

Public Opinion Programme
The University of Hong Kong

***Public Opinion Survey on
The Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance
Household Survey and Focus Group Studies***

COMMISSIONED BY

TELEVISION AND ENTERTAINMENT LICENSING AUTHORITY
THE HONG KONG SAR GOVERNMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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I Preamble

i. Established in June 1991, the Public Opinion Programme (POP) was first under the Social Science Research Centre and then transferred to the Journalism and Media Studies Centre (JMSC) since May 2000. With the aims of collecting and studying public opinion on social and political issues that could be of interest and value to academics, the media, policy-makers and the general public, the Team provides quality survey services to various bodies.

ii. The survey, captioned “Public Opinion Survey on the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance” was commissioned by Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in July 2000. The objective of the survey is to gauge and analyze the prevailing standards of morality, decency and propriety that are generally accepted by members of the community and to collect the public’s views on the standards for article classification under the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance (Cap. 390) (COIAO). The questionnaire was designed by POP after consulting TELA while data analysis and interpretation were all entirely and independently carried out by the Research Team of POP.

II Research Design

i. The study, comprising two parts, was conducted between January and August 2001.

ii. The first part of the study was a door-to-door household survey. By the addresses randomly selected by the Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government, a total of about 1,800 Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above were successfully interviewed. After taking the number of refusal and incomplete cases into account, the effective response rate of this part was 54.0%, with a standard sampling error of less than 1.2%.

iii. The second part of the survey was focus group studies in which participants were drawn from eight different sectors in society, namely, professionals, social workers, teachers, parents, mass media practitioners, students aged 18 or above, concern groups and the general public with each group consisting of at least 40 members. The studies were conducted in the form of group discussions to collect their opinions on the standard of article classification under the COIAO. A total of 19 focus group sessions were held achieving a sample of 327 successful cases.

III Summary of Key Findings

Summary of Findings of the Household Survey

i. Amongst the 38 articles selected for this survey, more than half of the household respondents considered that 13 articles as listed below should not be allowed for publication and should be classified as Class III articles: 1) The photo depicting filthy scenes (79.6%) ; 2) The photo depicting the close up of a female sex organ (76.4%) ; 3) The photo depicting sexual intercourse between a male and a female (sex organs partly matted) (72.8%) ; 4) The photo depicting a female performing oral sex for a male (sex organs partly matted) (72.1%) ; 5) The photo depicting a male sex organ in turgid state (68.3%) ; 6) The photo depicting a male sex organ in non-turgid state (67.1%) ; 7) The photo depicting Sadism and Machoism 66.6%) ; 8) The photo depicting rape and murder scenes during riots (66.5%) ; 9) The comic depicting the process of sexual intercourse between two males (62.8%) ; 10)

The comic depicting bestiality (61.5%); 11) The comic depicting group sex (61.1%); 12) The photo depicting female breasts and nipples (52.3%); and 13) The photo depicting bloody/dismembered body (50.4%) .

ii. At the same time, more than half of the respondents considered that the following 14 articles should be published or displayed to adults, i.e. the articles should be classified as Class II: 1) The comic depicting ghosts and phantoms (62.3%); 2) The photo depicting nude female (sex organs partly matted) (60.4%); 3) The photo depicting female breasts (nipples matted) (59.5%); 4) The column introducing pornographic VCD (58.2%); 5) The comics depicting violence (58.2%); 6) The article depicting two model dolls having sexual intercourse (57.1%); 7) The literal description of sexual intercourse (56.2%); 8) The introduction of sex-facilitating products (56.2%); 9) The sarcastic sex cartoon (54.1%); 10) The comic depicting necrophilism (52.8%); 11) The comic that glorified triad societies (52.4%); 12) The column introducing pornographic websites (52.2%); 13) The press advertisement for sex services (51.4%); and 14) The sex service column (50.2%) .

