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51pc of Pakistanis in HK live in poverty

Study finds one in every four people from six ethnic groups in the city is poor

The financial plight of Rehena Iffā's family of four, including her parents, is typical of that of many other Pakistanis in Hong Kong, where 51 per cent of them live in poverty. No other ethnic minority has such a high poverty rate.

A wage of HK\$10,000 a month sustains Iffā and her family. Rent eats up HK\$3,400 each month, while food costs another HK\$3,000, she said.

Pakistanis such as Iffā are far from alone in feeling poverty's sting in the city. Figures show that close to one in every four people from an ethnic minority in Hong Kong is poor, according to a report, based on census statistics, compiled by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service after *ethnic minorities* were excluded from the government's poverty report published in September.

"The figures are not surprising. Intergenerational poverty and poverty among those already with work is very serious [among *ethnic minorities*]," said Yip Ho-ling, who works for the advocacy group Unison.

The council report covers the Pakistani, Nepali, Indian, Indonesian, Filipino and Thai communities. With their numbers rising steadily, these groups account for 113,815 people, or 1.7 per cent of the population. About 24 per cent of them are poor – a poverty rate 3 percentage points higher than that of the rest of Hong Kong. Foreign domestic workers were not included in the statistics.

Compared with the 25 per cent of poor children in the general population, 32 per cent of ethnic minority children are poor. And among poor ethnic minority families, more than 60 per cent had at least one member in full-time work, while only 41 per cent among the poor within the general population had jobs.

Iffā's financial plight is common, said Lo Kai-chung from HKSKH Lady MacLehose Centre, which provides services for about 3,000 Pakistanis. Poverty would only get worse once Iffā started having children, Lo said.

Yip was concerned the council's study would be ignored. "We worry that the government will not make policies. There are in fact things which can be done right now," she said, pointing out that NGOs had made useful

proposals that the government could study and use immediately.

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