

# A Statistical Profile of Women and Girls in Hong Kong

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Written by The Hong Kong Council of Social Service  
Commissioned by, and in partnership with, The Women's Foundation  
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# Foreword

The issues facing Hong Kong women are numerous and complex. Some of these issues are particular to gender, most relate to pressing social issues – from rising incidents of teen pregnancies to integration challenges faced by the constant tide of New Arrival women from the Mainland to Hong Kong's rapidly ageing population. Resolving these issues requires concerted efforts and collaboration across the public and private sector. At The Women's Foundation, we believe these efforts can only be effective if they are grounded on objective and reliable data and an understanding of the fundamental root causes.

The Women's Foundation has been a leading voice in filling the critical gap in objective and incisive gender research in Hong Kong. In 2006, The Women's Foundation published our ground-breaking study on The Status of Women and Girls in Hong Kong to review the status of women in Hong Kong. Building on this study, starting in 2008, we launched an 18-month long stakeholder engagement process comprising focus groups, individual interviews and public symposia to better understand the barriers faced by women and girls.

In 2010, to raise greater awareness of gender issues, we launched a monthly column in The South China Morning Post and the Hong Kong Economic Journal website. The column features pieces from leading local and international voices on a diverse range of topics relating to women and gender issues in Hong Kong.

Since our first study in 2006, we have seen an improvement in some areas, some not at all, and in some the situation has further deteriorated. Hong Kong's Gini co-efficient has worsened with more people living at the poverty line; Hong Kong's rapidly ageing population (with women significantly outliving men) is straining welfare programmes and housing and health services; while at the other end of the spectrum, the needle has not moved for women in political office or on corporate boards and in senior executive positions. At the time of writing, the new Hong Kong Administration is showing signs that it is serious about tackling these issues which is encouraging. The growing number of CSR-minded businesses which are engaging with and supporting the NGO sector in their work to help the disadvantaged is another optimistic note.

We hope our research efforts, and the efforts of other organisations like the Hong Kong Council of Social Service can help identify challenges and gaps in current social welfare and education policies and programmes to inform and influence strategy and resource allocation by all stakeholders seeking positive change.

The Women's Foundation also believes in empowering other organisations to conduct independent studies that enhance the existing body of gender research in Hong Kong. In 2010, we commissioned a series of quantitative and qualitative research studies by The Chinese University's Gender Research Centre, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and Civic Exchange, examining the status of women and girls in Hong Kong.

This publication is the work of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, commissioned by The Women's Foundation with support from Goldman Sachs Gives. We are grateful to the Hong Kong Council of Social Service for their work and, in particular, Anthony Wong, Terry Leung and Joanna Liu for giving their time and expertise in producing this report.

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In closing, we know that words alone cannot meet the needs of Hong Kong's most vulnerable populations. Our greatest hope is that this research will serve as a catalyst for long-term systemic change by spurring efforts to pursue the changes needed to achieve the full participation of women in Hong Kong society.

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# 1 Summary of Findings – Facts and Discourse about Women in Hong Kong

In order to illuminate the situation of women and girls in Hong Kong, this statistical profile examines different social, economic, and political settings, and assesses Hong Kong's progress towards achieving the elimination of gender discrimination and inequality. It presents the most recent publicly available data and statistics for Hong Kong relating to women and human rights, women and the economy, women and poverty, women and health, violence against women, women in the family, women in power and decision-making, and women and the media. In addition, this report focuses on two other female target groups, namely, migrant and ethnic minority women and girls.

This summary of findings does not list all of the concluding observations presented at the end of the individual chapters that follow. Rather, it identifies the patterns or observations that traverse different themes so that policy-makers and stakeholders will have a better understanding of the current status of women and girls in Hong Kong.

## 1.1 Major Findings on the Situation of Women and Girls in Hong Kong

The good news is that women have access to, and participate in, many domains of life in Hong Kong. The absence of outright exclusion, however, does not imply that women enjoy parity with men. As women become more educated, for example, they are better able to enter the labour market and make a living for themselves but obstacles to professional success remain. Aside from the 'glass ceiling' that women encounter in the labour market, social, economic, cultural and political constraints

or expectations exert a strong influence on women in their decision-making processes. Gender role expectations may normalize discriminatory practices. Moreover, as gender intersects with age, class, race, ethnicity, and family, etc., discrimination and unequal practices against women may actually multiply in diverse ways. Historical, structural, and circumstantial barriers to equality may be deemed as "natural" rather than malleable making them no less harmful but more difficult to identify and combat.

### **Intersection of Age and Gender: Women After the Age of 30**

The intersection of age and gender masks disadvantage even when a discourse of equal opportunity is present in civil society. The remarkable difference in the situations of women before and after age 30 is a case in point. Girls and women are given equal opportunities before 30. However, the interaction between socio-cultural factors and age structures limits opportunities for women over time such that after 30 most will ultimately give up their relatively equal pay employment for marriage and family.

Despite a belief in equal opportunity as a social good, inequality is embedded in the socio-cultural context of everyday life. Individuals and institutions perpetuate gender stereotypes. This socialises girls (and boys) in ways that later shape career and life choices. Socio-economic and socio-cultural factors, which vary according to a woman's age, also have a significant impact on women. Multiple barriers, many subtle or unacknowledged are part of the social fabric. Discrimination takes many forms and is experienced in myriad ways by

individual women. Yet because the bias that women face singularly is not collectively articulated, gender bias escapes public visibility and is not easy to eradicate.

