

A Baseline Survey on Equal Opportunities on the Basis of Gender 1996-97

Executive Summary

Background

1. The Equal Opportunities Commission commissioned the Gender Research Programme and the Social Indicators Programme of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to conduct a baseline survey on equal opportunities on the basis of gender in Hong Kong in September 1996. The objectives of the survey are:

- (1) To collect information about the public's perception of gender role and stereotyping.
- (2) To collect information on the public's perception and experience of equality or discrimination between men and women in the media, family, education, work, and community participation.
- (3) To establish baseline subjective indicators reflecting equal opportunities or discrimination on the basis of gender.
- (4) To collect information about the public's knowledge of the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Methodology

2.1 A random sample household survey design was adopted. The sample size included 2,020 Hong Kong Chinese people aged 16 or over.

2.2 The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents largely coincide with the general population as reported in the Hong Kong 1996 by-census.

2.3 Among the 2,020 respondents, 48.3% are men and 51.5% are women. About 66% are currently married, 25.1% have never married, and 8.9% are either widowed, divorced, or separated. Nearly 1/3 of the respondents receive primary or no education, about half have secondary school education, and 1/8 complete tertiary education. About 14.2% of the sample can be classified to the low income group earning less than HK\$6,000 a month, 53.3% have a monthly income from HK\$6,000 to HK\$14,000 a month, and 32.5% earn HK\$15,000 or more.

Survey Instrument

3. A structured interview questionnaire in Cantonese is designed by the research team and contains seven parts of personal background information, media, education, work, family, community participation, and knowledge of the Equal Opportunities Commission. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with the respondents. The survey took place from September 1996 to December 1996.

Findings of the Survey

4. Gender Stereotype and Media

4.1 This part examines the gender differences in the perception of gender stereotypes and the awareness of its presence in the media. Men and women's satisfaction with the media's reporting of gender inequality, the presence of discrimination against men or women in the print and television media, and the need for legislation against gender discrimination in the media are studied.

4.2 The respondents are asked to evaluate a series of personal traits and to indicate to what extent they perceive each of them characterized mostly men, mostly women, or both genders equally. Results show that the respondents are very gender-stereotypic; perceiving all items in the masculine subscale of the Bem Sex Role Inventory as masculine characteristics, and all items in the feminine subscale as feminine characteristics. Respondents generally adhere more to female than male stereotypes. Gender differences are also found in the perception of gender stereotypes, with each gender having more rigid norms for their own gender than for the other gender.

4.3 In general, respondents are more aware of male than female stereotypes in the media. Gender differences are also noted in respondents' level of awareness toward the presence of media gender stereotypes, with men being more sensitive than women to the stereotypic descriptions of men by the media. Regarding specific role descriptions, more women than men are aware that the media portrays women as dependent on men and the family as the best place for women. On the other hand, more men than women agree that the media often describes men as belonging to the workplace, protecting women, and capable of making important decisions.

4.4 About half of the respondents are dissatisfied with the media's reporting on gender inequality, and only 27.3% are satisfied with the media's performance in this regard. In general, respondents perceive both the print media and television tend to discriminate

against women than men, and consider the print media as being more discriminatory against women than the television. There are no gender differences in the above perceptions. About 66% of the respondents agree that the government should legislate to curb discrimination against women in the media, with more women than men supporting such government control.

5. Education

5.1 This part reports on gender and human capital investment in education. Gender differences in the actual and expected level of educational attainment are examined. The amount of money that the respondents spend on supplementary education expenses for their children are also explored.

5.2 The male respondents on the whole have one more year of education than the female respondents, with men having an average of 9.87 years of education and women 8.7 years. This gender difference decreases as the sample gets younger, with the advantage for men decreasing from 3.5 years for the 55-64 years old group to 0.62 years for the 25-34 years old group. For those aged 16-24, the direction is reversed with women having 0.85 years of education more than men. Similar trend has been found with previous analysis of the Hong Kong Census data.

5.3 Women have similar expected educational attainment as men, and generally expect to have about 11 years of education. For those aged 16-24, women have a significantly higher education expectation than men. However, women respondents still perceive a slight parental prejudice against their education.

5.4 Women have a higher tendency to enroll in the adult and continuing education programmes than men. Women tend to enroll in the language, computer, and business/account programmes; whereas men tend to enroll in the industrial/technical programmes.

