

## **A Win-win Situation – Family-friendly Policies**



EOC Chairperson Mr Raymond TANG and Women's Commission Chairperson Ms Sophia KAO urged employers and employees find ways to adopt FEPPs in order to achieve better work-life balance.

**Over the past few years, a growing community concern over the lack of work-family balance has called for a more family-friendly working environment in Hong Kong to help reduce stress for employees.** In view of this, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Women's Commission jointly commissioned the Lingnan University to conduct a study on the needs, awareness, prevalence and benefits of "Family-friendly Employment Policies & Practices (FEPPs)" from March to May this year. 137 corporations and SMEs, employing a total of over 160,000 staff, participated in the survey.

### **The Survey**

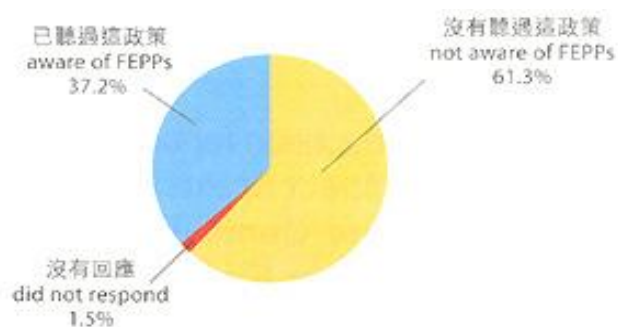
It is the first FEPPs study of this scale in Hong Kong that involved both employers and employees. Survey forms were electronically sent to 6,600 organizations, covering large, medium and small enterprises in different sectors and industries in Hong Kong. The respondents represented 4.4% of the current working population in Hong Kong. For the employee survey, 653 employees from 17 companies completed a self-administered questionnaire to form the feedback.

### **What is FEPP?**

FEPPs refer to programmes designed by companies or organizations to help employees balance work and family roles. The overriding objective of these policies and practices is to assist employees in managing their family responsibilities while also maintaining employment, by offering more choices of flexible and varied work arrangements to cater for their needs. These often mean flexi-hours, home-based work or 5-day work week.

## Key Findings

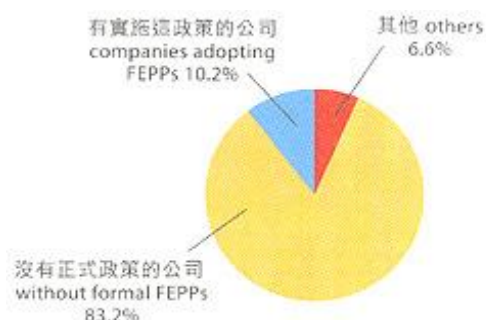
Low awareness of FEPPs among employers, in particular the SMEs



What are the common FEPPs implemented by employers

Compassionate leave	56.9%
5-day working week	43.8%
Flexible shift working	27.0%
Employee assistance programme	24.8%

Low prevalence of FEPPs in Hong Kong



What do employees want

Flexi-time	58.9%
Compressed work week	44.1%
Home-based work	39.0%
Family care leave	32.6%
Paternity leave	27.5%

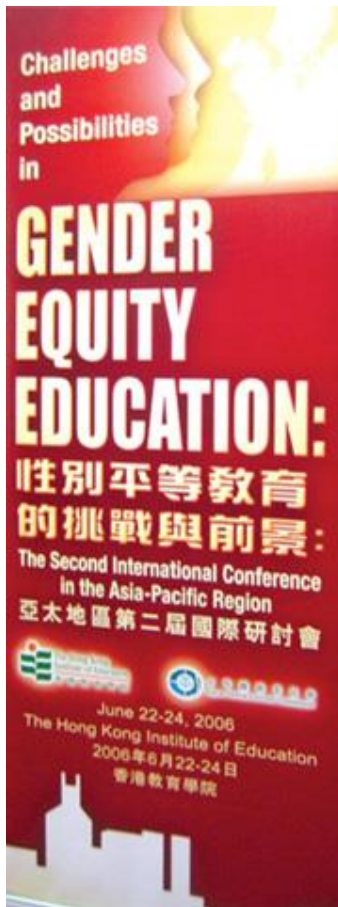
## Major benefits after adopting FEPPs:

