

Women's Commission
**“What do Women and Men in Hong Kong Think about the
Status of Women at Home, Work and in Social Environments?”**
Survey Findings

**Part One: What do Women and Men in Hong Kong Think about the
Status of Women at Home?**

Background

With a view to understanding the current status of women and different perceptions between women and men towards women's status in the aspects of family contribution, economic participation and community engagement in Hong Kong, the Women's Commission (WoC) commissioned a large-scale survey to Policy 21 Limited which was carried out between February and May 2010. A total of 3 002 Hong Kong residents within a scientifically selected sample were successfully enumerated by means of face-to-face interviews, constituting a response rate of 66%.

2. The target respondents of this survey were Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above (excluding foreign domestic helpers). Among the 3 002 respondents, 43.3% (1 299) were males and 56.7% (1 703) were females, with age distribution as follow: 18-34 (24.7%), 35-54 (37.8%) and 55 or above (37.5%).

3. The survey findings released this time will focus on what women and men in Hong Kong think about the status of women at home. The findings on what women and men think about women's economic and social participation will be released in due course. This executive summary sets out the major findings on the status of women at home, which are divided into four parts –

- Concepts and present situation of distribution of family duties
- Patterns of making important decisions and money management between spouses
- Perception and attitude towards marriage and child birth
- Status of women at home and level of happiness

4. The data below have been adjusted proportionally with reference to gender, age, location of residence, type of housing as well as completion of/refusal to interview. As such, the gender and age profiles of the sample are in line with the population data of Hong Kong compiled by the Census and Statistics Department in 2009 and can reflect the general profile of Hong Kong's population aged 18 or above.

1. Concepts and Present Situation of Distribution of Family Duties

Both women and men generally agreed that both sexes should contribute to the household income, which reflected that the concept of “male being the breadwinner of the family” was no longer prevalent

1.1 The survey findings revealed that over 80% of women and men agreed that “both women and men should contribute to the household income”, and the percentage of females showing agreement was 3.3% higher than their male counterparts (male: 80.4% and female: 83.7%). As shown in the findings, it was generally agreed that both men and women should contribute to the household’s finance, reflecting a change from the traditional concept that men should be the breadwinner of families and their primary duties of dealing with external affairs. At the same time, it showed that the society had generally accepted the change in women’s economic role.

- Regardless of their status of economic activity, both males and females were inclined to agree that “both women and men should contribute to the household income”.
- Among males, working men had the highest percentage of agreement towards the notion (83.3%), while the lowest proportion was found in male retirees (72.8%).

The concept of “women as homemakers” was still prevalent as men’s willingness to share household and childcare duties was rather low

1.2 According to the survey, only less than a half (48.4%) of the society considered that men should take up a larger share of household duties than they do presently, while women outnumbered men significantly in showing agreement with this notion (female: 52.3% and male: 43.9%). Among them, working women (57.4%) and unengaged men (46.2%) were more likely to agree that men should take up a larger share of household duties than they did at present.

- When analyzed by age, the findings revealed that, irrespective of age, over half of females agreed that men should take up a larger share of household work than they did now. Among them, young women (aged 18-34) had the highest rate of agreement (56.4%). As regards men, it was also the young ones aged 18-34 who had the lowest rate of agreement (42.2%).
- When analyzed by marital status, the findings revealed that among those men who agreed that “men should take up a larger share of household work than they do now”, the highest proportion were found in married or cohabiting men (47.5%) and the lowest proportion were found in single men (39.2%).

1.3 The survey findings also revealed that women remained largely responsible for household duties. Combining the two sets of figures, the results showed that the community, men and women alike, still considered generally that women should be

responsible for housework. It was worth noting that even among females, there were only 52.3% who opined that men should take up more household duties. The results suggested that the concept of “women as homemakers” was still prevalent.

1.4 The society’s view on whether “men should take on more responsibility in childcaring” was similar to that on sharing household duties. While over a half of females (51.2%) agreed that men should take on more responsibility in child caring than they did now, only 43.0% of males agreed to it. At the same time, the survey findings revealed that 70.6% of females were in fact taking up the responsibility of childcaring. The results showed that it was generally accepted by the community that childcaring was still women’s responsibility.

