

## **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 Three: What do Women and Men in Hong Kong Think about the Status of Women at Work?**

##### **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. Further to the survey findings on the perception of women and men in Hong Kong towards women's status at home released in late November 2010 and that towards women's status in social environments released in early January 2011, WoC would like to announce today the third part of the findings on the perception of women and men in Hong Kong towards women's status in the workplace.

4. The survey findings released this time will focus on how women and men in Hong Kong think about the status of women at work and their economic participation. This executive summary, consisting of the following four parts, sets out the major findings on women's status in the workplace –

- Perception of the society towards women's participation at work
- Sexual discrimination against women in the workplace
- Factors hindering women from entering the job market and the implementation of family-friendly employment practices
- Women's status in the workplace and their level of happiness

5. 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.

## **I. Perception of the society towards women's participation at work**

**It was a common view that employment made women independent. Nevertheless, women had to sacrifice more than men in order to be successful**

1.1 Concerning social perception towards working women, the survey revealed that over 80% (82.2%) of the respondents agreed that "having a job was the best way for a woman to be independent". It suggested that the public generally agreed that there was a direct relationship between participation at work and independence for women.

1.2 Almost 60% (57.1%) of people agreed that "women had to sacrifice more than men in order to achieve career success". On the other hand, less than 40% (37.4%) considered it more difficult for women than men to succeed in career.

1.3 66.3% of people agreed that "an increase in the number of successful women was a positive social phenomenon", but there was a wide discrepancy between women and men in their responses to this proposition. The percentage of women indicating agreement (72.1%) was higher than that of men (59.6%) by over 10 percentage points, which showed that men had a more traditional gender concept than women.

**Women were commonly stereotyped as family carers**

1.4 When considering women's employment vis-a-vis their family duties, over half of the society (50.4%) considered that "women should focus more on family than work", and almost 40% of people (38.9%) agreed that "men's job was to earn money while women's job was to do household work and take care of the family". The findings revealed that women were commonly stereotyped as family carers.

- *In response to the proposition that "men's job was to earn money while women's job was to do household work and take care of the family", men's percentage of agreement was significantly higher than that of women. 44.4% of men agreed, while only 34.1% of women indicated agreement with the statement, representing a gap of more than 10 percentage points.*

1.5 Almost 80% of the respondents acknowledged home-makers' contribution to the family and agreed that their contribution were as important as that of the bread-winning family member(s).

**Women in the managerial role were being prejudiced against**

1.6 Concerning women's situation in the workplace, the survey found that over 30% of people (33.4%) thought that staff members generally preferred not to be supervised by female managers/supervisors. This reflected that people have prejudice against women as managers or leaders to a certain extent as they were predisposed by the traditional concept that management should be largely male-dominated.

**The younger the age and the higher the education attainment, the more the shift against traditional gender concepts**

1.7 According to the survey, the younger the age and the higher the education attainment, the lesser people would accept traditional gender concepts.

- *For propositions imbued with gender stereotyping, such as “women should focus more on family than work” and “men’s job was to earn money while women’s job was to do household work and take care of the family”, the percentages of agreement fall directly with age and inversely with education level.*
- *For proposition with positive evaluation of working women, such as “an increase in the number of successful women was a positive social phenomenon”, the cohort of young men and women aged 18-34 has shown the biggest discrepancy in percentage of agreement (a difference of 15 percentage points between men and women) when compared with other age groups. It reflects that young women had higher gender awareness than young men.*

## **II. Sexual discrimination against women in the workplace**

**Discrimination against women in the workplace was still common**

2.1 Currently, women are legally protected against discrimination under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance. Nevertheless, the survey found that over 70% of the society believed that discrimination against women in the workplace was still common.

2.2 Concerning sex discrimination in terms of income, it was unlawful discrimination under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance for an employer to treat an employee less favourably in respect of the terms and conditions of employment on the ground of his/her gender. Nevertheless, the survey findings revealed that more than 70% of people (71.7%) agreed that situations of men being better paid than women of the same rank/position do happen\*. The percentage of men agreeing with this proposition was even higher than that of women (male: 73.2% and female: 70.5%).

2.3 The Sex Discrimination Ordinance also protects a woman from being treated less favourably on the ground of her pregnancy. The survey however revealed that over 70% of people (72.6%) in the society considered that situations of employers choosing not to hire pregnant women do happen. The number of those who thought that these cases “always happen” constitutes as much as 28.9%.

