

## Chapter 7      Social Capital

Measuring social capital can enhance our understanding of the kind of attitudes and behaviours of youth that will generate trust and social cohesion in society.

### 7.1      Definitions of social capital

Social capital is defined 'in terms of networks, norms and trust, and the way these agents and institutions to be more effective in achieving common objectives' (Schuller, 2000:4). Uphoff had identified two dimensions in measuring social capital: *objective construct* and *subjective construct* (Quoted in Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002: 6).

Objective construct was identified as structural social capital. It was argued that the established roles, social networks and other social structures supplemented by rules, procedures and precedents could facilitate information sharing, collective action and decision making among the people involved. The structural social capital consists of three levels, namely, micro, meso and macro.

Putnam defined social capital in term of micro level which means '*features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trusts that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit*' (Spellerberg, 2001:11). In other words, it put emphasis on horizontal associations between people as 'networks of civic engagement' which mediated norms and operational rules of society and generated and reinforced trust in the credibility of these rules and in social relationships (Grootaert, 1998:2; Spellerberg, 2001:11).

Coleman (1990) defined social capital in terms of meso interpretation, including horizontal and vertical associations. He defined social capital as '*a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of actors (whether personal or corporate) within the structure*' (Spellerberg, 2001:11). Vertical associations are characterized by hierarchical relationships and an unequal power distribution among members (quoted in Grootaert, 1998:3; Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002:5; Spellerberg, 2001:11).

The third and most encompassing view of social capital includes social and political macro environment that shapes social structure and enables norms to develop. Besides the horizontal and vertical associations, this includes the macro-level formal institutional relationships and structures, such as political regime, the rule of law, the court system, as well as civil and political liberties (Grootaert, 1998:3; Grootaert and

Bastelaer, 2002:6).

Uphoff identified subjective nature of social capital as cognitive social capital, which refers to share norms, values, trust, attitudes and beliefs (quoted from Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002:6). As one of the important elements of social capital is trust and reciprocity, it is necessary to look into the quality of the social relations. In other words, it can be measured by the level of expressed trust in other people and the behaviours and attitudes towards oneself and towards others, including giving to strangers, as well as time giving to, relationships and social interaction people have with others on both formal and informal basis.

Thus, both structural and cognitive aspects should be taken into account and used in conjunction so as to grasp a full meaning of social capital. The measurement of the structural aspect helps us identify the nature of network participation, while attitudes and behaviours help identify how the norms and trusts are generated among the social networks.

## **7.2 Measurement of social capital**

Many researchers in the western countries had tried to add meaning on “social capital”. There are two comprehensive reviews concerning social capital in Australia and the UK respectively.

The study conducted by Bullen & Onyx (1998) measuring social capital in five communities in New South Wales (NSW) suggested that there are eight distinct elements defining social capital. Four of the elements are about participation and connections in various aspects, including *participation in local community*, *neighbourhood connections*, *family and friends connections*, and *work connections*. Whereas the other four elements are the building blocks of social capital, which includes *proactivity in a social context*, *feelings of trust and safety*, *tolerance of diversity*, and *value of life*.

The survey (2002) conducted by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in the UK (2002) had summarized the key aspects of social capital. The main themes of this study include: (i) *participation, social engagement, commitment*; (ii) *control, self-efficacy*; (iii) *perception of community level structures or characteristics*; (iv) *social interaction, social networks, social support*; and (v) *trust, reciprocity, social cohesion*. The list of indicators which were adopted and modified from Bullen & Onyx, as well as ONS’s studies measuring social capital is summarized as follows.