Gender stereotype was commonly found in the division of household work

1.5 The survey found that women and men took on obviously different types of duties in their division of household work, which showed that certain gender stereotypes existed as far as division of household work was concerned. The results indicated that women were mainly responsible for the chores of daily life and assumed the role of a carer. The major types of household duties that were being taken up mainly by females included –

- childcaring;
- cleaning, doing laundry;
- grocery shopping, preparing meals;
- taking care of elderly members in the family; and
- taking care of chronically ill/disabled family members, etc..

Men were mainly responsible for some minor repairs in the division of household work.

As for the duties involving both men and women (but still with a female preponderance), they included –

- Supervising domestic helpers; and
- Handling other daily household affairs (e.g. paying bill, handling miscellaneous matters, etc.).

2. Patterns of Making Important Decision and Money Management between Spouses

The situation of decision-making in family matters revealed that it was still prevalent for women to be the family carer

2.1 According to the survey, most people said they would decide together with their spouse/companion in family matters like –

- Location of residence;
- Family (childbirth) planning;
- Major financial decisions (e.g. investment);

- Family activities (e.g. local activities or overseas vacation); and
- Taking care of elderly family members who live in the same household.

2.2 It was noteworthy that the question of who decided in family matters depended mainly on the nature of the matter. Matters decided finally by women were mostly those concerning daily routines, meaning that it was still common for women to assume the role of family carer. Such daily matters included –

- Household decisions;
- Daily childcare; and
- Education and extracurricular activities arrangements for child(ren), etc..

Most people had the right to manage money, but almost 20% of women had no say

2.3 As regards family financial management, the proportion of persons who said that they and their spouses/companions had savings together and had equal rights of using all/a portion of the money was 43.6%, while almost one fifth of the them (19.1%) stated that they were completely independent from their spouses/companions financially. According to the survey, almost one fifth of the population (18.7%) said that the male spouse was responsible for managing and allocating money, of which 86.3% of these women had no income at all. In comparison, only 14.5% stated that the female spouse was responsible for managing and allocating money, which suggested that the authority of family financial management still lied mostly in the hands of men.

2.4 Analyzed by economic activity, although there were almost 30% of working women (27.8%) and homemakers (29.3%) who indicated that they and their spouses/companions had savings together and had equal rights of using all of the money, there were at the same time nearly 30% of female homemakers (29.2%) who expressed that the male spouse was responsible for managing money and allocated their share, which showed a much higher proportion as compared to working women (6.6%).

2.5 Excluding those persons who had no income, although the percentage of males responsible for allocating money (15.3%) was still higher than that of females (14.2%), the discrepancy had slightly narrowed. This reflected that where men and women were both contributing to household income, women's say in money management would enhance correspondingly.

2.6 As for major financial decisions (e.g. investment), 53.3% of persons indicated that they and their spouses/companions would decide together. However, 20.6% of men responded that they often had the final say whereas 19.2% of women said that their spouses/companions often made the final decision. This showed that men was still dominant over women in financial decision-making.

Most people had a saving habit and those not having a saving habit were so because of “lack of ability”

2.7 80.4% of women and 78.1% of men indicated that they had a saving habit, with most of them having jobs. The higher the education level and personal income, the higher was the percentage of having a saving habit. Irrespective of personal income level, more females than males indicated that they had a saving habit. Most people (male: 86.2% and female: 84.4%) indicated that they knew clearly about their spouses/companions' saving condition.

2.8 Among those who did not have a saving habit, the main reason was “lack of ability” (male: 75.7% and female: 81.7%). When analyzed by personal income, it was found that 71.6% of females who did not have any savings due to lack of ability had no income, whereas the corresponding figure for males was 49.9%.

2.9 The survey also revealed that more than a quarter of males and females (male: 25.1% and female: 26.2%) worried about their retirement life.

3. Perceptions and Attitude towards Marriage and Child Birth

Men and women had different preferences in choice of spouse

3.1 The survey found that the degree of acceptance in age difference between men and women regarding choice of spouse was still influenced by traditional values. When asked whether they would accept a spouse older than themselves, most women (88.9%) were more willing to accept an older spouse, while the majority of men (88.9%) were more willing to accept a younger companion.