iii. The findings revealed that more than 65 per cent of household respondents cited "protecting the teenagers" as the reason for classifying the sample articles as Class II (65.1%), whilst over 70 per cent of the household respondents classified the sample articles as Class III primarily because their contents were "extremely repulsive" (73.7%).

iv. Results also revealed that if newspapers, family magazines or comics contained literal descriptions or pictures of bestiality, necrophilism, voyeurism, incest, child pornography, SM, rape or gang rape, extremely bloody and violent contents, respondents generally tended to classify them as Class III articles, i.e. they should be prohibited from release to the public.

v. Besides, it was found that if free gifts were given out with respective articles, there was an apparent increase in the number of respondents who classified the articles as Class III when compared to their original classification without the presence of the free gifts. At the same time, there was a sharp decrease in the number of respondents who classified the articles as Class I when those free gifts were offered.

Summary of Finding of the Focus Group Studies

i. Amongst the 38 articles in this survey, more than half of the participants considered that the following 4 articles should be classified as Class III, i.e. to be prohibited from release to the general public. These articles are: 1) The photo depicting filthy scenes (66.1%) ; 2) The photo depicting the close up of a female sex organ (63.2%) ; 3) The photo depicting rape and murder scenes during riots (53.1%) ; and 4) The photo depicting a human body with exposed intestines (51.8%) .

ii. On the other hand, more than half of the focus group participants considered that the following 23 sample articles could be published or displayed to adults: 1) The column introducing pornographic VCD (79.4%) ; 2) The photo depicting female breasts and nipples (78.8%) ; 3) The photo depicting nude female (sex organs partly matted)(78.3%) ; 4) The column introducing pornographic websites (77.8%) ; 5) The photo depicting a male sex organ in non-turgid state (71.9%) ; 6) The comic depicting sexual intercourse between two males (70.6%) ; 7) The photo depicting a male sex organ in turgid state (70.2%) ; 8) The introduction of sex-facilitating products (69.9%) ; 9) The article depicting two model dolls having sexual intercourse (69.1%) ; 10) The photo depicting violence (67.8%) ; 11) The sex service column (66.7%) ; 12) The comic depicting group sex (65.8%) ; 13) The photo depicting female breast (nipples matted)(60.9%) ; 14) The photo depicting a female performing oral sex for a male (sex organs partly matted) (60.7%) ; 15) The comic depicting ghosts and phantoms (59.7%) ; 16) The comic depicting bestiality (58.9%) ; 17) The literal description of sexual intercourse (58.2%) ; 18) The press advertisement for sex services (57.7%) ; 19) The comic depicting necrophilism (57.5%) ; 20) The photo depicting sexual intercourse between a male and a female (sex organs partly matted) (56.9%) ; 21) The sarcastic sex cartoon(54.1%) ; 22) The photo depicting voyeurism (54.0%) ; and 23) The photo depicting Sadism and Machoism (52.9%) .

iii. Results of the focus group studies revealed that 77% of the participants classified the articles as Class II mainly for reason of “protecting the teenagers” (77.4%), while 76% of the respondents classified the articles as Class III because their contents were “extremely repulsive”. These findings were very much consistent with those obtained from the household survey.

iv. Same as the household respondents, views of the participants in general changed somehow if free gifts were offered with certain articles tested. Statistics

also revealed that participants generally showed no inclination to change their stances on article classification drastically after listening to TELA officers' briefing on the Ordinance.

v. In general, the majority of the focus group participants considered that the prevailing yardsticks of article classification after taking into account of the guidelines stated in the COIAO (Section 10(1)(a)-(e)) were too lenient. Only a very small portion of participants considered the present standards too harsh (1.3%): while about a quarter of them felt that the classification yardsticks were properly set (25.7%) and more than 60% of them opined that they were too lenient (62.8%).

vi. It was found that "the morality standards of the general public" and "the influences of the article on children and teenagers" were most frequently cited by the focus group participants as the guiding principles for the purpose of article classification.