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Feature Story: Sharing the Tears and Joys of Single Mothers

FEATURE STORY



Sharing the Tears and Joys of Single Mothers

If you were a member of a single parent family, would you be afraid to admit it because of people's discriminatory attitudes? If a friend or a coworker belongs to a single parent family can you, in good conscience, say that you would not regard them differently?

"Single parents not only face the difficulty of supporting their family but also the stigma attached to their marital status. Even their children are not spared and have to face harassment and discrimination in their everyday life. What's worse is that some single parents, fearing that their children will be ridiculed, tell their children to lie about their family circumstances," says Ms. Jessie Yu, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Single Parents Association. "The children, already unhappy about their parents' separation, have to further worry about being exposed and may not be able to handle their emotions."

The EOC invited two single mothers—Jessie and famous artiste Ms. Nancy Sit, aka Mama Nancy - as mentors to the final session of the Career Challenge Mentorship Programme 2008/09 to help young people break stereotypes about single parent families. Both of them have overcome tremendous odds before achieving success.

Overcoming Worries

"I was planning on not telling anyone about my divorce in 1995. But a magazine reported it and a TV station invited me to act in a drama series," says Mama Nancy. "I was afraid of taking up the job at the time because I feared that people would be gossiping about my private life and worried that this would create pressure on my children."

To her surprise, Mama Nancy gained huge popularity and her workload kept increasing upon resuming her acting career after the divorce. She is very grateful for the support that she has received from the society but wishes that people would also respect other single parent families. That is why she fully supports the work of the Hong Kong Single Parents Association.

"I was once a victim of domestic violence and after my divorce I made some friends who were also single parents," says Jessie. "At first we shared our stories with each other but even after voicing our grievances we still faced a hard life ahead." That is when they decided to come together and establish a volunteer group to raise public awareness about single parenthood and improve the lives of single parents. "We founded the Concern Group on Single Parents in 1991, which was later renamed as the Hong Kong Single Parents Association," says Jessie. The Hong Kong Single Parents Association has been in service for more than 20 years now.

Dealing with Stereotypes

Jessie recalls her own upsetting experiences when she was asked rude questions whenever she looked for jobs or places to rent. "You don't have a husband? Do you have money to pay the rent? Will you bring indecent men home all the time?"

She was also not spared during job interviews. "Supporting your children on your own? How will you be able to come to work?" asked a prospective employer during a job interview.

In another instance, when she was looking for a placement for her child in a school, a teacher told her that they do not admit children from single parent families because "they are bound to be particularly hard to handle".

Jessie narrates an incident which happened many years ago. A TV station co-organised a game show entitled "Healthy Family". Some of her single parent friends were eager to participate but were rejected. "Does it mean that it is necessary to have both parents for a family to be healthy? Are single parent families doomed to be unhealthy?" asks Jessie. "With the mass media conveying such a message, single parent families will only be further marginalized." She stressed that even without a father or a mother, a family can be healthy and happy as long as members of the family live their lives to the fullest.



Making Accommodations

Noticing that the venue of our gathering was equipped with a ramp for wheelchair access, she added, "Some adjustments in access can help those in need to overcome their obstacles and enjoy equal participation. Unfortunately, in today's society, many people still do not make 'adjustments' in their mind for single parent families."

However, she expressed hope that people will shed their discriminatory attitudes towards single parent families so that children in these families can grow up confidently in a healthy environment.

Family as the Driving Force

Mama Nancy mentioned that after her divorce she was the sole carer of her children. At first she was no different than others in thinking that her children were a burden to her. However, after experiencing various frustrations and hardships in life, she came to realise that children are not only the parents' pillars of support but also the driving force behind their hard work. Jessie agreed with her totally. They said with one voice, "Even a note or an SMS message from our children will become our sweet memory." This is something to bear in mind for children in their roles of sons or daughters.