**Table 7.1: Indicators of social capital**

| <b>Dimensions</b>  | <b>Examples of Indicators</b>  |
|--|--|
| Behaviour  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Donation (Money, in kind, Blood, etc.)</li><li>■ Voluntary Services</li><li>■ Types of organizations participated in and their membership status</li><li>■ Participation in activities organized by family members, neighbours, relatives, schoolmates, workmates</li><li>■ Propensity to discuss with family members, relatives, neighbours, schoolmates or workmates</li><li>■ Doing favours for family members, neighbours, schoolmates or workmates</li><li>■ Extent of borrowing from neighbours, family members, relatives, schoolmates or workmates (Help seeking behaviours)</li><li>■ Voting in elections (voting behaviours)</li><li>■ Time spend on reading newspapers, magazines, books, watching TV, listening to radio and types read, watched or listened</li><li>■ Drug abuse</li><li>■ Suicide</li><li>■ Number of youth arrested by types of offence</li><li>■ Violence against others</li></ul> |
| Relationship   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Attachment to family members, relatives, neighbourhood, school or workplace</li><li>■ Trust in family members, relatives, neighbours, schoolmates or workmates</li><li>■ Whether feeling safe at family, neighbourhood, school or workplace</li><li>■ Satisfaction/enjoyment of living in local area</li></ul>   |
| Self-efficacy  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Whether feel valued by society</li><li>■ Perceived ability to change personal life situation</li><li>■ Perceived ability to influence politics or making claims on officials</li><li>■ Perceived control over community affairs</li><li>■ Perceived control over own health</li><li>■ Perceived rights and responsibilities of citizens</li></ul>  |
| Attitudes towards others                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Views about discrimination (fears of people who are different, such as ethnicity, in religion or in sexual orientation)</li><li>■ Tolerance towards marginalised people (such as mentally disabled)</li><li>■ Optimism about others' motivation</li><li>■ Whether you would claim a benefit to which you were not entitled</li></ul>   |
| Attitudes towards government and other social institutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Views about the Government</li><li>■ Views towards the future of Hong Kong</li><li>■ Attitudes towards social institutions and practices</li><li>■ Rating of socio-economic inequality</li><li>■ Views about corruption</li><li>■ Perceived freedom to speak out in opposition to a commonly-accepted norm</li><li>■ Perceived norms of social support</li></ul>   |

**Table 7.1 (Continued....)**

| <b>Dimensions</b>   | <b>Examples of Indicators</b>   |
|---|---|
| Demographic characteristics of Youth participated in variety of social networks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sex</li> <li>■ Age</li> <li>■ Nationality</li> <li>■ Household composition</li> <li>■ Length of residence</li> <li>■ Geographical distribution</li> <li>■ Birth place</li> <li>■ Employment situations (such as place of employment, types of employment, income level and hours of work)</li> <li>■ Religion</li> <li>■ Communication Capacity (including Language spoken; Education level; Health conditions; Presence of computer/Internet access)</li> </ul> |

Sources: Bullen, P. & Onyx, J. (1998)  
 Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (2002)  
 Krishna, A. & Shrader, E. (1999)  
 Social Analysis and Reporting Division, the Office of National Statistics (2002)

### 7.3 Data availability

Data on the perception of youth towards themselves (self-efficacy) and towards the community where they are now living in is insufficient at present. These two types of indicators are in fact important for us to comprehend how the social capitals generate among the youth.