5.5 For respondents who are married and have children, they do not discriminate against girls in their educational expenditure, and spend about the same amount for boys and girls in tuition, private tutoring, travelling and pocket money, and others. Parents and potential parents, regardless of gender, also claim that they will spend equally in order to secure the best secondary or university education for their sons and daughters.

6. Family

6.1 This part examines respondents' experiences and perceptions of gender (in)equality in the family. It first focuses on how men and women perceive gender roles in the family. The distribution of household labour and the making of family decisions are also explored among married respondents.

6.2 There is an egalitarian ideology regarding the distribution of housework across gender. However, women are more ready than men to depart from traditional family roles. Compared to women, men are more "traditional" and are less acceptable to paid housework, less willing to involve in housework, less ready to challenge the traditional view that women have to do housework even if they have full-time jobs, but more inclined to believe that sons and daughters should have different share of housework.

6.3 Gender-biased attitudes are noted regarding child care responsibilities. A majority of the respondents believe that women can do a better job than men in looking after children but not supervising/disciplining children, with more men than women having these attitudes.

6.4 About 60% of the respondents still hold stereotypic views toward their sons and daughters. Despite these stereotypes, respondents do not seem to discriminate against children based on their gender, and over 80% agree that daughters should receive similar education and treatment as sons. Compared to women, men seem more inclined to have gender-biased attitudes toward daughters, especially in their daughters' right to inherit parents' property.

6.5 Traditional gender-based division of household labour is evident in most families. Most household chores and responsibilities are still primarily the wives' responsibilities, and husbands' main responsibility is with maintaining and repairing of household appliances. It is uncommon for husbands to share housework or responsibilities together with their wives.

6.6 While husbands are generally recognized as the "legitimate" head, most decision making power in the family tends to be egalitarian, with many decisions jointly made by husbands and wives. If it is not a joint decision, husbands are more likely than wives to make the decision in investment, removal, raising a home mortgage, and buying expensive furniture or electronic appliances; whereas wives are more likely than husbands to be the decision makers in choosing primary schools for their children or deciding whether to have a baby.

7. Work

7.1 This part delineates gender differences in the perception of gender (in)equality and discrimination in the workplace. All respondents are asked to consider whether inequality between men and women exists in the labour force as in the rate of participation, unemployment, employment status, job opportunities, occupational segregation, job status, and work-family issues. The prevalence of gender discrimination in employment situations such as recruitment, job assignment, performance appraisal, compensation, entitlement to fringe benefits, promotion, training, career development, sexual harassment, and distribution of authority is also explored.

7.2 Out of the 13 work situations, 9 are considered by more than half of the respondents as being unequal for men and women. Over 60% of the respondents perceive situations related to difficulties encountered by married women in juggling between work and family life as constituting gender inequality at work, but relatively fewer respondents (2.4-24.6%) consider various aspects of gender division of labour in the labour force as being unequal for women. More than 70% of the respondents perceive these 13 situations as occurring commonly in Hong Kong, with gender gap in pay being the most common.

7.3 Gender differences are found in the perception of gender inequality and its prevalence in the labour force. Except in the situation where young women generally find jobs more easily than young men, more women than men perceive the depicted situations as being disadvantageous to women, with the greatest gender differences found in situations related to pay, job opportunities, and work-family issues. In addition, more women than men believe that gender inequality in pay, job opportunities, and work-family conflicts occur commonly in Hong Kong.

7.4 About 75% of the currently employed respondents perceive 12 out of the 14 given employment situations as being discriminatory on the basis of gender. Dismissal due to pregnancy, sexual harassment of women at work, and gender-based differential benefits are considered as the most severe forms of gender discrimination. Large variations among respondents are noted in their perceived prevalence of the given situations.

7.5 In general, employed women are more sensitive than employed men in perceiving gender discrimination in the employment situations. With the exception of women's maternity leave, more women than men regard the given employment situations as discrimination based on gender, especially in situations where women have a greater chance of being laid off and senior positions are occupied by men. However, men and

women share similar perception regarding the prevalence of women being dismissed due to pregnancy, sexual harassment at work, and specification of gender in job advertisements.

8. Community and Political Participation

8.1 This part examines the attitudinal and behavioural aspects of community and political participation of men and women. Gender disparity in the degree of activism in organizing and participating in communal and political activities, motivating factors, and attitudes toward women as political and community leaders are also explored.

8.2 In general, respondents' participation in community activities such as signature campaign, resident meeting, seminar/forum/exhibition, community survey etc. is quite low, with only 15.4% being the initiators, workers, or members of the organizing committees. The rate and pattern of participation is the same across gender.