- Gained reputation of being an employer of choice
- Improved morale
- Increased ability to attract high-performing and experienced employees
- Improved working relationships among colleagues
- Reduced turnover

## Conclusion

- It was clear from the study that employees strongly supported FEPPs. For the few companies that had implemented FEPPs, they reported substantial gains, such as improved reputation, better morale and lower staff turnover rate.
- In general family friendly policies were associated with improved productivity, performance and more job satisfaction. Staff perceived less work stress, less physical or psychological symptoms and better work-life balance.
- The survey showed that wider adoption of FEPPs would result a broad range of benefits for both companies and employees.

### Road Towards Gender Equity



Equal access to education for both genders is an important aspect of the work of the EOC. In June, the Commission joined hands with the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) to host the **Second International Conference on Gender Equity Education in the Asia-Pacific Region** to evaluate gender differences in education and explore new learning opportunities for young women and men.

"Challenges and Possibilities in Gender Equity Education" was the theme of the three-day conference, which was well attended by over 100 participants from 11 countries and regions, including the United States, Canada, Korea, India, Indonesia and mainland China. Through a series of keynote plenary sessions, workshops and presentations, a number of distinguished scholars and experts shared research findings, frontline experiences and insights on the topics of education and right to development, gender differences in learning, and feminist pedagogies.

One of the keynote speakers Dr. Susan McGee Bailey, executive director of Wellesley Centres for Women at Wellesley College in the United States, told the conference that equal access is necessary but not sufficient in terms of achieving gender equity in education. She said, "Girls are not receiving the same kinds of classroom experiences as boys. The differential expectations held for women and men place girls at particular disadvantages. Men and boys are damaged by gender stereotypes as well, but this damage is less visible. Both girls and boys need and deserve an education that is free from traditional gender stereotypes, an education that enables them to choose freely from a wide range of options."

Professor Dora Choi Po-king, associate professor of the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, pointed out that the patriarchal culture in our society, which is manifested in schools and workplace, has not only formed barriers to women's advancement, it has also put boys in a disadvantaged position by making them conform to the expectations of masculinity.

Another speaker Dr Grace Mak, principal lecturer of the Department of Educational Policy and Administration at the Hong Kong Institute of Education said, "Society's unease is shown in the way it accounts for gender difference in performance. A typical view is that girls do well only because they work hard, not because they are intelligent; and boys are naughty but intelligent, and do not achieve only because they so choose. This is a romanticized stereotype of boys' superiority and character."



(From left to right) Professor Bernard Hung-kay Luk, vice-president (academic) of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Professor Dora Choi Po-king, associate professor of the Department of Educational **Administration** and Policy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Dr. Susan McGee Bailey, executive director of Wellesley Centres for Women at Wellesley College in the United States



A youth forum co-organized by the Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women and the Organizing Committee of the Gender Equity Education Conference was held on the last day of the conference, in which the gender stereotypes and misconceptions were challenged and young people voiced their views on gender issues.

Over 100 participants from 11 countries and regions attended the Conference

Conference papers:

<http://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/graphicsfolder/inforcenter/conference/content.aspx?type=5&datetime=2006>



## Accessible Travel

### Accessible Travel



The wheelchair users enjoy an accessible trip with their family members

A big fan of TV travel programmes, Celia has long yearned to go on an overseas trip. This does not pose a problem for most people, one simply heads off if one has the time and money. Yet for Celia, a wheelchair user, just few steps can become an obstacle, let alone going abroad, so traveling has always remained a remote dream. This year, however, Celia realized her dream as she was able to go on an exciting 5-day-tour of Osaka with Easy-Access Travel Ltd (EAT), the only travel agency that caters to persons with a disability (PWDs) in Hong Kong.