3.2 Among those women who indicated acceptance towards a younger spouse, only less than one-fifth (18.8%) of them accepted an age difference of 5 years and over. On the other hand, among those men who indicated acceptance towards an elder spouse, 30% of them accepted an age difference of 5 years and over. The results reflected that men had a more receptive attitude in accepting age difference than women regarding choice of spouse.

3.3 More than half (52%) of the persons, particular among males, considered it acceptable to marry a divorced person (male: 54.5% and female: 49.8%). At the same time, more women than men (female: 24.7% and male: 19.5%) indicated that it was unacceptable to marry a divorced person. Receptiveness was the highest among men aged 35-54 (59.6%) and women aged 18-34 (57.7%).

3.4 More women considered objective factors such as education level and social status to be among the major considerations for choosing a spouse (female: 51.8% and male: 42.0%).

- When analyzed by personal income, it was found that the number of women who held this view did not decrease as their income increases. The income

group of \$20,000 or above (female: 63.9% and male: 52.6%) had the highest number of persons agreeing with this view. The results indicated that higher-income women tended to focus more on objective factors when choosing a spouse.

- When analyzed by age, it was found that the number of persons who considered objective factors to be among the major considerations for marriage decreases as their age increased.

Same-sex relationship was still generally unacceptable in the society

3.5 Concerning the acceptability of same-sex relationship in the society, over 70% (72.4%) of persons said they found same-sex relationship unacceptable. More women (13.7%) than men (8.5%) accepted same-sex relationship, but they were still a minority. A relatively higher proportion of those who indicated acceptance of same-sex relationship were in the younger age group of 18-34 years old. Among them, more women (22.6%) than men (11.8%) expressed acceptance. This notwithstanding, 66.8% of males and 64.1% of females in this age group indicated that they did not accept same-sex relationship.

More men thought that marriage led to happiness

3.6 More men (37.6%) than women (32.5%) agreed that married people were generally happier than the unmarried. In opposite, more women (34.1%) than men (27.4%) disagreed with this view. The married or cohabiting cohort (with or without child(ren)) (39.3%) were more likely than the other groups to think that married people were usually happier than the unmarried.

Acceptance towards singlehood was on the high side

3.7 Over 40% of persons (irrespective of gender) felt comfortable with being single and had no plans of getting married (male: 42.3% and female: 41.5%), outnumbering those who did not feel this way (male: 31.4% and female: 32.3%).

3.8 The results reflected that women today did not look forward to marriage as much as in the past. The concept of marriage seemed to be weakening, and singlehood, on the other hand, had become increasingly acceptable to the community.

Nearly 50% of females thought that life without a child was empty

3.9 More women than men agreed that life without having a child was empty (male: 37.9% and female: 44.7%). Most of those agreeing were married or cohabiting; and among them those with child(ren) displayed the highest percentage of agreement (male: 47.1% and female: 54.3%). The never-married cohort had the lowest percentage of agreeing with the statement (male: 21.5% and female: 22.1%).

Social acceptance of single mothers was rather low

3.10 Over 40% of males (45.6%) and over half of females (53.9%) found it unacceptable for a woman to give birth to a child and had no intention to get married. Only the younger age group (aged 18-35) had greater acceptance for unwed mothers, with 39.9% men and 34.8% women. However, there were still 33% of males and 47.9% of females in this age group who found the statement unacceptable.

Nearly half of the people accepted cohabitation relationship, with more men showing acceptance than women

3.11 Over a half of males (53.6%) stated that “cohabitation without the intention of getting married” was acceptable, but only 38.2% of females found it acceptable. On the precondition that marriage would be an eventuality, the idea of “cohabitation before marriage” gained a slightly higher level of acceptance (40.9%) among females.

- When analyzed by age, the findings revealed that the number of persons showing acceptance towards cohabitation got lower as their age increased. In the age group of 18-34, 67.6% men and 49.7% women agreed with cohabitation without getting married. But in the age group of 55 or above, only 33.5% men and 24.8% women indicated such acceptance.