- The family (or household) remains the most powerful institution defining the situation of women in Hong Kong. This is not to say that family is the source of all problems. Rather, it is the ways in which families are socially and culturally organised and practised that can negatively affect women. For example, culturally, men are seen as the head of the family. Women are rarely regarded as heads of families and those who are may face additional pressures as they challenge social norms. Unless gender norms bend to accommodate dual headship there is little hope for genuine harmony at home. Changes in gender norms provide women with more opportunities in the public sphere, but also illustrate how women have long been positioned or perceived as the 'second sex' in the family. In the specific social and cultural context of Hong Kong, many more women than men give up their jobs when faced with pressure at home. Historically, women have been inextricably connected to the work of care and nurture. Families assume that it is women who are responsible for housework, care-giving, and child-rearing responsibilities. In addition to limiting options for personal and professional growth beyond the private sphere, individual women who feel they have no support or are overwhelmed by the work of care may experience isolation from the extra-familial world. In extreme cases, a rigid attachment to gender roles can reproduce vulnerability and powerlessness in the family, resulting in household subordination and domestic violence of various types and intensities.
- The specific organisation and practice of family in Hong Kong may also mask women's disadvantaged situation behind a façade of some seemingly positive ideals. Within the household, women's poverty is largely invisible because women are assumed to benefit from the income of household breadwinners. Individually, however, women's poverty rate is higher than that of men. In the same way, women's unemployment or underemployment is hidden within the category of the 'economically inactive,' the majority of whom are female family care-takers.
- The situation is similar in the health care sector. In theory, both genders may, given training, qualify to become doctors. In practice, while an increasing number of women are earning medical degrees,, physicians and specialists, particularly senior doctors, still tend to be men. Not surprisingly, para-medical professional positions that entail care and communication tend to be filled by women. Mediated by family factors such as marriage, child-birth, and care-related responsibilities, more female than male doctors find it difficult to remain in their jobs. The resulting political and economic implications are that even women who have received high levels of professional training reap far fewer benefits in terms of money and occupational status.
- Outright discrimination against women is legally prohibited, and women's access to the labour market is supposedly unrestricted or welcomed in many industries. However, in certain work settings, women are the first to be fired and the last to be hired. In addition, women suffer from a gender gap in pay, typically receiving 30% less compensation than men.
- 'Glass ceilings' prevent women from fully realising their potential in terms of career advancements. As a result, there are more male employers than female, more men in senior jobs than women, and more women in casual jobs than

men. Industries traditionally dominated by men continue to limit women's access.

- While girls outnumber boys in schools and universities at the undergraduate level, gender imbalance marks particular departments and subjects are coded male and female. Additionally, the way that individual schools and universities are organised reinforces the stereotype that kindergarten and primary school teachers should be women while university professors should be men.
- Women can theoretically freely participate in the political arena, but in fact they lag behind male peers. How and in what ways their participation leads to realisation of their power in relation to that of men is of prime importance. While there are more women registered electors (see Chapter 8), as the level of real power increases, the number of women participating decreases. Thus, women are often relegated to the role of 'cheerleaders' in the political process. Research shows that democratic elections seem to aid women's access to power, but social and cultural hurdles are present at the day-to-day level of political organisation such as within political parties, localities or villages, where women are less preferred as election candidates.

### **Intersection of Class and Gender: Women and Income Inequality**

As mentioned above, women's poverty remains largely invisible. At the household level, women's and men's poverty rates are more or less the same, so for many policies and programs aimed at poverty alleviation in Hong Kong, gender is considered irrelevant and the subtle feminisation of poverty is absent from the agenda.

While the working conditions and salaries of the lower-income classes have been the object of wide societal concern particularly during the debate on minimum wage policy,

the gender composition of this demographic group has not received equal attention. This omission is significant as figures show that jobs filled by women are disproportionately low-paid and casual. When occupation intersects with gender, women are clearly seen to comprise the majority of the lower-income working classes and men constitute the majority of the better-paid management class.

### **Intersection of Race/Ethnicity: More Than Ethnic Minorities and Migrants**

The intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender not only hides the gender dimension within different categories of minorities and migrants thus making minority women's rights seem irrelevant, but also exponentially reinforces their disadvantaged position.

- The increasing number of women from Mainland China who move to Hong Kong with their male partners often find themselves dislocated in their new environment. Their status as 'New Arrivals' is what policies and programmes address, and their disadvantaged situation is not generally understood in gender terms. In fact, the majority of 'New Arrivals' are women. Their situation as 'New Arrivals' is fundamentally linked to their female gender identity as rural daughters sent to make an urban living, or who marry Hong Kong men and become housewives in an unfamiliar, unfriendly city.
- Similarly, the situation of ethnic minority women in Hong Kong from the Global South is as, if not more, challenging as than that of new migrants from Mainland China. Language barriers prevent Hong Kong's ethnic minorities from enjoying equal access to higher education, securing well-paid jobs in a predominantly service-oriented economy that requires a good command of Cantonese and fully participating in society. However, ethnic minority

women are particularly disadvantaged because manual hard labour jobs where there is now a preponderance of ethnic minority workers are usually not available to women.

- The disadvantaged situation of women who are employed as domestic workers is a result of not only the intersection of race, ethnicity and gender, but also that of class, family, and household. Paradoxically, although their situation is a result of intensified globalisation, in which they are a mobile group responding to the global demand for domestic caregiver resources, their situation in Hong Kong is extremely localized and largely confined to their host families' households. Thus, they are the least visible of foreign-born workers.

## 1.2 The Disadvantaged Situation of Gender Discourse

The above observations illustrate that women's disadvantaged status is real, but often invisible. This is not because the disadvantaged status of women is not observable in various real life settings. Rather, their disadvantages are not perceived or understood as being produced by or attributable to their being female.

In addition to paying attention to women's disadvantaged status, it is also important to pay attention to the impoverished condition of gender and feminist discourse in Hong Kong. This can be assessed theoretically and empirically deploying a gendered perspective.

### Gendered Perspective

In terms of theoretical perspective, gender discourse must be sensitive not only to gender but also to the intersection of

gender and other socio-economic and socio-political variables such as class, race, ethnicity, etc. Without this kind of theoretical perspective, the situation of women in Hong Kong would never be identified and clearly understood.

Observations, data, and information grouped or coded only by gender and sex are incomplete. Intersectional analysis yields strong empirical data facilitating more effective assessment of the real situation of women in Hong Kong.

### Data Environment

The difficulties experienced in the process of compiling this statistical profile demonstrate the challenges for articulating the gender discourse in Hong Kong.