#### An Extraordinary Travel Agency

EAT, the first and only travel agency with local and overseas travel licenses for PWDs, was established by the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSAR) with a grant from the Support the Employment of People with Disabilities Fund under the Social Welfare Department. Among the staff at EAT, 60% are PWDs. They enjoy their work as they feel empowered to be able to help others. Andy Chan, Manager of EAT said, "Many PWDs like traveling, yet there is only one agency in Hong Kong that can meet their needs. It is a meaningful job for us and we know there is a great demand in this market."



In fact, EAT's target customers are not restricted to PWDs. For those who dislike a tight itinerary, and for the elderly and those with children, EAT is able to offer a more relaxed journey. Since its establishment at the end of 2003, apart from local tours, EAT has set foot on the Mainland, Japan, Singapore and Korea. It has co-hosted tours with various organizations such as China's Disabled Persons Federation and Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth for about 20,000 participants.

### **Accessible Tour**

Lam Leung-ming, who has worked for HKSR in the past 17 years, is now a tour guide of EAT. "PWDs encounter many transportation difficulties, so we need to make detailed arrangements," said Mr. Lam, himself a PWD. "As a standard practice, I visit the destinations before each tour, to map out the best routes and also to check all the facilities," Mr. Lam continued.



Life can be made easier for persons with physical disability by this hanging chair.

EAT generally arranges tours to more developed countries where access facilities are more advanced. For instance, there is one hotel in Osaka, Japan with sliding doors, skid proof devices and handrails in the washroom. It also provides remote controlled hanging chairs and ceiling tracks to carry guests with physical disabilities between their beds and washrooms.

To provide an accessible tour, the needs of PWDs have to be carefully considered. "The schedule cannot be too tight. For example even though there is a landing platform in the coach, wheelchair users need extra time to get on and off. If we arrange too many visits and stops, participants would tire easily. Besides, we must ensure that all facilities at the stops are convenient to wheelchair users, especially entrance access and washrooms for PWDs," Mr. Lam said. Commode chairs and platforms are standard facilities on each trip, and five to six assistants accompany the travelers everytime. Mr. Lam encourages family members and friends of PWDs to join the tour, to share what is often an unforgettable experience.

Manager Andy Chan pointed out frankly that their charges are higher than other travel agencies by about 20%. "The main reason is the higher transportation cost of coaches which are specially designed for PWDs." Therefore, he tries to build up a better network with other groups and hopes to lower running costs. Fortunately, their office is located inside HKSR's Lam Tin complex, which charges an affordable rent and helps to reduce operation costs.



Coach with landing platform



Movable tracks for wheelchair users to overcome staircases

### The Way Ahead

Mr. Lam feels that in Asia, accessibility in Hong Kong lags just behind Japan, but he hopes that Hong Kong can do more to provide better access and facilities. Looking ahead, Mr. Lam shared his wish, "We are planning a series of new tours for people with mobility difficulties. We want to step out of Southeast Asia and our first target will be Australia. **I really hope that more people can enjoy accessible travel so that every one can join in the fun - to see the world and gain more confidence.**"



<b>Date of Establishment</b>	12/2003
<b>Aim</b>	To render PWDs a safe, reliable and comfortable "accessible travel services"
<b>Tel/Website</b>	2772 7301 / <a href="http://www.easyaccesstravelhk.com">http://www.easyaccesstravelhk.com</a>



### EO Networks



Mr LAN Bujin, Deputy Director of Poverty Alleviation Office of the China's State Ethnic Affairs Commission visits EOC.



Sharing session with medical practitioners and health officials from the mainland on AIDS issues.



A courtesy visit by Mr LIU Qiang (right), Vice Director of the Department of Liaison, Hongkong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council.



The HK Federation of Trade Unions Women Affairs Committee exchanges views with EOC on how the anti-discrimination laws protect women's rights.



Mr PHUA Boon Leng, Senior Assistant Director of Singapore's Labour Relations Department (centre) and his colleagues pay a call.



A warm welcome by Mr Philip CHEN (1st right), the Chief Executive of Cathay Pacific Airways at Cathay Pacific City.





