

Survey on the Extent and Level of
Positions taken up by Women in the
Private and Non-governmental Sectors
in Hong Kong

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women's Commission

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Research Background

- 1.1 In order to gain a better understanding of the extent and the level of positions taken up by women in the private and non-governmental sectors in Hong Kong at the moment, The Women's Commission initiated a market survey to gather the relevant information.
- 1.2 The key objectives of the survey are:-
 - To find out the number and proportion of women working in different industries, disciplines of occupation and levels of positions in the private and non-governmental sectors.
 - To identify differences, if any, in the extent of employment of women, among establishments in different sizes, with different company backgrounds, or in different industries.
 - To gauge the incidence of adoption of major gender-related employment practices among establishments in the private and non-governmental sectors.
 - To gather information pertinent to women's participation in different disciplines of occupation and positions in the private and non-governmental sectors in countries of Asia Pacific, North America and Europe, where possible, as benchmarks for comparison.

Research Methodology

- 1.3 The survey consists of a mail survey to collect the relevant information from establishments in Hong Kong and a literature review to gather published gender-related employment statistics of other countries for comparison.
- 1.4 A total of 3,500 establishments were selected for enumeration. A total of 1,516 questionnaires were successfully completed and returned by establishments from the period between April 15 to May 23, 2002.

Key Findings

Mail Survey

- 1.5 It is estimated that a total of 1,559,014 males and 1,252,698 females are working full-time in the private and non-governmental sectors in Hong Kong. In other words, close to half (45%) of the full-time paid employees/ personnel working in the private and non-governmental sectors are women.

Industry Sector

- 1.6 Women's involvement is the highest (58%) in the sector of "community/ social and personal services", in particular in the field of "education/ medical/ community/ social services" (65%).
- 1.7 On the other hand, "Transport/ storage/ communications", "construction" and "mining/ electricity/ gas" are industries comparatively concentrated with males, in which more than 70% of the workforce are males.

Establishment Size and Country of Origin

- 1.8 In terms of size of establishments, it is observed that companies with 10-99 full-time employees tend to hire a relatively higher percentage of females. (47% among companies with 10-49 employees and 50% among those with 50-99 employees.)
- 1.9 Relatively speaking, establishments with headquarters located in North America employ a significantly higher percentage of women (54%) than Asian, European and Hong Kong companies. (44%, 45% and 46% respectively)

Discipline of Occupation

- 1.10 In terms of disciplines of occupation, "accounting/ finance" is the discipline most highly concentrated with females (72% engaged are female). Besides, females' involvement in "administration/ human resources/ public relations" (55%), as well as "purchasing/ merchandising" (53%) is also higher than in other disciplines.
- 1.11 On the other hand, men are highly concentrated in the science and technology related disciplines such as "engineering/construction/ R&D" (88% of employees engaged are males) and IT/MIS (78%). Among companies with an engineering/ construction/ R&D function, 82% of these companies only have male employees working in this area. Similarly, 67% of companies have only males in their IT/Management Information System area.

Level of Positions

- 1.12 Of all the top/ senior management positions, women are now holding about a quarter (26%) of them. Likewise, women are slightly under-represented in the middle management/ supervisory positions (41%).
- 1.13 Similar pattern is observed across different industry sectors, except for industries which are already concentrated with females, e.g. in “education/ medical/ community/ social services” (56%) or “personal and other services” (38%) sectors.
- 1.14 The above pattern is generally consistent among companies of different sizes or countries of origin.

Adoption of Gender-related Employment Practices by Hong Kong Companies

- 1.15 A majority (72%) of establishments have not adopted any gender-related employment practices. In particular, adoption is slow in manufacturing (81% adopted none) and wholesale/ retail (78%) industries. Among companies which adopted any gender-related practices, “flexible working hours/ practices” is the most common (23%) practice adopted.
- 1.16 In general, large companies tend to have a higher adoption rate of gender-related employment practices.

Literature Review

- 1.17 Existing research studies or published work examining women’s position in employment are limited. Even among work conducted in this area on a national basis, they tend to be limited in scope, such as covering only large corporations or certain industry sectors. Moreover, different countries employ different definitions in classifying “level of positions”. Therefore, cross-country comparisons are made difficult. The information available which most closely match our needs are statistics from the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- 1.18 On the whole, the pattern of women’s participation in different industry sectors of Hong Kong is very much in line with countries examined worldwide.
- 1.19 In general, Hong Kong is on par with other major Western and Asian countries in maintaining a relatively balanced share of workforce between the two gender groups in the middle ranking positions.
- 1.20 According to ILO data, about a quarter (22%) of the top positions are taken up by the working women in Hong Kong in 1999, and the ratio lags behind women’s share of the overall employment of 42% in that year. That said, the position of Hong Kong is found to be average and similar to that of the Singaporeans, Australians and the Scandinavians.

Conclusions

- 1.21 On the whole, the employment population in the private and non-governmental sectors in Hong Kong has maintained a balance in terms of gender participation. However, certain degree of difference exists between women and men in terms of industry sectors and disciplines they engaged in, and the level of positions taken by them.
- 1.22 Women in general are less likely to be employed in disciplines such as “engineering/ construction/ R&D”, “IT/MIS” and “production/operations”, which are disciplines that require scientific and technical knowledge or skills.
- 1.23 Currently only about a quarter of top/senior positions are taken up by women, That said, the ratio is still considered to be on par with a number of other Western developed countries.

The Way Forward

- 1.24 The present survey is the first one conducted by the Women's Commission on private and non-governmental sectors establishments regarding the extent and level of positions taken up by women in Hong Kong. The results of this survey could form a benchmark against which future survey results may be compared. The Women's Commission intends to conduct similar surveys every three to five years to monitor changes and trends.
- 1.25 As the findings of this survey are mainly statistical data, the Women's Commission is interested to know more precisely the underlying reasons and factors which have contributed to the phenomenon of gender job segregation and the relatively small proportion of women occupying senior or management positions. The Commission is therefore considering possible further studies in this area. Since the overarching theme for the Commission in the coming year is capacity building, any further study or action would be aligned with that theme.
- 1.26 In the meantime, the Women's Commission would like to call on the private and non-governmental sectors to be sensitive to the gender needs and to consider adopting family-friendly work practices where possible.
- 1.27 The academia may also like to conduct more research in this area and contribute ideas on how to enable and facilitate women to participate in the private and non-governmental sectors more fully in all fields and at all levels."