

Women still on outer edges in key industries

Poll reinforces concern that misconceptions and male-dominated workplaces keep females away

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Gender equality is still a distant goal in Hong Kong, a study has found, with women making up only a fraction of the workforce in key industries.

Only 7 per cent of workers in the logistics and transport sector are women, while women traders make up just 16 per cent of the nine trading and hedge-fund dealing rooms surveyed by the Economist Intelligence Unit, on behalf of the Women's Foundation.

Only 4 per cent of hedge funds in the city are headed by a woman, researchers found.

"The problem is in recruitment," said Camille Fabre, a JP Morgan trader, adding that most women did not consider going into the male-dominated industry. "There are lots of misconceptions about the job."

The two other industries surveyed were also male-dominated. In information technology, less than 10 per cent of staff at more than half the 57 companies surveyed are women. In the luxury sector, the proportion of senior management posts held by women is below the global average.

"It's important to analyse the situation. I am very concerned about discrimination and biases," Equal Opportunities Commission chief Dr York Chow Yat-ngok said at the release of the report yesterday.



Chow said 60 per cent of complaints to the commission concerned workplaces, of which 40 per cent were gender-related.

Economist Intelligence Unit researcher Laurel West said at least 20 large companies were surveyed in each sector, with the trading sector the least willing to help.

West said changes in corporate culture and government policy were needed to make workplaces more family-friendly.

Cat Purvis, CEO of IT company Exicon, said 90 per cent of the women she hired came from personal recommendation; none

applied to the firm directly. She believed many women felt jobs in the sector were unstable and that the work might not be suitable.

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Purvis said it was important men joined the fight for equality. "Instead of setting up women's groups, maybe we should be calling them gender equality groups," she said.

Anna Thompson, general manager (aircrew) at Cathay Pacific, said that while most of its staff were women, just 3 per cent of its pilots were female.

The government has faced calls to make workplaces more family-friendly to encourage women to return to the workforce amid concerns of a shortage of staff in some industries.

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