

Census Censors

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Aside from the interesting detail on women, the Civic Exchange's press conference last week to unveil the massive survey on Hong Kong's women also produced insight into the strange behaviour of the Hong Kong's Census and Statistics Department.

It is common practice in most developed countries for those bodies that conduct the census to provide a data sample of 1 or 2 per cent in an anonymised state to academics and researchers for them to slice and dice at will. But not so in Hong Kong.

Professor Michael DeGolyer of the Hong Kong Baptist University points out that a good statistician can see whether or not the data is faked. "That's maybe why the government won't give us a sample," he said, referring to the embarrassing recent revelation that some of the government's statistical data had been fabricated.

He says the government's control of the census data is unhealthy, since coming up with anything other than the government's version of events requires a huge amount of extra effort. DeGolyer says he has asked on several occasions and always gets the answer: "We'll look into it."