**Table 7.2: Obtained indicators of social capital**

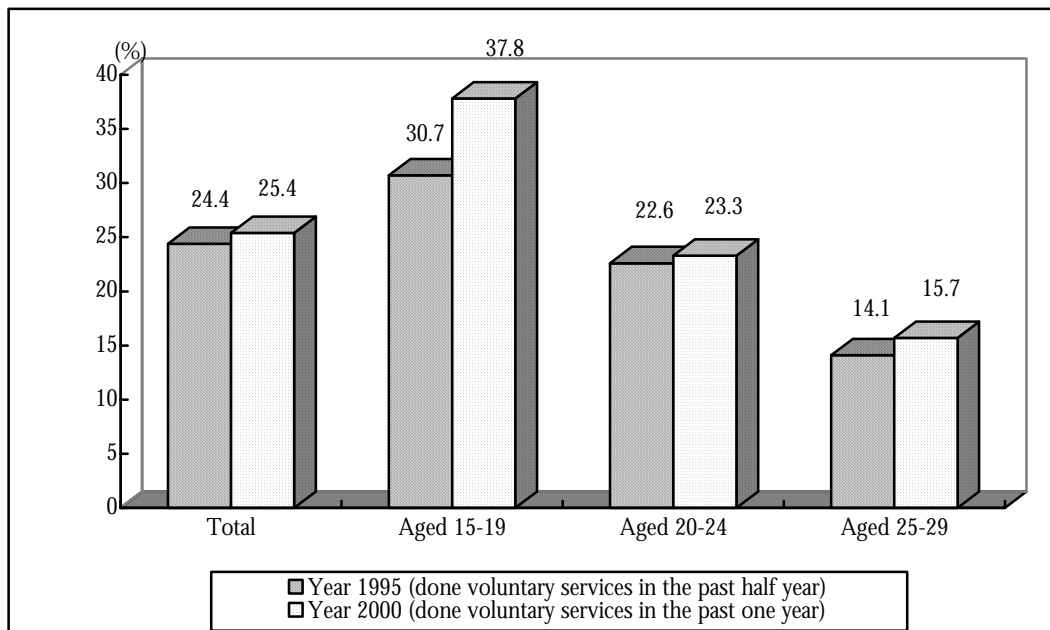
| <b>Dimensions</b>  | <b>Obtained Indicators</b>   | <b>Source</b> |
|--|--|---------------|
| Behaviour  | ■ Participation in voluntary services                              | ■ HKFYG       |
|  | ■ Reasons not do voluntary services                                | ■ HKFYG       |
|  | ■ Ways of donation   | ■ HKFYG       |
|  | ■ Social network participation rate (aged 15-24)                   | ■ HKFYG       |
|  | ■ Social network trust measurement (aged 15-24)                    | ■ HKFYG       |
|  | ■ Social network reciprocity (aged 15-24)                          | ■ HKFYG       |
| Relationship   | ■ Social network relationship (aged 15-24)                         | ■ HKFYG       |
|  | ■ Family Cohesion (Form 1- 4)                                      | ■ Shek (2000) |
| Self-efficacy  | ■ Attitudes towards government and Self-efficacy of Youth          | ■ HKFYG       |
| Attitudes towards others                                   | ■ Attitudes towards others   | ■ HKFYG       |
| Attitudes towards government and other social institutions | ■ Attitudes towards economic development and political development | ■ HKFYG       |

## 7.4 Discussion

### 7.4.1 Behavior

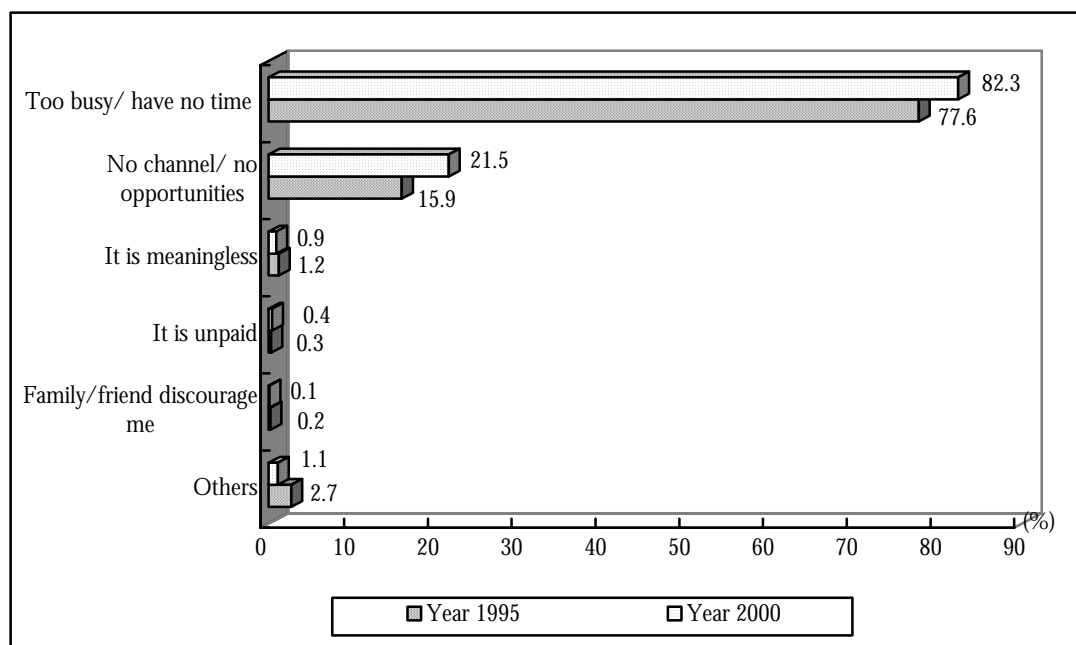
One of the key indicators showing the social cohesion of the youth to society was their degree of “giving to strangers”. According to the studies conducted by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (1995 and 2000c), it is hard to identify any changes in the involvement of youth in the voluntary services (24.4% in 1995 and 25.4% in 2000) (Figure 7.1). It was because the age groups and the duration of doing voluntary services that take into account were so different in the two studies. However, both studies indicated that the major reasons for the youth not doing voluntary services were that they were “too busy/ have no time” (77.6% in 1995 and 82.3% in 2000), as well as “no channel/ no opportunities” (15.9% in 1995 and 21.5% in 2000) (Figure 7.2). It seems that publicity of the ways to join volunteering services is needed in future so as to recruit more youngsters who are willing to take part in volunteering work.

