

EO Files (December 2016)

“THINGS WE DO, PEOPLE WE MEET – Reflections in Brief”

Respect starts with early acts in life

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has condemned the action of a taxi driver who recently posted on the internet a photo of a passenger breastfeeding an infant.

So too does it condemn all discriminatory and harassment acts against breastfeeding.

Not only is this disrespectful and an infringement on privacy but it also hinders the establishment of a breastfeeding-friendly environment.

Mothers have a duty to look after their children. The public needs to respect their right to breastfeeding.

What's even more worrying is that this was not an isolated incident.

Hong Kong may rate as a modern international city that values gender equality, yet there have been many instances of women being bullied and humiliated for breastfeeding in public.

Two years ago, for example, an internet user posted a picture of a mother breastfeeding on a bus and criticised her for doing so. Yet her body was covered.

In March, a local celebrity was harassed and insulted by a woman while breastfeeding in a female changing room at a five-star hotel.

Following the incident, she lamented that hotels and shopping malls in Hong Kong lack breastfeeding rooms.

The EOC handles complaints related to breastfeeding under the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance and during the past four years the incidents have included discrimination against breastfeeding mothers when they are using services or in the area of employment.

For even though breastfeeding has in recent years become more common in Hong Kong, discrimination against it from public facility operators, employers or colleagues has also been on the rise.

Additionally, current legislation does not stipulate explicitly that discrimination against breastfeeding is illegal.

In March, the EOC recommended the Government tackle this problem as a high priority issue.

Specifically, the EOC urged the Government “to introduce express provisions prohibiting direct or indirect discrimination on the ground of breastfeeding”.

This could be done by either amending the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, or as an amendment to the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance.

Furthermore, the EOC recommended that the definition of breastfeeding should also include expressing milk.

In addition to changing the law, we all need to play our part in ensuring mothers who are breastfeeding feel safe when doing so.

They are doing their best to ensure our next generation grows up in the best of health.

They should be treated with dignity and respect.

Alfred CM Chan
Chairperson, Equal Opportunities Commission

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