Loving Your Parents

When Mama Nancy asked, "Who, among you, has ever said 'I love you' to your parents?", only about one-third students raised their hands. Mamma Nancy and Jessie encouraged the students to express their love to parents.

Pains of Single Fathers

Jessie said that single fathers are in fact as hard a role to play as single mothers. However, when men encounter problems, they may find it embarrassing to tell other people. That is why in the past, cases of men seeking help only accounted for 10% of all cases.

Hong Kong Single Parents Association

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Respecting People with Family Status

At the final session of this year's Career Challenge Mentorship Programme, we invited Mama Nancy and Ms. Jessie Yu to be our mentors and share their views on respecting people with family status, especially single parents.



Hug of Encouragement

A student, whose mother passed away two years ago, said he was still mourning the loss. He asked how he could overcome the grief and handle the memory of his mother. Mama Nancy and Jessie encouraged him to take good care of himself and live cheerfully saying that is what every mother wants. Before her departure, Mama Nancy gave that student a warm hug of encouragement.



Journalist in the Making

One of the Career Challenge mentees turned out to be a student reporter of the Education Page of the Ming Pao. She has also posted her report on Mingpao.com. Please visit the following webpage to see what she thinks about the event:

http://www.studentreporter.mingpao.com/cfm/com_Scr ipt2.cfm?Script_ID=10608

Career Challenge 2008/09 has been successfully concluded. Please log on to the EOC website at <u>www.eoc.org.hk</u> to view the clips of the sharing session highlights.



Mentees' Reflections...

Students found that they could very much relate to what both mentors said. Following are some of the thoughts and feelings of the students who took part in the Career Challenge Mentorship Programme:

I think both Mama Nancy and Jessie are the best role models for mothers. After hearing their sharing, I realised how hard it is to be a parent. I will certainly be more filial to my parents.

In the toughest time, Jessie did not give up on herself. She even pursued further studies...we should all learn from her perseverance.

Having just recovered from a serious illness, Mama Nancy still found time to attend our sharing session as a mentor amidst her busy schedule. This came as a pleasant and touching surprise to me!

Talking about healthy families, many people will have a mental picture of a father and a mother holding their children happily. However, in today's Hong Kong, many single parent families live harmoniously and work hard for success. Why can't they ever be considered a healthy family?

Understanding Cultures

About 5% of people in Hong Kong are ethnic minorities. While our appearance may be different, they see Hong Kong as their home just like everybody else. Let's learn more about them who could be our neighbours, colleagues or friends...



\bigcirc	Country name	Republic of Indonesia
	Geography	Indonesia, which consists of about 17,508 islands, is located between Asia and Australia continents and the Pacific and the Indian oceans.
	Climate	Equatorial but cooler in the highlands.
	Capital	Jakarta (located in Java Island)
	Language	Indonesia has 300 native languages but Bahasa Indonesia (literally meaning Indonesian Language) is the national language which is widely spoken in Indonesia.
	Population	240.3 million (July 2009 estimates). It makes Indonesia the fourth most populous nation in the world.
Î	Government	Independent republic
	National Flag	Red and white. Red symbolises courage and white symbolises purity.
â	Popular Sport Games	Badminton and football
and	Religions	There are six religions recognized by the state, namely Islam (86.1%), Protestantism (5.7%), Catholicism (3.0%), Hinduism (1.8%), Buddhism (1.0%) and Confucianism (less than 1.0%).



Taboo

In early 2009, there were over 140,000 Indonesians in Hong Kong, of which around 125,000 were working as foreign domestic workers.

Do not use your left hand when you shake hand, or give out something. Because of religious belief, Muslims do not eat pork or pig product.

