

A FIRST STUDY OF MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN IN  
HONG KONG WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THEIR EDUCATIONAL  
NEEDS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN THIS WORK OVERSEAS

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Summary

Reference: \*

The study describes the treatment of the mentally handicapped throughout history and gives an account of the work of pioneers in this field and the theories that determined the treatment they meted out.

In particular, it investigates Hong Kong's educational services to the handicapped. It identifies the needs of the mentally handicapped and suggests ways of meeting them, highlighting the key problems of training personnel for work in the area of education, vocational training and welfare services in respect to the mentally handicapped.

\*The report included here is a summary of the contents of the full report not yet listed in the Commonwealth Secretariat Register.

Report

Even though efforts to educate the mentally handicapped began in the last century, the problems in mental deficiency were of concern and interest to relatively few people until the last decade or so. Before World War II many people, including the professionals, still held that very little could be done to integrate the mentally handicapped individual into community settings and so it was in society's best interest to remove them from family and community.

The situation reflected the absence of major government or national policy on mental retardation and feeling of public responsibility probably because of inadequate understanding and knowledge of the problem of mental deficiency. During this period very little research was done in this area and it was not an attractive subject of study at university level.

The post World War II was a time of acceleration in the field of mental retardation in legislation, facilities and research activity throughout the world. Among these were the growth of provisions for all grades of mentally handicapped children and adults, employment opportunities, programs in public education, assessment services, and research in teaching, biological, sociological and psychological aspects of the mentally handicapped. Major national organizations also saw considerable and outstanding growth during the last twenty or thirty years.

The post World War II period in Hong Kong has seen great increase in population from half a million to four million in 17 years. The rapid increase in population has created many major social problems such as housing, medical and health, and education to such an extent that the needs of the minority groups, such as the mentally handicapped, have been given very little priority. The Government's policy to meet all major social challenges is to subsidise legally incorporated voluntary agencies.

The last decade has been a decade of rapid economic growth coupled with major natural disasters and political crises. During this past ten years or so, the needs of the mentally handicapped and, similarly, needs of other minority groups have been met only in crisis situation or embarrassment.

The project investigates the nature and extent of the Hong Kong community's educational services for the mentally handicapped with the hope that the results may lead to an intelligent understanding of the present situation and a more adequate attack on the local difficulties which at present hinder the rapid promotion of this work along modern lines. It is the first study of its kind in this field of work for the Colony.

Chapter I presents a general picture of how the mentally handicapped have been treated throughout history.

Chapter II gives an account of the development of special education including the work of some pioneers in this field, and reviews certain theories relating to the treatment of the mentally handicapped. A description of similar developments in Hong Kong up to the present day follows.

Chapter III describes the needs of the mentally handicapped and suggests ways of meeting them adequately.

Chapter IV highlights the key problem of training personnel for work with the mentally handicapped in the areas of education, vocational training and welfare services. It then analyses the Hong Kong situation in particular and points out urgent problems associated with the acute shortage of trained staff to serve the mentally handicapped here.

Chapter V discusses matters of suitable curriculum, timetable and teaching methods in terms of the different categories of the mentally handicapped. Examples are given, and Hong Kong's special requirements are stressed.

Chapter VI sums up the findings of the research, and concludes by relating modern trends in providing for the mentally handicapped in Hong Kong. Certain implications are set down, and recommendations are made for future research in the local setting.