- The lack of awareness of gender as a key category of analysis in the recording and collection of statistics is a major problem. During the process of requesting data from different Hong Kong government departments and other institutions, researchers were often told that information on gender was not collected or recorded. The lack of gender segmentation in the recording and collection of data means there is no publicly available data on the percentage of low-income women benefiting from the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy (WITS) Scheme,<sup>1</sup> the number and percentage of women registered as members of the Hong Kong Second-hand Exchange,<sup>2</sup> the number and percentage of driving licences granted to women, the number and percentage of women registering to receive e-forms from the government, and the ratio of men to women who contribute to Hong Kong's yearly carbon footprint.

1 The Work Incentive Transport Subsidy (WITS) Scheme is designed to relieve the burden of travelling expenses commuting to and from work on the part of low-income households.

2 The Hong Kong Second-hand Exchange is a free community service provided by the Environmental Protection Department. It aims to facilitate the exchange of unwanted but still usable items to help reduce, reuse and recycle waste in Hong Kong.

The lack of a gendered perspective results in a failure to ensure the compilation of primary data into statistics with gender breakdowns. Moreover, it virtually guarantees the omission of data by gender in regular reports. Frequently, raw data is obtained concerning a person's gender but this does not translate into gender-based statistics. For example, information on taxpayers' gender is collected, but when researchers asked the Inland Revenue Department to provide data related to tax payment by gender, the Department responded that the data had not been compiled or analysed by gender. Other examples of data with no gender breakdown include the number of people initiating legal proceedings, the number of people with private health insurance, the number and percentage of bankrupt persons, and the number and percentage of people serving on the Common Jurors' List.

Because of the lack of an established practice within the administration to report statistics with a gender breakdown, the research presented here had to rely heavily on requests for data from the relevant government departments. This led to a host of problems including inconsistencies among departments in terms of data provision, inconsistencies when dealing with different staff within the same department, administrative procedures that deter data requests, non-standardised waiting periods for receiving data, and the preferential treatment accorded to "VIPs" such as Legislative Council (LegCo) members.

- *Inconsistency among Departments in Providing Data:* While many government departments accept email requests for data, some did not respond to emails. Although many government departments were responsive to data requests and reacted proactively (e.g. they called to

clarify our requests and offered help), others were less helpful. Ultimately, researchers had difficulty discerning when data simply did not exist or if they were in fact being denied access to the information.

- *Inconsistencies within the same Department:* Different responses were received from staff members within the same Department on a number of occasions, showing once again, the need for standardized protocols and practices.
- *Deterring Requests:* Quite frequently, government departments would acknowledge a data request but subsequently did not provide the data requested.
- *Waiting Period:* Some departments responded to data requests quickly by either providing the data immediately or giving a specific time when data would be available. Others failed to respond at all.
- *Preferential Treatment:* Some of our data requests were declined by government departments, but were subsequently met when they were requested by LegCo members on our behalf. This type of preferential treatment reinforces the practice of data centralisation and selective transparency, which impairs the articulation of the situation of women in Hong Kong and the climate of intellectual freedom in Hong Kong at large.

More situated analysis based on the concept of intersectionality is vital. Instead of reporting data in the format of standard tables, a more useful approach would be the release of data in the form of datasets that would allow concerned stakeholders to perform their own analysis. However, releasing data in dataset format is generally uncommon, except to academic institutions.

**Table 1:** Examples of Unavailable Data that Reflect the Intersection of Gender and Other Factors

Indicators	Breakdown Requested
Number and percentage of candidates, elected members and appointed members in District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Marital Status</li> </ul>
Number and percentage of candidates and elected members in LegCo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Marital Status</li> </ul>
Percentage of women who are the primary breadwinners in their households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Income and household size</li> </ul>
Percentage of women participating in the Self-reliance Scheme (SFS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Age and number of years receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA)</li> </ul>
Percentage of domestic helpers using legal aid services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gender</li> </ul>
Percentage of women receiving Wardship under the Adoption Ordinance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Age, education level, occupation, and income</li> </ul>
Number and percentage of women re-entering the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ age, education, and marital status</li> <li>▪ age, education, and number of children</li> </ul>
Number and percentage of teenagers who have alcohol abuse issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gender</li> </ul>
Number and percentage of teenagers who display behavioural issues at school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gender</li> </ul>
Number of women who are commuting to and from Hong Kong regularly with two-way permits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Age, age of husband, number of children, and reason for commuting</li> </ul>
Percentage of people with sexually transmitted diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gender, age, occupation, education level, and marital status</li> </ul>
Number of single parents suffering from mental health problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gender, age, and type of mental problem</li> </ul>
Number of cosmetic surgeries and body related modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gender and age</li> </ul>

As available concepts and data are not able to articulate the situation, advocacy for women's status and rights remains difficult and contentious, creating a distorted impression that the situation of women is similar to that of men. If the public perception is that gender equality has basically been achieved, less attention and fewer resources will be devoted to collecting, recording, reporting, and releasing data that facilitates deeper gender analysis.

To break this cycle, more attention must be paid to gender in context and in

conversation with other factors that shape identities and lived experiences. Indeed, many recent qualitative studies have helped reveal the importance of intersectional gender analysis in Hong Kong, and elsewhere. In the context of policy advocacy, however, qualitative studies, despite their value, can only have limited impact. Quantitative studies are badly needed to fill the gap. This statistical profile is an important endeavour in this direction, but it points to the need for more studies involving primary data collection in the future.

## 2 Women's Education and Training

According to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, education is both a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Furthermore, educational attainment is an important channel for upward social mobility. For the young, schools are the institution responsible for equipping them through a formal curriculum (i.e. the study of specific subjects) and a hidden curriculum (i.e. values that are taught in school but not an explicit part of the formal curriculum) to fill various roles in society (Renzetti and Curran, 1989). Traditionally, women and girls were expected to take up domestic roles, which limited their opportunity for education. In Hong Kong today, although women have improved access to the education system, systemic inequalities persist.