Source: Radio Television Hong Kong (EO Diversity Project), Consulate General of Indonesia in Hong Kong, Facts and Statistics of Immigration Department, Website of the Indonesian Government (http://www.indonesia.go.id/)

Race Discrimination Ordinance and its Code of Practice on Employment Come into Full Effect Now

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Race Discrimination Ordinance and its Code of Practice on Employment Come into Full Effect Now

The Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) and its Code of Practice (CoP) on Employment have become fully effective from 10 July 2009. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is responsible for implementing the Ordinance, which makes racial discrimination, harassment and vilification unlawful.

Purpose of the Code

"The CoP on Employment, prepared by the EOC under the RDO, is intended to encourage employers, employees and other concerned parties to promote racial equality and harmony at the workplace by adopting good practices, and to help them understand their respective rights and responsibilities under the RDO so that they will respect and refrain from infringing the rights of other people," says the EOC Chairperson Mr. Raymond Tang. "The Code also helps employees and workers understand what steps they should take if they encounter discrimination and harassment on the ground of race."

Besides explaining the legal provisions and the meaning of race under the RDO, the CoP also illustrates scenarios that could constitute racial discrimination, harassment or vilification and provides examples of best practices. To facilitate greater understanding of the RDO and its CoP on Employment and explain how the law affects them and their businesses, the EOC has also been providing training and talks on the subject to the public and private sectors, professional bodies, the general public and ethnic minorities. The Commission also organises roving exhibitions and subsidizes community projects to help promote a better understanding of the new Ordinance and the Code.

Extensive Consultation

The Code was prepared through extensive consultations from 13 October 2008 to 19 January 2009. The EOC organised 68 briefing and consultation sessions for concerned stakeholders, including the general public, employers' groups, labour unions, ethnic minority organisations, concern groups, non-governmental organisations, government departments and human resources practitioners from private and public organizations during the consultation period.

In Different Languages

Besides preparing the draft CoP in the two official languages, Chinese and English, the EOC had also translated it into six different languages—Urdu, Nepali, Tagalog, Thai, Hindi and Indonesian—to facilitate better understanding of the Code among the people of different ethnic backgrounds. It was widely distributed to stakeholders for comments and feedback, and was also made available online. The EOC received 88 written submissions on the draft Code. The Code was revised after giving proper considerations to all the comments and feedbacks that were received during the consultations and through written

submission. It was then submitted to the Legislative Council for consideration and approval. The EOC has made further amendments to the Code in response to comments received during the scrutiny by the LegCo Subcommittee which was formed to scrutinize the Code as well as two Rules made by the EOC, namely the Race Discrimination (Formal Investigations) Rules and the Race Discrimination (Investigation and Conciliation) Rules. The finalized Code passed by LegCo and now in full effect is available at EOC website: www.eoc.org.hk.

Support Centres for Ethnic Minorities Open

The Hong Kong government has provided funding to operate 4 service centres for the ethnic minorities in different districts in order to help the service recipients to integrate into the community. The centres offer language programmes, computer classes, tutorials, orientation workshops, as well as interest classes.



The support centres run by the International Social Service Hong Kong Branch in Wanchai and the Yuen Long Town Hall in Yuen Long have just started operation. The Hong Kong Christian Service's centre in Kwun Tong and the Christian Action's centre in Tuen Mun will start providing the services soon. The one operated by Hong Kong Christian Service will also provide centralised telephone interpretation service to assist the ethnic minorities in their use of public services.

www.cmab.org.hk

Disability Discrimination Case – Equal Rule Does Not Always Add Up to Equal Opportunities

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION CASE



Equal Rule Does Not Always Add Up to Equal Opportunities

The Complaint

Mr. Tsui, who has a permanent disability in his right hand, joined a large company as a clerk. In about a year's time he was assigned to act as an assistant officer and continued in this capacity for six years. His daily routine included data entry and preparing reports. He received good rating during the annual performance appraisals. When a vacancy for the assistant officer appeared, Mr. Tsui applied.

