughter who is handicapped. Daphne's parents were rather old fashioned and they were constantly complaining about her lone mother status. Not only was Daphne not able to look after her parents at their old age as expected, her parents had to take up some of the caring responsibilities for their grandchild as well. For this reason, Daphne reverted to a subordinate position at home and she was restricted from normal social activities. At work, Daphne passed over a chance for promotion so that she could have more time to look after her daughter. She hoped that she would pay off her ex-husband's debts soon, finish the training program she had enrolled in and be in a better position to move out with her daughter.

31. Emily

At age 48, Emily was hopeful that she would find Mr. Right on the internet. She thought she had found Mr. Right and was planning to return custody of her ten-year-old son to her ex-husband as Mr. Right resided in another Asian city which she did not think would suit him very well. Emily pictured a better life with a new family and running her own business to make up for 25 year's lost time in the marriage.

APPENDIX C

BASIC INFORMATION ON THE LONE MOTHERS

Types of children or Situation of case	With children aged 0-12	With children aged 13-18
<p>Middle – low income group (income below \$11,999) Stable or Unstable job, or Low income Short-term CSSA</p>	<p>Ada (Divorce 4yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 7,500 - Daughter aged 11 and Son aged 7 - Primary - Unemployed - Sub-divided Housing 	<p>Bonnie (Separated 10yrs/Divorce 4yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 10,080 - Two Daughters aged 21 and 18, and Son aged 12 - Primary - Unemployed - Sub-divided Housing
	<p>Gloria (Divorce 3yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 5,500 / Alimony 2,000 - Son aged 11 and daughter aged 9 - Secondary - Unemployed - Rental public housing 	<p>Joan (Divorce 7yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 8,000 not in her account (Two way permit) - Son aged 13 and Daughter aged 11 - Secondary - Unemployed (Two way permit) - Rental public housing
	<p>Katy (Divorce 6yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 10,000 / Alimony 1,600 - Twins Daughters aged 12 - Tertiary (degree) - Unemployed - Rental public housing 	<p>Teresa (Divorce 1.5yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part-time janitor 2,300 / daughter 3,000 - Three Daughters aged 24, 22 and 18 - Primary - Unemployed - Sub-divided Housing
	<p>Olivia (Divorce 3yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unemployed/ 3000 from ex-husband and 4000 is from renting out the flat - Son aged 8 - Secondary - Unemployed - Rental private housing (Elder Brother's) 	<p>Vanessa (Divorce 4yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part time Home-helper 4,000 / CSSA 6,500 - Daughters aged 14 - Secondary - Sub-divided Housing
	<p>Queenie (Divorce 10yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Waitress 6000 / CSSA 10,000 - Daughter aged 10 and Son aged 5 - Secondary - Part time - Sub-divided Housing 	
	<p>Rose (Divorce 2yrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 10,000 / Alimony 1,001 - Son aged 10 and Daughter aged 4 - Tertiary (degree) - Unemployed 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rental public housing 	
	Xandra (Divorce 9yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part time School Bus Assistant 500/ CSSA 6,000 / Alimony 2,500 - Son aged 10 - Secondary - Part time - Rental public housing 	
	Abby (Divorce 10yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part time Home-helper 9,000 - Daughter aged 12 and Son aged 4 - Primary - Sub-divided Housing 	
	Bobo (Divorce 3yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 12,000 - Son aged 18 (mainland) and Son aged 8 (HK) - Secondary - Unemployed - Sub-divided Housing 	
	Cathy (Divorce 5yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 11,900/part-time 1,600 - Sons aged 10 and aged 8 - Secondary - Piece-Time Work - Sub-divided Housing 	
	Emily (Divorce 4yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSSA 10,000/piece-time - 1 Son aged 10 and 3 Sons aged 29, 27, 24 (under ex-husband custody) - Secondary - Piece-Time - Sub-divided Housing 	
High - middle income group Middle class with stable job (income range \$12,000 - \$20,000)	Carrie (Divorce 5yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Journalist 14,000 - Son aged 7 - Tertiary (degree) - Full time - Rental private housing 	Doris (Divorce 1yr) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manager 38,000 - Two Sons aged 21 and 13 - Secondary - Full time - Rental private housing (Older brother)
*High income Professional or manager level	Eva (not yet complete the divorce process but separated 10yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Account & Admin 26,000/ older brother 2,000 - Daughter aged 11 - Tertiary (degree) - Full time - Owned private housing 	Fiona (Divorce 6yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senior officer 22,500/ Alimony 12,000 - Son aged 21 and daughter aged 15 - Secondary - Full time - Owned home ownership scheme flat
	Iris (Separated 3yrs/Divorce 1yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School admin 15,000 - Two Daughters aged 11 and 5 - Secondary - Full time - Owned home ownership scheme flat (living with in-law) 	Heidi (Separated 10yrs/Divorce 5yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part time 3,000/ ex-husband 11,000/ Other Gov't subsidies 2,600 - Son aged 16 and daughter aged 14 - Secondary

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part time - Rental public housing
Lara (Divorce 1.5yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyst 25,000 / ex-husband 17,000 - Son aged 5.5 - Secondary - Full time - Owned private housing 	*Mandy (Divorce 10yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special childcare worker 35,000 / Ex-husband 3,000 - Daughter aged 18 - Tertiary (High Dip) - Full time - Owned private housing 	
Pauline (Divorce 4yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ground Crew 15,000 - Son aged 4.5 - Tertiary (degree) - Full time - Rental private housing (living with parents) 	Nicole (Divorce 10yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clerk 11,000/ Alimony 1,500 - Daughter aged 17 - Secondary - Full time - Rental public housing 	
Susan (Divorce 9months) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ex-husband 14,000 - Son aged 4 - Secondary - Unemployed - Rental private housing (living with younger sister's family) 	Yanki (Divorce 9yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - air conditioner installation worker at construction work sites (maintenance /repair worker) 15,000 - Son aged 15 - Secondary - Full time - Sub-divided Housing 	
Ula (Divorce 1year) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR Officer 19,600 - Daughter aged 11 - Tertiary (High Dip) - Full time - Private housing (living with husband and in-law's family) 	Zara (Divorce 10yrs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part-time Social worker 15,000 - Son aged 14 - Tertiary (degree) - Part time - Rental private housing 	
Wendy (Divorce 3years) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manicurist nail technician 16,000/ Alimony 1,500 - Daughter aged 4 - Secondary - Full time - Rental public housing (living with parents) 		
Daphne (Divorce 1yr) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cosmetic salesperson 20,000 - Daughter aged 4 - Secondary - Full time - Home ownership scheme flat (living with parents) 		

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