Representatives of Xuzhou Women Association learn more about gender equity in Hong Kong.

## EO Diversity Project Promotes Social Integration

### EO Diversity Project Promotes Social Integration

The EOC has launched a major social integration initiative "EO Diversity Project" in conjunction with RTHK Radio 2 to promote racial harmony, inclusion of persons with a disability, gender equality and accommodation for persons with family status. You will be able to learn more about equal opportunity through a series of radio programmes, a writing competition and training workshops.



(Left to right) Gregory Charles Rivers, Rammie Guo and Gill Mohindapaul Singh share their experiences of adapting to life in Hong Kong.

**"Made in HK Alex Lee"** — Features interviews on diversity, culture and life styles of ethnic minorities, broadcast every Friday, 1-3 pm from 5/2006 to 4/2007 on RTHK 2 (FM94.8-96.9).

**Essay Competition** — Share with us your real-life experience on diversity and inclusion and win a scholarship. Winning entries will be broadcast in the radio programme.

**Training Workshops** — Join other young adults to learn more about social harmony.

#### Programme details:

[http:// www.eoc.org.hk](http://www.eoc.org.hk) OR 2511 8211

## Case – Rubbing Salt Into Her Wound

### Disability Discrimination Case

#### Rubbing Salt Into Her Wound

##### The complaint

A work injury has not only left May with persistent chest and shoulder pains, but also led to unfair treatment by her employer.

"I had worked for the school as a janitor for over 20 years. But what they had done to me was just disappointing!" May told the EOC investigator. "After the injury, the school insisted on assigning me with sedentary duties, though I had never made that request. Ironically, they denigrated me for not performing my job adequately. Had they ever checked with me my health condition, or made any attempts to understand what kinds of duties were suitable for me?"



After the completion of the work injury assessment, the school arranged for May to attend a medical examination, which gave the opinion that she was medically unfit for strenuous duties. "I guess they eventually found an excuse. They claimed that I could no longer perform the inherent requirements of a janitor, which I totally disagreed, and there were no suitable positions available for me in the school. So I was left with no other choice than early retirement. The school management made all the decisions without discussing anything with me."

##### What the EOC did

May complained to the Commission against her employer for disability discrimination. The school authorities denied the allegation, "After reviewing the medical evidence, we believed that May could no longer perform the work for which she was employed. What we had done complied with the requirements of the labour law."

The EOC investigator explained to the school representative the definition of inherent requirements of the job, and the principle of reasonable accommodation under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO). Reasonable accommodation is an important element in the DDO for non-discrimination in employment. It refers to any modification or adjustment to a job, an employment practice, or the work environment that makes it possible for an individual with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunity.

After serious consideration, the school authority understood that they should have investigated thoroughly to see whether any accommodation could have helped May perform the inherent requirements of her job. The two parties agreed to resolve the dispute by conciliation. Finally, May accepted a monetary compensation of 12 months' salary to settle her complaint.



## **What the law says**

Under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, it is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against another person with a disability. Where the employer considers that the employee's disability would affect him/her in carrying out the inherent requirements of the job, it is the employer's duty to prove so and/or to show that there is unjustifiable hardship to provide any accommodation. Simply relying on a medical assessment does not remove the employer's responsibility for making decisions in these matters.

Many complaints received by the Commission indicate that there is a lack of communication between employees and management, resulting in mistrust or grievance, which would then escalate to a complaint. Ongoing communication is particularly important where the employees should be involved in exploring different, possible and reasonable accommodations. Reassignment should only be considered if no accommodations are available to enable the individual to perform his/her current job, or if the only effective accommodation could cause undue hardship.



## Case – Why Me?

### Sex Discrimination Case

#### Why Me?

##### The complaint

Fiona, who worked as an advertising officer of a property management company, informed her employer that she was pregnant. Shortly into her pregnancy, she had to take sick leave for a period of four months on medical advice because of pregnancy related illness.



