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## Abused wife law praised <sup>166</sup>

Women's groups and social workers yesterday praised proposed legislation which will offer more legal protection for battered wives and abused children in their own homes.

The proposal allows for battered wives to apply for a court injunction forbidding a husband or co-habitant from molesting or assaulting them.

It also allows them to prohibit the husband from entering the home on a temporary basis until a court is satisfied further violence is unlikely because the couple have either reached a reconciliation or decided to separate.

A woman doctor who is involved with battered wives and who was chairman of the steering committee for Hongkong's first refuge for battered women, said the sooner the law is introduced the better.

Battered women are more prepared to ask for medical, legal and social help than 20 or 30 years ago and society in turn has been able to offer them tangible help, she said.

"Legislation, if passed, offers the battered women protection and time to think over the situation clearly so they can decide whether they want to reconcile or separate," she said.

The director of the Christian Family Service Centre, Miss Nora Yau, also expressed her support for the proposed legislation.

She said some battered women with no children would leave home if they felt it would do any good.

But for women with young

children, this is often impractical and the result is they remain at home knowing of the danger of the assaults being repeated.

Miss Yau said the legislation would provide protection for women and children under such circumstances — although the relief would only be temporary.

She said there had been an increase in recent years of cases reported to social workers of women and children being subject to violence at home.

The chairman of the Hongkong Council of Women, Miss Elvisinia Siu, in supporting the proposals, said public education on it is very important to prevent future problems.

"We are a bit concerned, for example, that public housing estate managers will say it is nonsense for the owner of the house not to be allowed to go back to his home."

Most of the abuse cases happen in public housing estates.

A lawyer involved in the steering committee for the refuge said the proposed legislation will bring Hongkong in line with other countries like the United Kingdom.

A British court usually grants a three-month injunction forbidding the husband to molest, interfere or assault the spouse, or in more serious cases, a husband is not allowed to enter the house.

At the end of that period, the wife can apply for an extension of another three months if necessary.