**Figure 7.1: Participation in voluntary services (1995, 2000)**



Source: The HKFYG (1995 & 2000c)

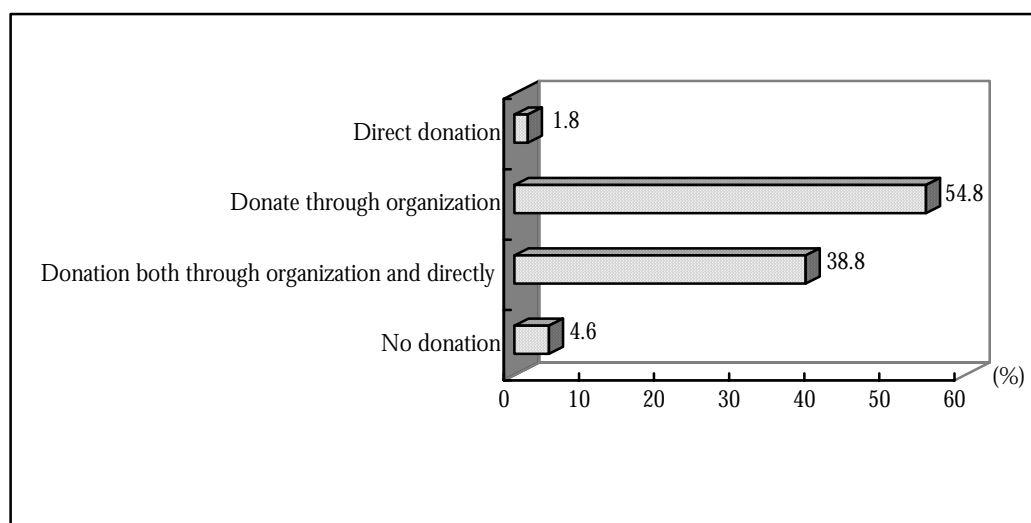
**Figure 7.2: Reasons for not doing voluntary services (1995, 2000)**



Source: The HKFYG (1995& 2000c)

In addition, many youngsters did participate in other forms of “giving to”, that is through donation. The findings of *A Study on Social Capital with regard to Giving, Volunteering and Participating* in 2002 reflected that over 95% of the respondents had given donation by different means. Over half of the respondents had “donated through organizations” (54.8%) and nearly 40% of them had donated both through organizations and directly to those in needed (38.8%) (Figure 7.3).

**Figure 7.3: Ways of donation (2002)**

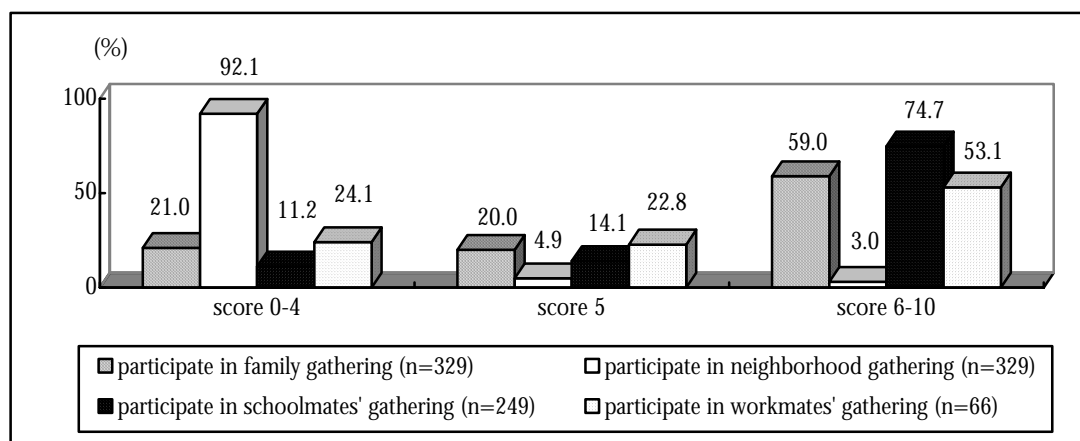


Source: The HKFYG (2002a)