"Two months later, Mandy called me and said our boss questioned why I had to take such a long sick leave, and so my supervisor advised me to resume duties as soon as possible. She said I would be in big trouble if I didn't show up soon. It sounded almost like a warning," said Fiona, recalling a telephone conversation she had with the secretary to her new director. "Though I was under a lot of stress after hearing what she told me, I did not return to work until I completed rest of my leave for fear of losing my baby."

"At the end of the same year, they took revenge on me. I was given a year-end bonus equivalent to 80% of my monthly salary, instead of a full month's pay like my other colleagues. Though I did not verify with them, I suspect that they deducted my bonus pay because of my long absence from work. But that's not the worst...". She went on, "Shortly after I returned to work from maternity leave, I was made redundant."

##### What the EOC did

Upon receipt of Fiona's complaint, the Commission's investigator approached her employer. In response to the allegations, a representative of the employer said, "Fiona's performance was only rated 'average' last year, and that was reflected in the reduced bonus pay. It had nothing to do with pregnancy discrimination." He continued, "Likewise, the decision on her redundancy, it was purely a business decision. Our latest leasing projects had just been completed, and no new advertising projects had been scheduled for the foreseeable future. Since we found Fiona's job duties were no longer required, we then decided to cut her post."



Fiona was appalled, "But why didn't they cut the post of my assistant? What are their selection criteria for redundancy? Did they choose me because I was absent on maternity leave?"

The two parties agreed to resolve the dispute by conciliation. A monetary compensation was made by Fiona's employer to her for the loss of income and she was also given an ex-gratia payment.

##### What the law says

Under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO), it is unlawful to dismiss an employee or treat her less favourably on the ground of her pregnancy. If the termination of employment was made because of redundancy, the selection criteria should be clearly spelt out to demonstrate why the pregnant staff is selected.

The Equal Opportunities Commission acknowledges an employer's need to make commercial decisions as a result of recognizing genuine redundancies. However, there should be documentary support to show the redundancy need as well as the manpower surplus. Employees are also entitled to be fully consulted about the redundancy and selection procedures, to be selected on the basis of fair and objective criteria, and to be offered alternative employment if possible.

### Around the World

#### Young Persons with Disabilities Gain Equal Access to Education

Teams of Disabled Youth Activists (DYA) from several former Soviet countries are working together to tackle physical and attitudinal barriers in education. They conduct disability awareness training programmes, build access ramps at community halls, schools and other public buildings, and produce videos advocating equal opportunities. These activities involve thousands of young persons with disabilities, adults, local officials and supporters throughout the region.



The programmes are proving to have an immense impact on the participants. Before joining the DYA Teams, some young members rarely left their houses as their families did not want them to be seen in the public, either for safety reasons or their parents were ashamed of having a disabled child. Through working on disability awareness projects, they can now earn their living and even contribute their earnings to their families.

Information source:

[http://www.disabilityworld.org/12-01\\_06/dya.shtml](http://www.disabilityworld.org/12-01_06/dya.shtml)

#### Visually Impaired Persons Offer Help

In Britain, a pool of web surfers with different disabilities has been brought together by the Usability Exchange to give instant feedback on website navigation. The launch of the Usability Exchange comes as the British Standards Institution and the Disability Rights Commission issue a new set of guidelines that recommend website creators involve persons with disabilities in testing. A research result shows that testing with disabled users may uncover 45% more accessibility problems.



Information source:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4816118.stm>

#### Syria's First Female Vice-President

Syria has named Najah Al-Attar as its first female vice-president. Her appointment marks a great step forward for the status of women in the Middle East. Attar served as the Minister of Culture from 1976 to 2000, and she was recently in charge of the Ministry's Translation Department. She holds a doctorate degree from Edinburgh University and has published a number of books. Fatin Bundugji, Director of Women Empowerment & Research of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry said, "The fact that she is a woman does not undermine the fact that she is the most qualified person for the job. Her appointment is based on her ability."