### 2.1 Education Attainment

After the introduction of a stipulation that mandated nine years of compulsory formal education in 1978, the gender proportion in education has equalised. Chart 2.1.1 show the overall educational attainment of population aged 15 and above by gender in 2009. Women comprised a higher proportion than men of those who attained 'primary' and 'upper secondary.' Although, women accounted for a smaller proportion at all other levels of educational attainment and a higher percentage of women than

men received no schooling, these gender gaps have narrowed significantly since 1986.

There are divergent trends in the older age groups, namely those aged 40-49, 50-59, and 60 and above. In the 40-49 age group, only 12.9% of women but 20.4% of men were degree holders in 2009. Moreover, 16% of women attained below a lower secondary level while only 10% of men did so. The gender gap increases with age. In the 50-59 age group, only 6% of women were degree holders while 11.3% of men held degrees in 2009. In the age group of those 60 and above, the proportion of female degree holders of women and that of male were 2.7% and 7.3% respectively, representing a gap of more than two times.

While the educational attainment of women has improved compared with the situation two decades ago, certain groups of disadvantaged women still have a much lower educational attainment.

### Female New Arrivals

New arrivals have become one of the important building blocks of Hong Kong's population structure, and most of them are women. There were 153,768 people aged 15 and above from mainland China who had resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years in 2006. Women were a significant proportion (i.e. 77.8%) of this group, especially in the age groups 25-34

**Chart 2.1.1:** Population Aged 15 and above by Gender and Educational Attainment in 2009

	No Schooling	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Post-secondary (non-degree)	Post-secondary (degree)
<b>Female (%)</b>	7.6	18.5	14.7	36.3	7.5	15.5
<b>Male (%)</b>	2.6	16.8	17.8	35.4	8.5	19.0

Source: Census and Statistics Department

and 35-44. Among women in the 25-34 age group, 63.3% had a lower secondary level of education or below in 2006, while only 8.6% had post-secondary qualifications, which unfortunately are not recognized in Hong Kong. For those in the 35-44 age group, 71.2% had a lower secondary education or below while only 5.5% had post-secondary qualifications in 2006.

### **Ethnic Minority Women**

Among ethnic minorities (excluding foreign domestic helpers) aged 15 and over, women comprised a higher proportion than ethnic minority men at all education levels in 2006 except at the tertiary level. In 2006, 40.2% of ethnic minority women had tertiary qualifications as compared with 56% of their male counterparts. However, if the statistics are further broken down by age, divergence exists between genders in the age groups after 30-39. Moreover, in the 15-29 age group, 38.6% of ethnic minority women had post-secondary qualifications compared with 40.4% of women in the general population.

### **Women with Disabilities**

In the 15-29 age group, only 5.3% of disabled women had a post-secondary degree compared with 26.5% of the general population in 2007.

## **2.2 Educational Opportunities for Women**

Similar to 2000, both genders account for roughly the same proportion of students enrolled in kindergarten, primary school, and secondary 1-5 in 2009. However, in 2009, there were a higher percentage of female students at the secondary 6 and 7 levels. Thus, in quantitative terms, girls' access to education is equal to that of boys.

The opening up of educational opportunities to women benefits them. Yet, underneath these aggregate statistics, subtle forms of inequality continue to persist.

### **Horizontal Segregation**

Patterns of gender segregation based on disciplines of study are apparent. From 2009-2010, significantly more women enrolled in the disciplines of education (i.e. 73.7%), social science (i.e. 64.2%), arts and humanities (i.e. 72.9%), and health (i.e. 68.7%) than men. In contrast, significantly more men concentrated on the discipline of sciences (i.e. 64.4%) than women. Furthermore, despite the fact that the share of women enrolled in engineering and technology programs increased from 14.1% in the 1996/97 academic year to 34% in 2009/10, men are still represent about two-thirds of total enrolment in this subject.

Horizontal segregation actually begins at the secondary school level when students choose the subjects they want to study. Except English language, Chinese language, and Mathematics which are mandatory, the top ten subjects chosen by male candidates and female candidates differ significantly. Additional mathematics, computer and technology were not among female candidates' top ten choices among the female candidates. On the other hand, male candidates were much more likely to choose traditional science subjects such as Chemistry and Physics.

Data on vocational training further illustrate the presence of horizontal segregation between genders according to different levels and modes of study. Among all graduates at the craft, technician, and higher technician levels who took full-time course, only 20.7%, 39.1%, and 45.9% were women in 2008/09 respectively. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3: *Women and the Economy*, over 95% of craft-related positions were dominated by men in 2009. Data on graduates of part-time day courses whose studies are sponsored by their employers supports this finding. The percentage of female graduates from part-time courses in

2008/09 was less than 1% at the craft and higher technician levels, and 12.1% at technician level.

### Vertical Segregation

Currently there are more women enrolled in programs funded by University Grants Committee than men with women comprising 53.2% of enrolled students in UGC funded programs in 2009/10. The postgraduate taught course level follows a similar trend. In 2009/10, 60% of enrolled students were women. For research postgraduate programs, although the proportion of women has continued to grow over the past two decade, men still comprised over half (i.e. 57.5%) of students in research postgraduate programs in 2009/10.

## 2.3 Impacts of Gender Segregation in Education

Chapter 3: *Women and the Economy* reveals that gender segregation is also clearly identifiable within the structures of occupation and industry. The fact that substantially more women study arts or social science subjects may limit women's career choices as prerequisites for science and technology related jobs are much more rigid. Furthermore, as Chapter 5: *Women and Health* notes, in the field of medical care more women are found in assistive or paramedical professions while men dominate in specialist treatment.

A similar situation exists in the field of education. In universities, as more women study the discipline of education than men, jobs in the field of education increasingly tend to be filled by women. In 2009/10, women constituted 99%, 78% and 56.9% of all teachers in kindergarten, primary day school and secondary day school respectively. However, at the tertiary level of education, there are more male than female teachers. In approved post-secondary colleges and University

Grants Committee funded institutions men comprised 69.8% and 65.6% of total number of teachers respectively.