2.4 Although the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance has provided legal protection to people having responsibility for the care of family members, the survey showed that the majority of people still thought that there were discrimination against

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\* Including the options of “Always happen”, “Happen occasionally” or “Not always happen”.

persons due to their family status. More than 70% of people (71.8%) thought that employers chose not to hire employees who could not work overtime because of the need to look after family members during non-office hours.

2.5 Separately, nearly 30% of people (27.0%) thought that sexual harassment against female employees was common in the workplace. The figure requires our attention.

#### **Women's promotion prospect was still limited by the "glass ceiling"**

2.6 "Glass ceiling" refers to the hidden obstacles for women to be promoted to senior positions, which was created by deep-rooted gender bias against women in business. According to the survey, over 70% of people considered that men usually stood a better chance of promotion than women of similar age (70.7%) or with similar abilities (71.1%), which reflected a general view that women's promotion prospect was still limited by the "glass ceiling".

- *According to the latest figures released by the Census & Statistics Department, men accounted for 70.4% and women only 29.6% in the category of "managers and administrators" in 2009. The figures might also prove the existence of "glass ceiling" to some extent.*

2.7 Occupational segregation between sexes still existed in the employment field. Over 70% of people (70.2%) in the society thought that being a woman was an obstacle to development and promotion in the workplace, with more women (71.9%) than men (68.2%) thinking this way.

- *When analyzed by occupation, women who considered the situation of men having a better chance of promotion than women "happening always" were mostly working in male-dominated occupations ("craft and related workers" (17.2%), "plant and machine operators and assemblers" (25.9%) and "elementary occupations" (about 12%).*
- *Females who considered being a woman as an obstacle to development and promotion in the workplace came mostly from the categories of "managers and administrators" (96.2%) and male-dominated occupations ("craft and related workers" (100%) and "plant and machine operators and assemblers" (100%)). It should be noted that as high as 15.1% of female managers and administrators considered that this situation "always happens".*

### **III. Factors hindering women from entering the job market and the implementation of family-friendly employment practices**

#### **Family responsibility was the major reason that kept women from working**

3.1 Statistics compiled by the Census and Statistics Department in 2009 showed that women's participation rate in the labour market of Hong Kong was only 53.1%, substantially lower than that of men (69.4%). The labour force participation rates of married women (51.5%) and divorced/separated or widowed women (28.6%) were

lower than single women (67.5%).

3.2 The survey found that among the women who were neither studying nor having a full-time job, “having to look after other family members” and “having to do housework” were the main causes that prevent them from looking for a job. This reflected that family responsibility was the major reason that kept women from seeking employment. Conversely, for men who were neither studying nor having a full-time job and indicating that they were not looking for a job, the main reason given was “retirement” or the “belief that they cannot find work”, etc..

3.3 Besides, among the married/cohabiting women who had never worked, 30.7% have indicated “having to look after other family members” as the main reason for not working. Again, family responsibility was seen to be the major reason holding women back from working.

#### **Women were less confident in finding a job**

3.4 Among those who were seeking for a job or more jobs, women (31.9%) were more inclined than men (26.5%) to think that they were unlikely to find an ideal job. We see it as a possible indication that women were less confident in their opportunity or competitiveness in the employment market.

3.5 Those who thought they could not find an ideal job had indicated age and education level as their main hurdles. More women than men thought that “employers would not like to recruit an applicant of my age” (women: 55.8% and men: 47.5%) and “my education or training cannot fulfil the expectation of potential employers” (women: 51.2% and men: 44.4%). While relatively few people thought that their gender would affect their chance of getting a job, the percentage of women (8.1%) among them was significantly higher than that of men (2.9%).

#### **It was common for women to leave the workplace after giving birth**

3.6 According to the survey, almost 30% of married people (29.6%) indicated that the female spouse did not (or had no intention to) return to work after giving birth, reflecting that it was common for women to choose to leave the workplace after giving birth. The main reasons for choosing to stop working were all related to family responsibility, for instance, “having to look after other family members”, “having to do housework”, and “being unable to find someone to look after the children” etc.

#### **Married women were treated less favourably on their return to the workplace**

3.7 29.8% of married/cohabiting women said that they had tried to get back to work after quitting the job market for some time, and the main difficulty they encountered when returning to the workplace was the “difficulty in balancing both career and family”. When comparing their new jobs with their previous ones, 36.4% of women resuming work stated that their new post/rank was less favourable, and 40.1% of them said that their remuneration was lower than before.