According to the company rule, he had to pass the English and Chinese typing test, to be allowed to sit for interview for the position. When Mr. Tsui received a letter inviting him to sit for the test, he wrote to them to consider his disability and make necessary accommodations. When he sat for the test no measures were taken to accommodate his disability. He failed in the test and was therefore not granted an interview.

Mr. Tsui then lodged a complaint of discrimination on the ground of disability with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

What the EOC did

The case officer of the EOC tried to settle the case by proposing early conciliation. However, the respondent refused to accept Mr. Tsui's claim that he was discriminated against as they had applied the same rule to all applicants and also refused to compensate. The EOC then investigated the case and decided to go for conciliation since Mr. Tsui might have been indirectly discriminated against. The case was later settled through conciliation after the respondent agreed to exempt Mr. Tsui from the typing test and allow him to sit for the interview.



What the law says



The Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a person with a disability by dismissing that person, or subjecting him to any other detriment, for example depriving the opportunities for promotion, transfer or training (DDO, Section 11). Discrimination may be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination in employment means treating an employee with a disability less favourably than another employee without disability. Indirect discrimination is often less obvious than direct discrimination. It means imposing the same requirement or condition, which is not justified or genuinely necessary, on everyone but doing so has an unfair effect on a particular group (e.g. persons with disabilities). In this case, Mr. Tsui was indirectly discriminated against because the company applied the same rule to him as those to other applicants despite him having a permanent disability and did not take measures to accommodate his disability.

New videos Online





On the Way

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) welcomes the announcement of concessionary fares for people with disabilities by the MTR Corporation. There are many people in our society striving to create better facilities for people with disabilities and Mr. CHENG Chiu Ho (Ho), a wheelchair user for over 30 years, is one of them. In the latest EOC YouTube video - "On the Way" Ho tells us about the changes he has seen in the facilities and accessibility for people with disabilities in Hong Kong and his feelings on that. He also shares with us his vision of turning Hong Kong into a barrier-free city.



www.youtube.com/user/hkeoc

SEX DISCRIMINATION CASE



No Place for Women

The Complaint

Ms. Chan worked as a part time kitchen helper in a restaurant. One day she injured her thumb and could not work. She then decided to resign. Not long afterwards she recovered.

Two months after she resigned, there was a vacancy in the restaurant. Her former supervisor then asked her if she was interested to work as a full-time employee. She agreed and worked for the restaurant again. However, after nearly three months into her new position, she was told by her supervisor that she would be dismissed since the Head Chef did not want a woman to work in his kitchen as a full time helper. Her supervisor added that her post would be filled up by a male candidate.

Puzzled and annoyed, Ms. Chan lodged a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) against the restaurant for discriminating against her because of her gender.

What the EOC did

Upon receiving the complaint, the EOC's case officer contacted both Ms. Chan and the management of the restaurant. The relevant provisions of the law and the complaint handling procedures were explained to them. Through early conciliation, the employer agreed to give monetary compensation to Ms. Chan. Early conciliation offers an alternative means for the complainant and respondent to settle a case more quickly. It can be conducted at any stage before or during the process of investigation provided the two parties agree.



What the law says

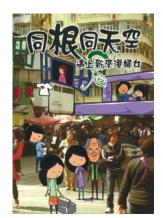


The Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO) makes it unlawful for any person to discriminate against a woman by dismissing her or subjecting her to any other detriment [SDO, section 11 (2) (c)]. Acting upon stereotypical assumptions based on sex (in this case, the Head Chef thought that it was not suitable for a woman to work in a restaurant's kitchen) could lead to unlawful discrimination.

Book Release – Under the Same Sky: the New Arrival Women



Book Release – Under the Same Sky: the New Arrival Women



New arrival women from the mainland are often labeled as lazy or uneducated. To eliminate prejudice against new arrival women from the mainland, the New Arrival Women League has invited 25 matriculation and post-secondary students to spend time with these women and report on their livelihood and daily routine which resulted in this book. Despite leading a difficult life and often being discriminated against, these women are fighting hard against all odds to integrate into and contribute to the society. This project is funded by the Community Participation Funding Programme of the EOC.