In a macro sense, the attachment of the youth to society can be measured by their concern to society. One way to indicate this was their political participation rate. By comparing the voting rate of those aged 18 to 30 in the 1998 and 2000 Legislative Council elections, there showed a sharp decrease in the voting turnout rate (from 49.5% in 1998 to 37.3% in 2000).

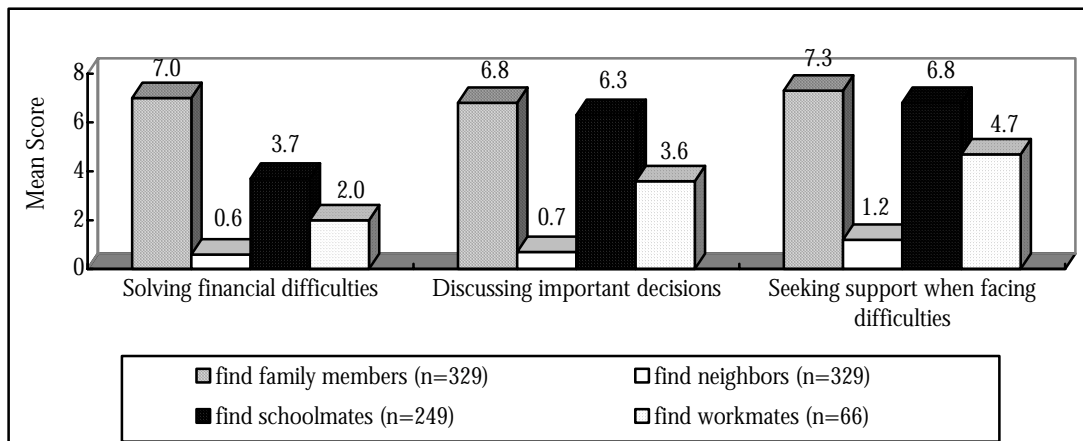
In a meso level, the social cohesion and trust can be measured by how much the youth devotes to the different kinds of social networks, as well as how much they seek help from such social networks. It seems that the involvement of youth in or their attachment to the neighborhood is far more limited than their involvement in other social networks such as family, school and workplace. The participation rate of youth in the neighborhood gatherings was the least as compared to their involvement in the family functions, as well as the functions organized by their schoolmates and workmates (Figure 7.4). Also, when measuring the social network trust and reciprocity, it was clear that the youth tended very rarely to find neighbors for assistance (Figure 7.5). In return, the youth also tended very rarely to give assistance to their neighbors, as compared to the relatively higher degree of attachment to their family members, schoolmates and workmates (Figure 7.6). It is interesting to observe that youth would most likely to seek help from the family members, while they most often would devote time and energy to deal with the issues/ problems of their friends.

**Figure 7.4: Social network participation rate (aged 15-24) (2002)**



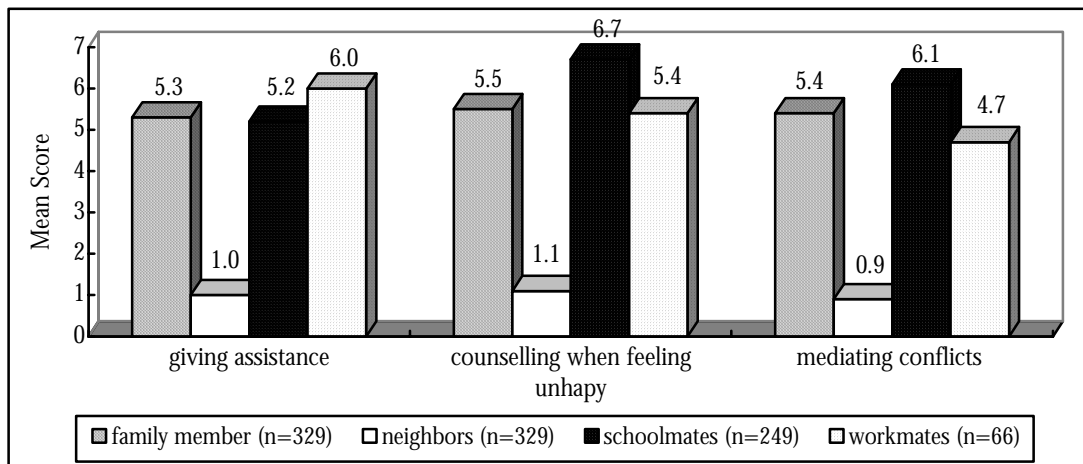
Note: Social participation rate: 0 score = never participate; 10 score = fully participate  
 Source: The HKFYG (2002b)