#### **More women than men engaged in part-time jobs**

3.8 The survey revealed that the percentage of women (8.4%) doing part-time

job (i.e. working less than 30 hours per week on average) was distinctly higher than that of men (2.6%). The figures from the Census and Statistics Department in 2009 also showed that women outnumbered men in part-time employment with a gender ratio of 100 females to 55 males.

- *When analyzed by age, it was found that the percentage of women doing part-time jobs increased directly with age. It was believed that age was one of the factors determining women's ability to find full-time jobs.*
- *When analyzed by marital status, it was found that married or cohabiting women with child(ren)(11.6%) and divorced/separated or widowed women (14.4%) had a higher percentage of part-time employment when compared with women of other marital status. It was believed that family duties were part of the reason why these women choose to work part-time instead of full-time.*
- *In addition, the lower the academic qualifications of women, the higher the ratio of them working part-time. It was believed that the nature of part-time jobs might contribute to such phenomenon.*

**The implementation of family-friendly employment practices was satisfactory but enhancement was still needed**

3.9 WoC has been actively promoting the implementation of family-friendly employment practices as we believe that the provision of flexible and inclusive working environments and arrangements will create more favourable conditions for women to join the employment market. The survey showed a good sign in that more than 70% of people (71.0%) in the society agreed that employers or supervisors were willing to allow their staff to take leaves or time offs to handle family matters; and nearly 70% of people (69.1%) agreed that employers would allow staff to work in flexitime upon mutual agreement.

3.10 Nevertheless, among those who agreed that “employers or supervisors were willing to allow their staff to take leaves or time offs to handle family matters” and “employers would allow staff to work in flexitime upon mutual agreement”, the majority considered that such situations “do not always happen” or “happen occasionally”, whereas those who indicate that both situations “always happen” account for only 4.1% and 7.0% respectively of the total. We trust that there were still plenty of room for improvement in the implementation of these measures.

#### **IV. Women's status in the workplace and their level of happiness**

**A quarter of women do not wish to have a very successful career development**

4.1 On women's career expectation, the survey found that 26.6% of women did not wish to be very successful in their career. Among all marital status, more than 40% of married/cohabiting women with child(ren) (40.7%) shared this view, which was significantly higher than women of other marital status.

4.2 At the same time, more than one-fifth of married/cohabiting men (23.2%) said that they did not want their companion to be very successful in their career.

4.3 According to the survey, the main reasons for not wanting themselves/their companion to have a very successful career development were: they “have to look after other family members”, “have to do housework”, “prefer to spend more time with their children”; and they thought that women “do not need to support their family income” etc., which were related to family responsibility in general. The findings revealed that some members of the society thought that there were conflicts between commitment at work and family duties and these two things could not coexist.

**Women’s status was lower in the workplace than at home and in social environments**

4.4 As in the previous parts on women’s status at home and in social environments, the survey invited men to rate their spouse’s/companion’s status and women to rate their own status in the workplace on a 1-5 point scale. The findings showed that women’s status in the workplace scored an average of 3.32 points, lower than that of their status at home (3.60) and in social environments (3.35).

- *Among the working women, the status rating given by managers and administrators was the highest (3.84), whereas the rating by women in elementary occupations was the lowest (3.19).*

4.5 The survey has also invited men to rate their satisfaction with their spouse’s/companion’s status and women to rate their satisfaction with their own status in the workplace. The findings showed that the satisfaction rating of both men and women in this respect (overall average rating: 3.56) was relatively higher than that on women’s status in the workplace. It revealed that the public were inclined to accept the mediocre status of women in the workplace.

**Working women were happier than non-working women**

4.6 As released earlier, the survey found that more than 70% of people thought that they lead a happy life, and women’s percentage (75.4%) was slightly higher than that of men (71.4%). Out of a 7-point scale, the average score of happiness was 4.95 for women and 4.87 for men.

- *When analyzed by gender and status of economic activities, the findings showed that the average score of happiness of working women was 4.97, being second to women in school who have the highest average score of happiness (5.30), but higher than that of non-working women (home-makers (4.91), unengaged (4.83) and retired (4.77)). This showed that economic independence might have a positive effect on the level of happiness of women.*
- *When analyzed by occupation, the average score of happiness of managers and administrators was the highest at 5.42, whereas the average score of happiness was the lowest among those in the elementary occupations (4.46).*