Moreover, vertical segregation in terms of enrolment in tertiary education also limits women's career development in tertiary education. Normally, for employment in higher education, a research post-graduate degree is considered much more valuable than a taught one. Finally, in addition to the immediate impact on women, the vicarious impact of vertical segregation on gender equality is paramount. As students in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools see more women than men, they may be subtly imparted with a stereotypic image that assigns women to the position of teacher at the lower levels of education.

## 2.4 Continuing Education

The continuing education system is quite well-developed in Hong Kong. Theoretically, anyone who wants to enhance their educational qualifications should enjoy equal access to many different options. As compared to men, an increasing number of women have tried to gain a post-secondary qualification through part-time or distance learning from 1991 to 2006. The number of male students studying part-time or distance learning post-secondary courses per 1000 female students decreased from 1,337 in 1991 to 821 in 2006.

However, the gender ratio of female part-time post-secondary students to their male counterparts varies with marital status. While substantially more never married women; or widowed, divorced or separated women engaged in part-time study than their male counterparts in 2006, currently married women who studied part-time post-secondary courses in 2006 numbered nearly the same (i.e. 24,930) as currently married men who studied part-time post-secondary courses (i.e. 24,234).

The number of reimbursement claims for the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) also show that a greater proportion of women are taking part in continuing education. In 2009, women made 32,026 (i.e. 55%) of claims while men made 26,415 (i.e. 45%) of claims. Furthermore, among all women claiming reimbursement, most were below age 30, which is close to the median age of first marriage for women. This further suggests a relationship between marital status and engagement in continuous education for women.

## 2.5 Retraining

Women constitute a large majority of all participants in retraining programmes. In 2009/10, 73.5% of retrainees were women, and 98.7% of them enrolled in ordinary programs. Also, as previously mentioned, the educational qualifications of middle-age women and female New Arrivals are typically lower than those of the general population, and they tend to experience more difficulty finding jobs. However, less than 1% of total female retrainees participated in and New Arrival retraining programs. No 2009/10 figures were available for those who participated in retraining programs for those aged 45 and above.

## 2.6 Concluding Observations

- Over the past two decades, the gender gap in educational attainment has been reduced as a result of equal access to education for both girls and boys at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. However, for disadvantaged groups of women such as female New Arrivals from mainland China, ethnic minority women, and women with disabilities, gender gaps remain at higher levels of educational attainment.
- While, in general, women appear to be catching up in terms of their access to educational opportunities, subtle forms of inequality remain. Horizontal and vertical segregations jeopardise women's exposure to education on subjects or disciplines that can potentially render more occupational advancement choices or economic rewards such as engineering and technology.
- One long-term vicarious impact, which is still being reproduced in an education system where most kindergarten, primary, and secondary school teachers are women, is that students start to associate women with lower level teaching professions.
- Women continue to engage in continuing education more actively than men. However, a woman's marital status may impact her participation in continuing education programs.
- Students of retraining programs are predominantly women.

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# 3 Women and the Economy

This chapter deals with women's participation in and contribution to the economy. Women's equal access to economic resources is important for their development and the achievement of gender equality. Women have access to economic resources through three major processes: production, consumption, and investment.

**Production:** The opportunity for women to earn a decent living is the primary means through which they can realise their aspirations and meet their needs while contributing to the economy.

Ideally, jobs should be assigned based on an individual's ability and choices. However, stereotypes about what constitutes 'women's work' and 'men's work' are still prevalent in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the influence of traditional gender roles remains. While some women choose to be home-makers, many do so because of others' expectations, thus preventing them from realising their true potential in paid employment. The majority of women also bear primary responsibility for housework and childcare.

**Consumption:** Women's access to economic resources is of prime importance and their earnings constitute a major part in defining their access to economic resources. Women's work, whether in the workplace or at home, is not rewarded equally to men.

In a consumer society like Hong Kong, women's consumption should also be considered a contribution to the economy.

While identifying consumption patterns may risk reinforcing gender stereotypes, it also opens up an unexplored possibility for changing those stereotypes.

**Investment:** Investment is also crucial for women to have equal access to economic resources. Women's participation in investment activities such as saving, the stock market, and the real estate market as well as their access to credit and loans, defines how economic resources are accessible to them for further advancement.

This chapter aims to provide an overall profile of how women take part in these processes as compared to men in terms of the existing state of participation and the opportunities given to them, and the amount of economic resources they can access for their development.

## 3.1 Women's Contribution to Economic Production

With an improvement in educational qualifications, women are increasingly able to participate in the labour market. While this does not mean that women have already gained equal access to the job market and employment, the proportion of economically active<sup>1</sup> women has increased over time from 39.1% in 1996 to 46.6% in 2009.

The economically active population aged 15 and over can be further divided into two categories, 'Employed' and 'Unemployed.' The proportion of employed women dropped to 95.6% in 2009 from 97.7% in

<sup>1</sup> Persons who are economic active, as defined in all official statistics, refer to persons in the labour force. Labour force includes 3 major categories: the employed, the underemployed and the unemployed.

**Chart 3.1.1:** Labour Force Participation Rate, by Gender and Marital Status, 1986-2009

	1986	1996	2001	2009
Never-married Female (%)	70.8	68.4	67.7	67.5
Never-married Male (%)	76.9	70.9	67.9	66.0
Ever-married Female (%)	39.1	39.3	43.7	46.8
Ever-married Male (%)	82.9	78.2	75.7	71.2

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2010)

1996. A slightly larger drop was found among employed men from 96.9% in 1996 to 93.8% in 2009.

The gender ratio of females to males in the labour force has decreased over the past two decades, while the proportion of economically active women who are employed has remained more or less on par with that of men. However, in 2009, the female labour force participation rate<sup>2</sup> (i.e. 53.1%) was 16% lower than that the male rate (i.e. 69.4%), although the female rate has been increasing over the past decade.

One major explanation for this phenomenon is that women account for a substantial proportion of all economically inactive people<sup>3</sup>. In 2009, 57 men for every 100 women were economically inactive. Furthermore, in 2009, over 40% of economically inactive women were home-makers. While this represents a substantial drop by almost 16% in comparison with 1996, home-makers remained the largest group among all economically inactive women. Indeed, women accounted for nearly 100% of all home-makers with only two male per 100 female home-makers.