**Figure 7.5: Social network trust measurement (aged 15-24) (2002)**



Source: The HKFYG (2002b)

**Figure 7.6: Social network reciprocity (age 15-24) (2002)**



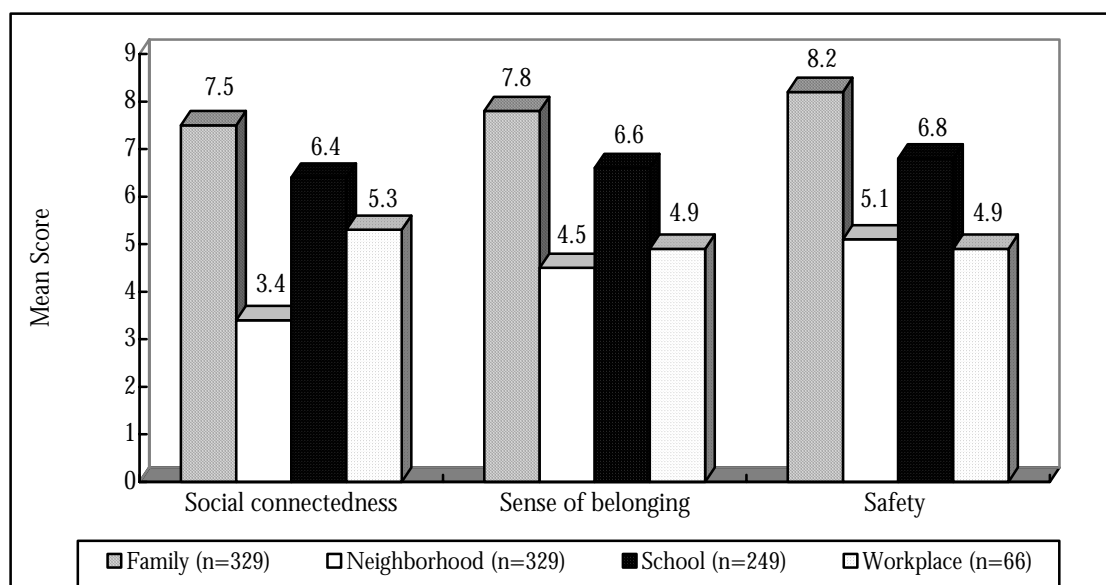
Source: The HKFYG (2002b)

#### 7.4.2 Relationship

Based on the pattern that youth was most likely to seek help from, as well as to devote time and energy to the different social networks, it was obvious that the social network relationship with neighborhood was the weakest ones, in terms of the social connectedness (mean score = 3.4), sense of belonging (mean score = 4.5) and safety (mean score = 5.1). In contrast, there was a strong network relationship with the family. The mean scores were 7.5, 7.8 and 8.2 respectively (Figure 7.7).



**Figure 7.7: Social network relationship (aged 15-24) (2002)**



Source: The HKFYG (2002b)