Enquiries: 3113 6573 (New Arrival Women League)

"Gender Equality and Gender Respect – Media and Societal Culture, Where Do We Go from Here?"

"Gender Equality and Gender Respect – Media and Societal Culture, Where Do We Go from Here?"



The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Women's Commission (WoC) jointly organised a seminar on "Gender Equality and Gender Respect – Media and Societal Culture, Where Do We Go from Here?" to explore ways of counteracting the negative effects of female gender portrayal in Hong Kong media without infringing on the freedom of speech and freedom of press. The seminar, held on 17 April 2009, was supported by the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education(CPCE). The speakers were professionals from the field of gender studies, media and social work, who were very concerned about young people's moral education.

Professor Fanny Cheung, Chairperson and Professor of Psychology Department, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, raised the issue of gender sensitivity in media, stressing that media has an influence on young minds about gender values.



Ms. Clara Law, Campaign Manager of Amnesty International and former Centre-in-charge of the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre, stated that stereotyped roles for men and women still exist and women are still regarded as the primary carers for their families. She mentioned that more gender-friendly policies are needed to achieve gender equality. Dr. Ng Chun-hung, Deputy Director of Centre for Cultural Policy Research and Associate Professor of Department of Sociology, The University of Hong Kong, cited

numerous examples to illustrate that the media portrays both sexes in a unilateral and distorted manner.

In the session on media culture, commentator Dr. Camoes Tam Chikeung, Chairperson of Hong Kong Journalists Association, said that young people should develop a healthy view of life and learn to be discerning so that they can think and independently analyse what they read. Mr. Chua Hoiwai, CPCE Member and Business Director of Policy Advocacy & International Networks, Hong Kong Council of Social Service, quoted statistics to show that the actual development of the socio-

economic status of the modern-day women is clearly at variance with the situation portrayed by the media.

Dr. Sandra Tsang, Member of the Commission on Youth and Associate Professor of Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong, stressed that parents should spend more time with their children to discuss gender issues and inculcate correct moral values in them so that they will be able to cope with when exposed to different issues in future.



The sessions were hosted by three facilitators — Dr. Agnes Law Koonchui, Member of the EOC and Deputy Director of Centre of Holistic Teaching and Learning, Hong Kong Baptist University; Professor Wong Po-choi, Chairperson of the Committee on Home School Cooperation and Professor of Department of Information Engineering, The Chinese University of Hong Kong; and Dr. Leung Lai-ching, Member of the WoC and Associate Professor of Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong. Please log on to www.eoc.org.hk to know more about the speakers' views on gender respect and media culture.

Announcement of Winners – "Stop Discrimination Now - Starting with You and Me" Short Video Competition



Announcement of Winners – "Stop Discrimination Now - Starting with You and Me" Short Video Competition

"Stop Discrimination Now - Starting with You and Me" Short Video Competition organised by the EOC was closed on 15 May 2009. We have received 133 video entries, and the winning entries are:

Champion	: We are Equal – Jacky Au Choi Ki
First runner-up	: We are Here – Lam Ka Yeung, Hong Kong Shue Yan University
Second runner-up	: IMAGINE – Choi Yiu Fai, HKRSS Tai Po Secondary School
Second runner-up	: JUST KIDDING – Yeung Pui Man

"Special Recognition Awards" are also given to other 9 entries. To view all winning videos, please visit our EOC YouTube Channel.

www.youtube.com/user/HKEOC

EO Club Corner: Revisiting the Code of Practice on Employment under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance

EO Club Corner



Revisiting the Code of Practice on Employment under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance

Since the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (the DDO) more than ten years ago, Hong Kong employers, large or small, have readily embraced that equal opportunities should be afforded to employees with disabilities the same as those without. Attitudes toward the law have progressed from mere compliance to a more positive application, reflecting employers' commitment to corporate social responsibility. While employers would agree that diversity brings tremendous benefits to the workforce and business as a whole, they now have to deal with more specific issues on implementation – To what extent an accommodation is considered reasonable? Do we have to give up the candidate we absolutely desire for the one with a disability? Does having a disability encompass those who are habitually absent before and after long weekends or public holidays? How much do we change the nature of a job to facilitate an employee's recovery from a disability and how long this arrangement should last? What if the condition becomes permanent?

