

Hong Kong/ Society

Nearly half of Hong Kong parents of autistic children have witnessed them being picked on or told to behave, survey shows

Charity calls for more understanding and integration with wider society



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Nearly half of Hong Kong parents with autistic children have witnessed them being bullied or told off for being naughty, a survey has found.

Activists said the discrimination stemmed from a lack of public understanding and integration, and called for more targeted support for autistic people in this Wednesday's budget announcement.

The poll, by the charity Treats, surveyed 1,025 members of the public and 374 parents of autistic children, between last November and January.

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Of the parents surveyed, 45 per cent said their children were made fun of or bullied while participating in community activities, or criticised as naughty or badly brought up, by relatives or friends.

Even more parents – 62.3 per cent – said they experienced unfriendly comments or stares when taking their children out.

Vienna Ho Siu-lan, whose son, Matthew Yu Jo-tong, is autistic, recalled a woman insulting her son about seven years ago when he was in Secondary Two.

The middle-aged woman, who was holding a trekking pole, then boarded the train and gave Yu an unfriendly stare, so Ho hinted at her son, who immediately gave up his seat.

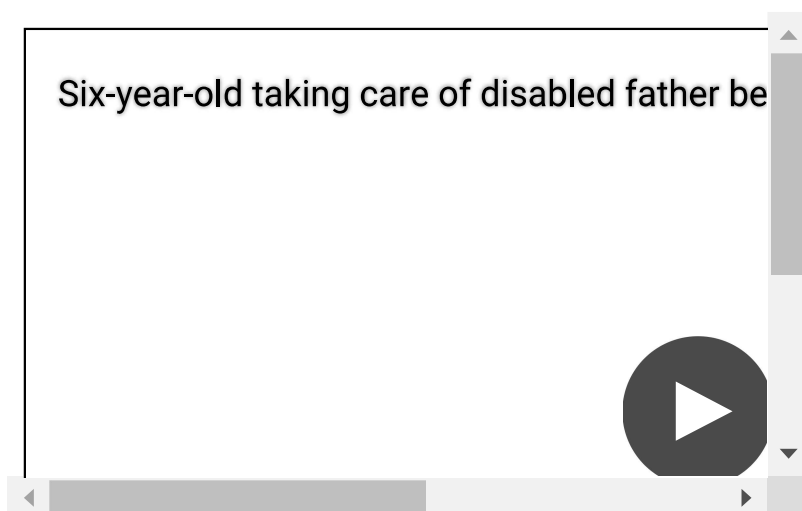
“The woman then complained to her husband about how my son is so young yet hogging seats and how he was not brought up well,” Ho said.

Ho explained her son had special needs and that she wished the woman would not verbally attack him, to which the lady replied: “If he is sick, don’t take him out.”

The survey also found 78.1 per cent of parents said their children had few friends in wider society.

While 92 per cent of the public surveyed believed autistic people had the right to participate in society and 76.5 per cent were willing to befriend people with the condition, about 40 per cent of respondents admitted they did not know how to get along with autistic people.

Only half of the public respondents said they had contact with autistic people.



Treats’ head of service Mabel Lo Mei-po said current support for autistic people tended to focus on their academic education and training for social skills, but there were few opportunities for them to be in contact with the wider public.

“With no opportunities to meet, misunderstanding and prejudice towards the autistic will continue to exist, which will lead to discrimination,” she said.

Treats’ executive director Kris Tong Sung-man called on the government to include in the upcoming budget more activities to promote integration between autistic people and mainstream society, in the community and at workplaces.



“For example, some mainstream community or youth centres might say their activities are not suitable for autistic people to participate,” she said.

According to a report released by the Census and Statistics Department in 2014, about 10,000 people reported living with autism, but experts believed the real number of autistic people was much higher.