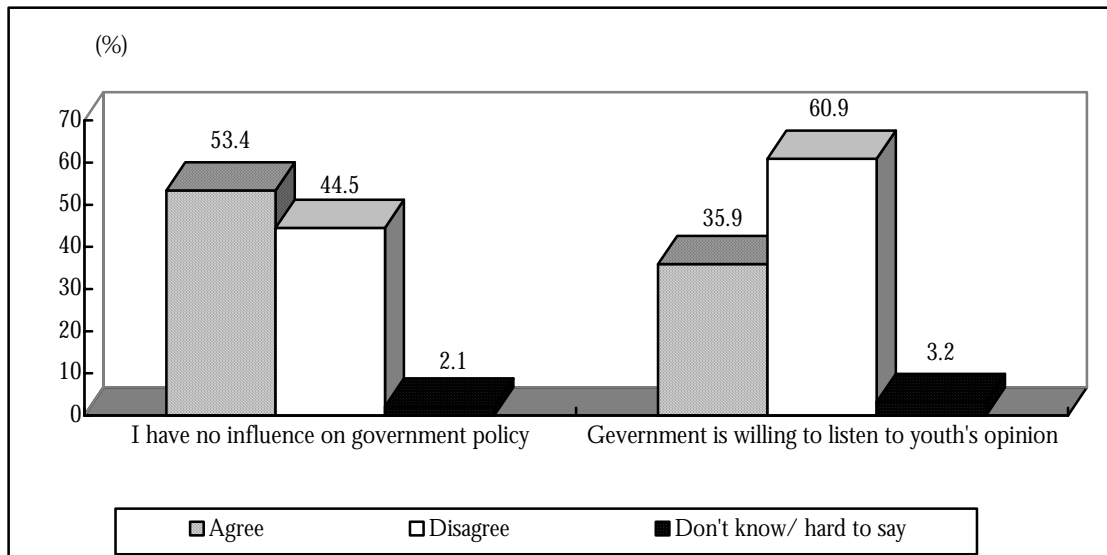
In addition, the findings of the study on *Adolescents' perceptions of family functioning* (Shek, 2000 & 2002) indicated that the adolescents in general had positive perceptions of their family functioning. Respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the following statements: support each others when in crisis (85.4%), family can solve most of the problems (79%), and accepted by the family members (76.6%). However, the findings of the study also alerted us that family functioning in the following areas need to be strengthened in the long run: (i) family members lacked communication; (ii) family members lacked mutual understanding; and (iii) family members lacked emotional responsiveness. The result were consistent to the findings of another study on *The Influences of Parents' Marital Relationship on the Emotion, Behavior and Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students* (Chan, 2000), which showed that only 48.7% of the respondents thought that they could “always” rely on family. It seems that more studies on the views of youth towards the quality of relationship among the family members were needed in future.

#### 7.4.3 Self-efficacy

As mentioned earlier, many youngsters are not interested in participating in social functions like election. One of the reasons for their low participation rate in politics is related to their low self-efficacy towards the influences on the government. According to *A Study on the Participation of Hong Kong Youth in Legislative Council Elections* (2000) claim that “they have no influence on government policy” (53.4%). Also, only about one-third of the respondents claim that “the government is willing to listen to the youths' opinion”

(35.9%). Not surprisingly, their perceived low self-efficacy may forestall their participation in society, which in return, may hamper the generation of trust and cohesion in society.

**Figure 7.8: Attitudes towards government and self-efficacy of Youth (2000)**

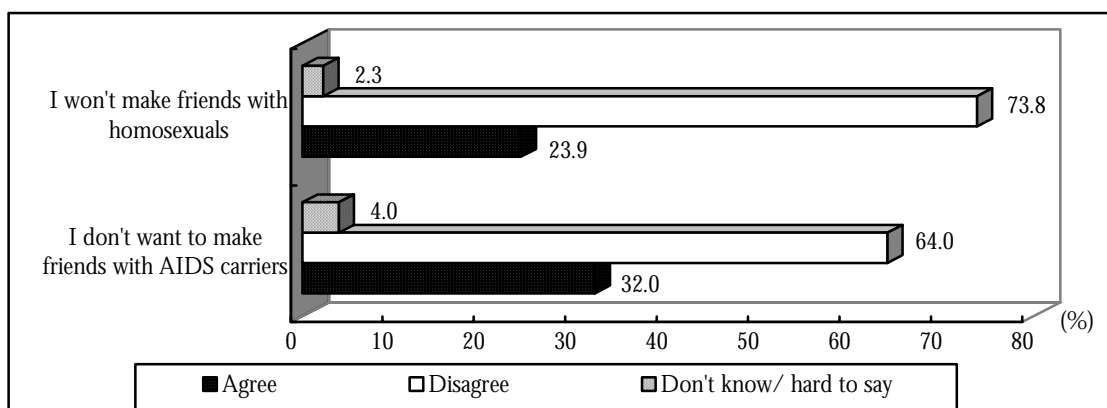


Note: Sample size: 756 aged 18-29  
Source: The HKFYG (2000b)

#### 7.4.4 Attitudes towards others

Although the observation in 7.4.1 indicates that many youngsters were willing to help others who were unknown to them, there were still rooms for improvement in their tolerance/acceptance towards those minority groups in society. According to the survey conducted by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (2000), over 30% of the respondents still “did not want to make friends with AIDS carriers” (32%). Also, over one-fifth of them “would not make friends with homosexuals” (23.9%) (Figure 7.9).