### Barriers to Women's Entrance to the Employment Market

While some women choose to contribute at home, others want to participate in the

job market but are prevented from doing so because of home-related duties. 44.3% of economically inactive women in 2008 said that they could not enter the job market due to household responsibilities as compared with 1.5% of men. Thus, household responsibilities are a major obstacle to women participating in the job market.

According to 2009 data, women's rate of participation in the employment market declines from age 30 onwards.

Juxtaposing this with the median age of a woman's first marriage (i.e. 28.5 years old in 2009), it is clear that once women get married, their participation in the labour force decreases.

Chart 3.1.1 shows the labour force participation rates by marital status and gender. There is a significant difference between single women who never been married, and women who married or had been married at some point. Only 39.1% of married women participated in the labour market in 1986 compared to 70.8% of women who had never been married. There has been a slight improvement in recent years, but even in 2009 46.8% of married women were in the labour market compared to 67.5% of never-married women.

<sup>2</sup> Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) refers to the proportion of labour force in the total population aged 15 and over.

<sup>3</sup> Economically inactive persons refer to persons who are not considered to be in the labour force. Unemployed persons, in official definition, are part of the labour force, who are considered to be only temporarily jobless. There are 4 reported categories of economically inactive persons in official statistics: home-makers, students, retired person, and other.

The participation rate of never-married women in the labour force is similar to that of never-married men. In 2009, the rates for women and men were 67.5% and 66%, respectively.

Economic opportunities include employing others, self-employment, and being an employee. However, a converging trend of female and male participation in the labour force applies only to employees. A significant gap between women and men, who come under the categories of 'Employers,' and 'Self-employed,' still exists at an aggregate level.

If being an employer is an indication of greater economic power, then women can appear to be much less economically powerful than men. In 1986, there were only 8,400 female employers compared to 109,400 male employers. This situation improved in 2009 with 26,800 female employers versus 101,300 male employers in Hong Kong.

In 1986, 18,700 women were self-employed compared to 131,900 men. This increased to 59,700 women and 180,900 men in 2009. However, caution should be taken when interpreting these figures as in recent years many grassroots workers were forced to become self-employed, particularly after 2000 when the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) was introduced.

### **Glass Ceilings for Women in the Labour Market**

Women's participation in the labour market has improved over time and greater emphasis is now placed on gender equality in the workplace. However, these improvements also conceal gender segregation in the job market. Horizontal and vertical segregation are explored in this section. The former refers to the extent to which men and women perform

different jobs, masking the inequality between them. The latter refers to the extent to which men have higher status and higher paid jobs than women.

**Horizontal segregation:** In 2008, a comparatively larger proportion of women (i.e. 59%) than men worked in community, social, and personal services; and wholesale, retail and import/export trades, and the restaurant/hotel industry (i.e. 52%). On the other hand, in 2008 men accounted for 92% of employees in the construction industry; 77% in transport, storage and communications; and 67% in manufacturing. These patterns have remained consistent over the previous decade.

Men also dominate Hong Kong's disciplined services, which include its eight official uniformed forces (e.g. the Hong Kong Police Force). In 2000, only 11.9% of people working in disciplined services were women; 88.1% were men. In 2010, there was a slight improvement with 13.9% women and 86.1% men.

This gendered pattern is particularly visible in departments such as the Fire Services Department and the Government Flying Service, in which only 1.4% of staff were women in 2010. In contrast, the gender imbalance is less marked in the Immigration Department. In 2010, 26.5% of Immigration Department staff were women.

**Vertical segregation:** While women's academic qualifications have improved, in 2009 there were still fewer female managers and administrators (i.e. 29.6%), professionals (i.e. 37.4%), and associate professionals (i.e. 44.4%). By contrast, there were a higher proportion of women in less well-paid, lower level positions including clerks (i.e. 72.7%) and elementary occupations (i.e. 64.7%) in 2009.

Apart from positions requiring further academic qualifications, men dominated various craft- and technical skills-oriented jobs. In 2009, women accounted for only 3.5% of craft and related workers, and 6.5% of plant and machinery operators and assemblers.

### The '70% of Men's Pay' Reality

Gender segregation in the job market not only affects women's employment opportunities, it actually obscures a deeper structure of gender inequality by distributing men rather than women to more economically rewarding industries or occupations.

Women's median monthly income is generally about 70% of men's – HK\$8,500 compared to HK\$12,000 in 2009. Data indicates that this ratio has existed for three decades with some variation depending on the industry.

Chart 3.1.2 shows that the monthly median income difference was either non-existent or less significant at the level of manager and administrator, professional, and

associate professional. In elementary occupations, the difference was sizable. This is, in part, due to the inclusion of foreign domestic workers in the data but even if this group was excluded, women's median monthly income was HK\$5,500 compared to HK\$7,000 earned by men (CSD, 2010).

### New Forms of Segregation and Reward Imbalance

In recent years, there has been an on-going process of economic restructuring in Hong Kong coupled with the impact of globalisation. Flexible employment has become a new trend in the labour market, and since employees who work 18 hours per week or less are not fully protected under existing regulations, many employers are creating flexible or casual jobs to avoid labour protection.

It is widely believed that casualisation provides more opportunities for women to participate in the labour market, particularly for those who need to stay at home to take care of household responsibilities. In 2009, about 60% of

**Chart 3.1.2:** Median Monthly Employment Earnings of Employed People, by Main Occupation and Gender, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2009

(HK\$)	1996		2001		2006		2009	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Managers and administrators	20,000	22,000	28,000	30,000	26,000	30,000	30,000	30,000
Professionals	22,000	26,400	30,000	32,000	28,000	30,000	30,000	32,000
Associate professionals	15,000	15,000	16,000	16,000	15,000	15,000	16,000	15,000
Clerks	9,000	9,500	10,000	10,000	9,000	9,500	10,000	10,000
Service workers and shop sales workers	7,000	10,000	7,000	10,000	6,500	10,000	7,000	10,000
Craft and related workers	7,000	9,500	8,000	10,000	8,000	9,500	8,000	10,300
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	5,300	9,500	6,000	10,000	5,500	9,500	6,600	9,500
Elementary occupations	3,800	7,000	3,900	7,500	3,400	6,800	3,600	7,000
Overall	8,000	10,000	8,800	12,000	8,000	11,500	8,500	12,000

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2010)

people who were casually employed were women.