Last year, a group of EO Club members got together with a team of senior EOC officers who worked on a project to revise the existing Code under the DDO. In the gathering participants shared their views and experiences on implementation of the DDO in the workplace. The team took the information as valuable reference, incorporating EOC's accumulated experience in complaint handling and local and overseas jurisprudence to produce a draft Code which is comprehensive and provides useful guidance relating to the employment context.



A revisit gathering was held on 14 May 2009 where the EOC team presented the draft Code to EO Club members and human resources practitioners representing employers of different sizes and industries from whom we had sought exchanges before as well as interested new EO Club members. Participants found the 122-page draft userfriendly and practical. Newly included and enhanced features including case illustrations and practice suggestions were applauded.

Furthermore on 26 May 2009, EOC met with representative NGOs that serve different disability groups. Participants generously shared views on the overall impression and individual issues they have on the draft. The discussion was fruitful in that the team was given a chance to see the draft from a different but equally important perspective.

We are pleased that the draft has been generally well received by those who had had an advance sight, and we will finetune the draft Code accordingly based on their comments before it goes out for an across-the-board Public Consultation scheduled toward the end of the year. Our ultimate goal is to produce a Code that encourages and nourishes partnership between employers and employees to work towards attaining an equitable workplace for all, striking a healthy and effective balance between their rights and responsibilities, and we look forward to receiving your comments in the Public Consultation before finalizing the Code for publication!



Join the EO Club

The EO Club offers information, training and advice to a wide network of employers, human resources practitioners, workplace trainers and equal opportunities officers. The membership year starts from July. If you wish to join the EO Club, please call us at 2106-2155 (Ms Cheung).

Hong Kong

Chinese Chess for People with Visual Impairment

Designed specifically for people with visual impairment by Professor Michael Siu, School of Design of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Chinese Chess for the Visually Impaired Persons received the Grand Award and Gold Medal at the 36th International Exhibition of Inventions, New Techniques and Product held in Geneva. The novel design allows people with different visual capabilities to play chess together. It will also be used in the National Chess Competition for the Blind in China.



Information source: http://www.polyu.edu.hk/cpa/polyu/hotnews/details_e.php?year=2009&news_id=1630

England

20 Top Family-friendly Employers

In an ageing society, more and more workers are "sandwiched" between meeting the demands and needs of their parents and children.

Many workers find this pressure extremely exhausting. To promote family-friendly policies at workplace, Working Families, a charity organization based in United Kingdom, identified 20 best family-friendly employers that have taken up special measures to assist their employees with family responsibilities in May 2009. The measures range from providing sabbatical, compressed working weeks and home working options to employees.



Australia

Human Rights Translated: A Business Reference Guide

The Castan Centre for Human Rights Law of Monash University, the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Global Compact Office have jointly published "Human Rights Translated: A Business Reference Guide" recently. The publication aims to promote human rights principles in corporate practices. This publication also gives examples of cases from all over the world in relation to different rights, which are relevant to businesses.



Serbia



Anti-discrimination Law in Serbia

The Serbian Parliament recently passed an anti-discrimination law which prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender or other factors.

The law was passed with 127 votes in favour to 59 against. This legislation also paves the way for the establishment of the Ombudsman of Equal Rights as a state independent body to implement the newly enacted law.

Information source: http://www.dnaindia.com/dnaprint.asp?newsid=1204992