**Figure 7.9 Attitudes towards others (2000)**

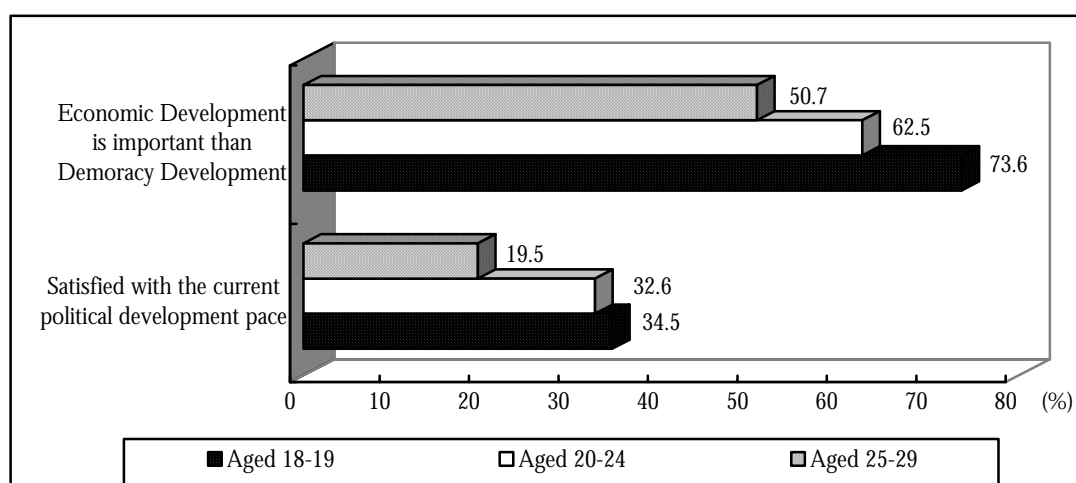


Source: The HKFYG (2000a)

#### 7.4.5 Attitudes towards government and other social institutions

Some youngsters were not satisfied with the current political development pace. It seems that the youth aged 25-29 were less satisfied with the current political development pace (19.5%), compared with those aged 18-19 (34.5%). Moreover, those aged 18-19 tended to think that economic development (73.6%) was more important than democracy development (50.7%) than those aged 25-29 (Figure 7.10). In fact, the attitudes of the youth towards the government might directly affect their participation in society, thus hampered the generation of trust and social cohesion. However, many studies at present mainly focused on the views of the youth towards specific issues, it is hard to understand comprehensively the views of youth towards the government and other social institutions in Hong Kong.

**Figure 7.10 Attitudes towards economic development and political development (2000)**



Source: The HKFYG (2000b)

## 7.5 Summary

Based on the foregoing discussions on “cultural capital” and “social capital”, it seems that the participation of youth in society could be further enhanced. Measures should be implemented to encourage them to participate in more active ways. It is because the lukewarm attitude and engagement of the youth towards society will not only weaken their ethnical identity of being Hongkongee/Chinese, but also lower the efficiency in generating social cohesion and trust in society. One of the possible ways is to provide channels or mechanisms to the youth to express their opinions and ensure that the government will listen to their opinion.

The nature of “social capital” and “cultural capital” can hardly be fully reflected without a comprehensive and systematic data bank. The above-mentioned data only reflects part of the phenomenon of youth related to their cultural/social participation as well as their attitudes to the society. It is hard to draw any direct and significant correlation between the behaviors and attitudes of the youth towards society from the foregoing discussions. It seems that a holistic approach as well as a longitudinal data collection practice should be developed to capture the cultural awareness, cultural identity, social cohesion and trust among the youth in future.

Also, for the measurement of social capital in particular, it seems that the views of the youth in the quality of family relationship as well as their perceptions towards the government and various social institutions need further exploration so as to grasp a comprehensive picture of the social cohesion of youth in society.