Increased opportunities to work do not necessarily produce better outcomes for women. Chart 3.5.1 shows that of the 76,400 casual workers (i.e. 66.7% of all casual workers) in 2009 who were paid less than HK\$4,000 a month, 67.7% were women.

Women are also more likely to receive lower pay than men. Three out of four female casual workers earned less than HK\$4,000 a month, whereas only two out of four male casual workers earned such low wages.

### 3.2 Women's Consumption Volume

How much women spend is indicative of the contributions they make to the economy. Although women's consumption volume is the most direct measure of contribution, there is currently no data on this. Some surveys such as MasterCard Worldwide's survey on consumer purchasing priorities (MasterCard Worldwide, 2010b) endeavour to understand women's consumption patterns, but they mainly focus on what women buy.

Women's Autonomy in Consumption Synovate conducted a survey in 2008 about women's autonomy in consumption.

Among the Hong Kong women, aged 15-64 and of all income levels, who were interviewed, 81% said that they could afford to pay for what they wanted without asking for money from their partners; 87% said that they had at least equal say on major purchases (Synovate, 2008).

MasterCard Worldwide Consumer Purchasing Priorities Index has also studied how men and women make financial decisions in the household since 2009 (MasterCard Worldwide, 2010). Findings show that while the percentage of female respondents who made the bulk of decisions on household spending increased from 32% in 2009 to 64% in 2010, the percentage of male respondents who made household spending decisions was higher in both 2009 (i.e. 42%) and 2010 (i.e. 86%).

### 3.3 Women's Investments

Investment return is considered a major economic resource in addition to gainful employment. Investments can take the form of savings, shares/bonds or related financial products, property acquisition, and starting a business, all of which may involve obtaining loans and credit. However, data relating to all these activities is not available.

MasterCard Worldwide's Index of Financial Literacy is based on a survey of customers

**Chart 3.1.3:** Number of Employed People (Excluding Foreign Domestic Helpers) Working Less Than 18 Hours a Week, 2009

	Male		Female		Overall
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
< HK\$4,000	24,700	32.3	51,700	67.7	76,400
HK\$4,000 - HK\$5,999	6,600	49.3	6,800	50.7	13,400
HK\$6,000 - HK\$7,999	5,200	65.0	2,800	35.0	8,000
HK\$8,000 - HK\$9,999	3,700	68.5	1,700	31.5	5,400
HK\$10,000 or above	6,200	54.9	5,000	44.2	11,300
<b>Overall</b>	<b>46,400</b>	<b>40.5</b>	<b>68,100</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>114,500</b>

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2010)

in 24 markets across the Asia/Pacific, Africa and Middle East in 2010 (MasterCard Worldwide, 2011). It comprises three components - Basic Money Management, Financial Planning, and Investment – and respondents' skills in each category were assessed to ascertain their financial literacy. Women in Hong Kong scored 71, 67.8, and 60.9, respectively, and ranked among the top five for both investment and basic money management skills. They scored 68 on the Financial Literacy Index, ranking eighth overall.

Women's investment in the property market should be explored in Hong Kong. Many people receive substantial returns from property investments, but unfortunately data on these activities is currently lacking.

Although both men and women in Hong Kong have equal opportunities to obtain loans or secure credit, findings by the Women's Economic Opportunity Index, a project piloted by the Economist Intelligence Unit, show that women frequently encounter difficulties when trying to secure credit because they have less collateral (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010). According to the Index, women in Hong Kong scored 58.7 in the area of 'access to finance' in 2010, ranking 26 among all the countries in the study. This was the lowest score out of all the other areas measuring women's economic opportunities such as labour policy and education. Although the Index project includes four indicators within the "access to finance" category, namely building credit histories, women's access to finance programmes, delivering financial services, and private sector credit, all these indicators were based on normative judgment or overly simplified scoring methods, which raises questions about their validity. All indicators are also not gender disaggregated (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010).

### 3.4 Concluding Observations

- Women's access to economic resources is not equal to that of men because in the processes of production, consumption, and investment, women encounter overt and covert barriers.
- A substantial proportion of women still have fewer opportunities to enter the labour market, and are home-makers whose contributions are not economically and socially recognised.
- Men and women generally have equal opportunities to participate in the labour market, but there are fewer women than men in the job market from age 30 onwards as this is the median age for first marriage. Many women leave the job market for home-making purposes and to start a family. A large proportion of women are economically inactive, and nearly 100% of home-makers are women.
- There is virtually no difference in the job market participation of men and women who have never been married.
- Horizontal and vertical segregation continue to prevent women from fully realising their opportunities and potential. For example, there are substantially more men than women in senior positions, and more women than men hold casual jobs. Furthermore, certain industries such as the service sector are still female-dominated.
- Women continue to receive about 30% less compensation than men for their contributions in the workplace.
- Women have significant influence over major household purchases and more money to spend on what they want without relying on their partners. Although women are skilled when it comes to investment and basic money management, women's access to financing is not as good as it is for men.

Home-makers are categorised as economically inactive in the Census and all

surveys done by the Census and Statistics Department. Although home-making does not lead to monetary reward, it is unmistakably an economic activity because women are forgoing opportunities for paid work when they remain in the household for home-making and care giving. Little research has been done to measure the economic value and impact of home-making.

As consumption is increasingly a driving force behind Hong Kong's economy, few studies have attempted to explore the role

of women, through consumption, in economic growth. How much do women contribute to GDP through consumption, production, or housework? What do they get in return?

In both consumption and investment, limited current research tends to be market-driven, and instead focuses more on individual spending and investment patterns. Future research should focus on understanding how women, as a group, spend and invest.