Information source:

<http://www.arabnews.com/?page=4&section=0&article=79682&d=24&m=3&y=2006>

#### Maternity Rights for Student Midwives

Workfare Programme for Needy Families The Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC) of Singapore has launched early this year a



Workfare Programme to help single parents or breadwinners from low-income families to find a job. They receive career counselling, and transport allowances to attend job interviews. For those who have found work, child care subsidies are also offered.

The breadwinners of these needy families are out of work because they are in lack of the necessary skills or childcare assistance. The programme helps identify home-based jobs and jobs with flexible work hours. The CDAC hopes that these families can eventually empower themselves through the Workfare Programme.

Information source:

[http://www.cdac.org.sg/eng/programmes/vss/ss\\_programme/cdac\\_workforce.htm](http://www.cdac.org.sg/eng/programmes/vss/ss_programme/cdac_workforce.htm)

## EO Reaches the Community

### EO Reaches the Community

The EOC has provided funding to community groups to initiate their own projects to promote the message of equal opportunities. Here are some success stories:



EOC's Community Participation & Publicity Committee Convenor Dr. Lo Wing-lok kicks off an outreach programme to promote equal employment opportunities for young people with intellectual disabilities. This meaningful project is organized by Caritas Lok Mo Integrated Social Service Centre.

The shop owners learn from Caritas volunteers that persons with disabilities are able to perform well. As a result of the project, a number of employers hired the job seekers involved in the programme.



Persons with disabilities show off their musical talents at the Open Day of Fu Hong Society Sheung Li Uk Activity Training Centre.







## 社區活動 EVENTS CALENDAR

22/8 - 26/9/2006

(逢星期二 Every Tuesday)



「心晴心靜」在職單親家長互助小組  
Mutual Support Group for Single Parents  
香港單親協會  
Hong Kong Single Parents Association  
2338 1303 www.hkspa.org.hk

23/8 - 18/10/2006

(逢星期三 Every Wednesday)



「家連家」精神健康教育家屬課程  
Family Link - Workshops for  
Family Members of Persons with  
Mental Illness  
香港家連家精神健康倡導協會  
Hong Kong Family Link Mental Health  
Advocacy Association  
2144 7244 / 2144 7611  
www.hkmhaf.org/family

31/8/2006

(作品遞交截止日期)  
Deadline for submission of scripts

香港關顧自閉周2006 - 《同一天空下》  
劇本創作比賽暨「與光同行」閱讀嘉許  
計劃  
Autism Awareness Week 2006 - Script  
Writing Competition and Reading  
Programme  
青山醫院精神健康學院及學前弱能兒童  
家長會  
Institute of Mental Health of Castle Peak  
Hospital & The Parents Association of Pre-  
school Handicapped Children  
2324 6099

13/9 - 27/9/2006



快樂媽媽家長小組  
Sharing Session for Mothers  
香港保護兒童會  
Hong Kong Society for the  
Protection of Children  
2760 8111

16 - 23/9 & 30/9/2006



對抗抑鬱症「認知治療」  
理論與實務工作坊及小組  
Workshop on Cognitive Therapy  
against Depression  
香港心理衛生會  
Mental Health Association of Hong Kong  
2340 6031 www.mhahk.org.hk

23/8 - 18/10/2006



防止兒童性侵犯證書課程  
Certificate Course on Preventing  
Child Sexual Abuse  
防止虐待兒童會  
Against Child Abuse  
2351 6060 www.aca.org.hk

22/10/2006



第三屆聾人七人小型足球比賽  
The 3rd Football Competition for the  
Hearing Impaired  
香港聾人福利促進會  
The Hong Kong Society for the Deaf  
2854 2676 www.deaf.org.hk

27/11 - 1/12/2006



第十二屆國際行走會議  
The 12th International Mobility  
Conference  
香港盲人輔導會  
The Hong Kong Society for the Blind  
2160 5099 www.hksb.org.hk

全年活動  
Year-round programme



豐盛男士協進會  
Life Enrichment Programme for Men  
明愛男士成長中心  
Caritas Men's Centre  
2383 3377