Where a married couple could not live together harmoniously, women were more inclined than men to choose divorce as a solution

3.12 On attitude towards divorce, the survey found that both men and women tend to agree that divorce was the best solution for a married couple who cannot live together harmoniously provided that they do not have children. Among them, more women (56.1%) than men (47.3%) supported divorce as a solution.

- Analyzed by age, the findings showed that more women than men (irrespective of age) considered “divorce was usually the best solution for a married couple who cannot live together harmoniously provided that they do not have children”. Females aged 35-54 were the cohort with the highest percentage of agreement with this view (63.8%). The percentage of persons aged 55 or above indicating agreement dropped substantially to around 40% (male: 38.2% and female: 43.9%).

3.13 However, where a married couple had children, people tended to disagree that divorce was the best solution. Only 26.8% of males and 28.6% of females accepted divorce as a solution.

4. Women's Status at Home and Level of Happiness

Nearly 30% of persons thought that male supremacy still existed in families nowadays

4.1 While more than a half of the society considered that male supremacy did not exist within a family context nowadays, 35% of them opined that it still existed in our families. More women than men agreed that male supremacy existed in their families (male: 32.8% and female: 36.8%).

- Irrespective of age, more men than women disagreed with the statement. The older the men, the higher the percentage of disagreement was found.
- As for women, it was noteworthy that young females aged 18-34 were the cohort with the highest percentage of agreement with the statement (41.2%). Besides, the proportion of single women who agreed with the statement (44.3%) was the highest among all marital statuses.

The community showed satisfaction towards women's mediocre status at home, which reflected that gender awareness should be strengthened in the society

4.2 Men were invited to rate the status of their spouses/companions at home while women were also asked to rate their own status (from a 1 to 5 point scale). The findings showed that both women's self-rating and men's evaluation of the status of their spouses/companions at home were not particularly high (3.6 on average). The findings also revealed that the evaluation of men on their spouses/companions (3.66) was higher than the self-evaluation of women (3.57).

- When analyzed by marital status, the findings revealed that the self-evaluation of single women (3.51) was lower than that of married or cohabiting women (3.61).
- Analyzed by income, it was revealed that the higher the personal income, the higher the score was (except that the score given by those with no income was higher than that by those with personal income below \$10,000). The self-evaluation of single women on their own status at home scores consistently within the range of 3.4 to 3.5, whereas the self-evaluation of the cohort with personal incomes of HK\$ 20,000 scored significantly higher at 3.8.

4.3 In rating their level of satisfaction (from a 1 to 5 point scale) concerning women's status at home, the findings revealed that the satisfaction level concerning women's status at home (average score was 3.86) was higher than the evaluation of women's status at home. The results indicated that the society tended to accept the mediocre status of women at home, which reflected that gender awareness needed to be strengthened.

Women were in general happier than men

4.4 The survey also looked into the level of self-reported happiness of people in their lives in overall terms (from a 1 to 7 point score). Generally speaking, more than 70% of persons considered that they lead a happy life, with females (75.4%) slightly outnumbered males (71.4%) in this regard.

- When analyzed by age, the findings showed that the youngest cohort (aged 18-34), irrespective of gender, had a higher average score of happiness than the cohorts aged 35-54 and above 55 (male: 4.93/4.87/4.79; female: 5.10/4.93/4.81). While the average score of happiness declined with age, women had a higher average score than men in any age group.
- When analyzed by gender and status of economic activities, the findings showed that women in retirement had the lowest average score of happiness (4.77) while those in school made the highest score (5.30). When a gender comparison was made, it was found that women had a higher average score of happiness than men, except in the case of home-makers where the score of female home-makers (4.91) was slightly lower than that of male home-makers (4.98). Other than the above case, women had a higher score of happiness than men.
- An analysis by gender and marital status revealed that the average happiness score of women in all cohorts were higher than those of men except for “women who are married/cohabiting without child(ren)” (4.87). As for men, the “divorced/separated or widowed” cohort had the lowest average score of happiness (4.46) whereas the cohort of “married/cohabiting and having child(ren)” (4.94) had the highest score. For women, the cohort of “divorced/separated or widowed” had the lowest average score of happiness (4.65), whereas the cohort of “never-married” and “married/cohabiting and having a child” had the highest score (both 5.03).