LITTLE PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN HONG KONG

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Abstract - "Little people" are those who have extremely short stature as they suffer from rare bone diseases. They are commonly known as "dwarves" or people with dwarfism". Dwarfism is generally regarded as a type of rare disease for its extremely small odds (~1 in 15,000). On account of its rarity, dwarfism, unlike other types of disability, has attracted relatively little attention from the general public and in various academic fields (e.g. architecture, psychology and sociology) except medical science. In view of the extant research gaps, this study aims to investigate the social and physical challenges facing the little people in Hong Kong, Between November 2017 and July 2018, ten little people or their family members participated in in-depth interviews and a questionnaire survey with 523 members of the general public was conducted. The findings of the project reveal that although Hong Kong's built environment has been designed barrier-free pursuant to the prevailing building standards, those standards do not cater for the special anthropometric characteristics of little people. As a result, little people face a lot of challenges when using built facilities. From the social perspective, Hong Kong's general public still have quite many misconceptions and preconceptions about little people. These wrong beliefs often lead to discriminatory attitudes and behaviour against little people. As indicated by the project findings, we are still far away from providing a discrimination-free and barrier-free living environment for the little people in Hong Kong. To make Hong Kong society more inclusive to the little people, there is a need for further tailored actions.

Keywords - Dwarfism, Little People, Discrimination, Physical Barriers, Disability, Hong Kong