8.3 Men possess more influence in community affairs as they hold more executive positions in social organizations. Women tend to be members of community services centres, women's organizations, and religious and charitable organizations; and regard social participation as an opportunity for learning. Men consciously relate social participation to career advancement; and tend to belong to labour unions, business and professional organizations, and sports, cultural, and recreational clubs.

8.4 Respondents' political participation rate is also low, and only 20.7% involve in at least one of the following political activities: complaining to the government departments, seeking councilor's assistance, expressing political ideas to councilors, and demonstrations, etc. Men are more active participants than women in politics, although men and women have similar sense of citizenship and are motivated by a mixture of civic-mindedness, parochialism, and non-political reasons such as broadening of their experience. More men than women engage in confrontational types of political activities.

8.5 Although men and women express favourable attitude toward women's participation in community affairs and politics, more women than men agree that there should be more women community or organization leaders. Respondents' attitude toward women as leaders and politicians is not related to their evaluation of women's general competence. Those who favour more women as leaders and politicians are just as likely as those who disfavour to regard women's ability as inferior to men.

9. Knowledge of EOC and Discrimination

9.1 This part examines respondents' knowledge about the establishment and functions of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). Their subjective perceptions of and personal experience in discrimination are also explored.

9.2 When the survey was conducted between September and early December of 1996, about 34.9% of the respondents claim they know the establishment of the EOC. Among them, 41.7% have knowledge about the hotline service for complaints and 49.4% claim they know the functions of EOC. Among those who have knowledge of EOC functions, 29.1% correctly identify both gender and disability discrimination, and 64.1% correctly name either gender or disability discrimination as areas that the Commission handles. In general, respondents are more aware of the EOC's function in gender discrimination than in disability discrimination. Although more men than women claim to have knowledge of the EOC, there is no gender difference in the correct identification of the functions of EOC. A majority of the respondents know the establishment of EOC through the television, newspaper, and radio.

9.3 About 52.5% of the respondents perceive gender discrimination as a common occurrence, with more women than men having this perception. On the other hand, men and women do not differ in their awareness of disability discrimination, and 69.5% perceive this form of discrimination as frequently occurring. Most respondents perceive these two forms of discrimination as occurring most commonly in work-related situations.

9.4 Only 5.1% of the 2,020 respondents have previous experience of either gender or disability discrimination. Among those who report personal experience of discrimination (n = 103), over 80% (n = 80) can be classified as based on gender, 14.4% (n = 14) as on disability, and 3.1 (n = 3) on both forms. More women than men are victims of discrimination (6.7% vs 3.6%). While far more women than men suffer gender discrimination (5.7% vs 2.1%), more men than women are being discriminated against on the basis of their disability (1% vs 0.2%).

10. Subjective Core Indicators and Gender Equality Index

10.1 This part presents the relationship of subjective core indicators for gender equality with demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, education level, and employment status. A subjective Gender Equality Index (SGEI) is also constructed based on these core indicators for comparison and trend analyses in later years.

10.2 The core indicators are selected from each of the content areas of media, education, family, work, and community participation. Among the content areas, the perception of gender stereotyping in the media and discrimination at work have the strongest association with the overall perception of gender discrimination, whereas egalitarian attitudes toward family roles and nontraditional attitudes toward community/political leaders are only weakly associated with the overall perception of gender discrimination.

10.3 Respondents' demographic characteristics also impact on their consciousness of gender inequality. Older respondents are generally less sensitive to gender inequality, tend to have gender-based family role expectation, perceive less gender discrimination at work, and think gender discrimination is infrequent in Hong Kong.

10.4 Relative to men and those with below secondary education, women and those with post-secondary education are more sensitive to gender discrimination in the media and at work, less gender-based in family roles, and more supportive of female community/political leaders. In addition, those who are employed tend to hold more egalitarian views in family roles and perceive less gender discrimination at work than those who are without paid jobs. Unmarried respondents, in contrast to married individuals, are more sensitive to gender discrimination at work.

10.5 The Subjective Gender Equality Index (SGEI) is the average proportion of respondents perceiving gender equality and will also be used for trend analyses in later years. The SGEI for the entire sample is .6376, reflecting an average of 63.76% of the respondents perceiving gender equality in various areas. For the entire sample and subgroups broken down by demographic variables, perception of gender equality is most evident in education resource for children, but least evident in the workplace.