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# 4 Women and Poverty

This chapter deals with the social production and eradication of women's poverty. Women seem to be impacted more severely by poverty than men, and as society's major caregivers this also affects the next generation. From 2006 to 2009, approximately 22% of all children in Hong Kong below age 18 lived in a low-income family.

Poverty is more than simply a lack of income or financial means. Poverty can be defined by the absence of choices and opportunities to fulfil basic needs and, in women, is complicated by a wide range of unequal treatment by different institutions in society.

Women's poverty is related to their family situation and the job market – both of which will be covered in this chapter - but also depends on how social policies or measures address the issue. The social security system is the most direct policy domain that will be featured in this report to understand how much social protection is accessible to women.

**Family:** In East Asian culture, the family has always served an important welfare function to complement the limitations of the government and the employment market. However, women's poverty is invisible in the context of the home. In examining the factors that contribute to their poverty, this chapter will examine the economic activity status of women at home and their sources of income.

**Job market:** The job market provides ways to eradicate poverty but various factors such as the nature of jobs available, job security, and working conditions do not

always mean that women in poverty benefit.

**Social security system:** Ideally, a social security system should protect everybody from poverty by providing for basic needs and opportunities. Hong Kong's social security system relies exclusively on the tax-based Comprehensive Social Security Scheme (CSSA) and, for retirement, the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF).

## 4.1 Identifying Women in Poverty

In Hong Kong, there is no official poverty line. The poverty line adopted by The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS), which is widely recognised publicly, is defined as a level of monthly household income equal to or less than half the median income of all same-sized households. Women living in households with an income equal to or under this line are considered to be living in poverty.

Overall, the number of women in poverty in Hong Kong has increased. They constitute a larger proportion of people living in poverty than men. Figures in Chart 4.2.1 show that the number and proportion of women in low-income households rose steadily compared to men – from 51.1% (i.e. 586,800) in 2000 to 52.3% (i.e. 620,200) in 2009.

## 4.2 Poverty in the Family

### Single Mothers in Poverty

Women's poverty is largely hidden within the household and one way of illustrating this is by examining single parent families. In Hong Kong, the majority of low-income single parents living in poverty are female.

**Chart 4.2.1:** Number and Percentage Distribution of People in Low-income Domestic Households by Gender, 2001-2009

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Male (No.)</b>	562,200	585,000	560,400	573,900	547,700	556,100	562,900	560,600	565,100
<b>Female (No.)</b>	586,800	606,700	583,800	607,900	595,200	599,300	613,600	612,200	620,200
<b>Female (%)</b>	51.1	50.9	51.0	51.4	52.1	51.9	52.2	52.2	52.3

Source: Census and Statistics Department (Email)

In 2006, 84.3% (i.e. 27,272) of single parents living in low-income households were single mothers and over half of them were out of work.

Most single mothers in low-income households were of working age. In 2006, over 80% (i.e. 85.7%) were aged 30-49.

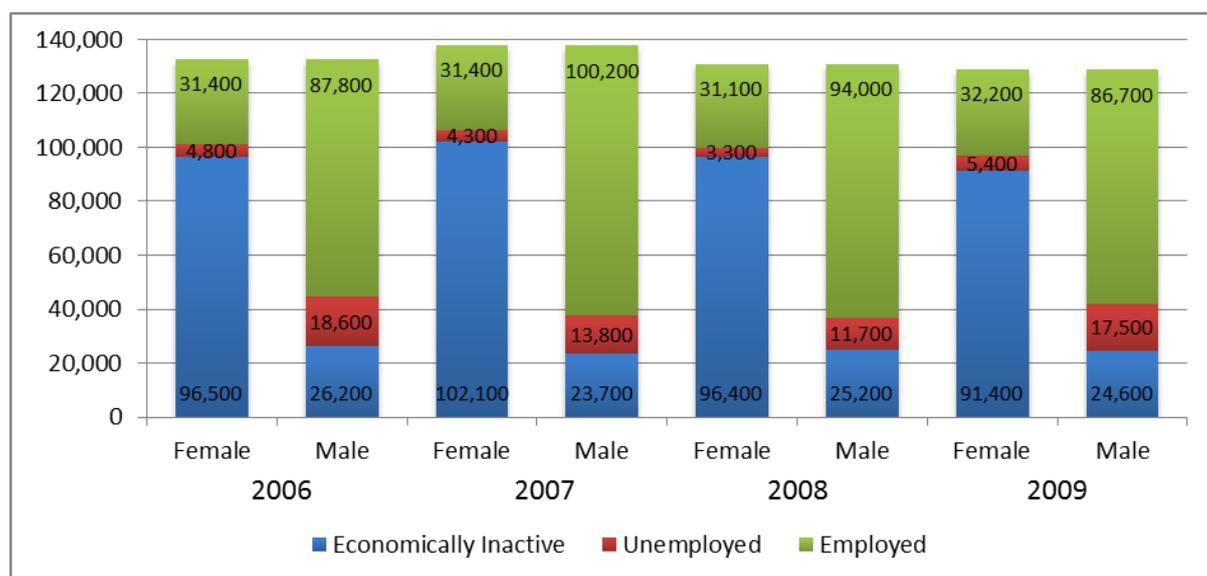
The majority of these single mothers had an education attainment of primary or secondary level. While a low educational level may be one of the factors blocking the improvement of their living standards, their caregiving responsibilities at home are also a vital factor. A persistent shortage of childcare services may make it harder for single mothers to improve their standard of living.

### Home-makers in Poverty

Marital status also seems to be associated with women’s poverty. Among all categories of marital status, married women are more likely to be economically inactive and make up the biggest portion of all women in poverty. Almost 20% of married women with children lived in low-income households in 2006-2009.

Over 70% of married females were economically inactive from 2006 to 2009, as shown in Chart 4.2.1, because women often rely on their husbands to earn a living. This is much higher than the number of economically inactive people in the entire population, which was less than 55% in 2009. (See Chapter 3: *Women and the Economy*)

**Chart 4.2.1:** Number and Percentage of Married People with Children ( below age 18) in Low-Income Households by Economic Activity and Gender, 2006-2009



Source: Census and Statistics Department (Email)

The majority of these economically inactive women are home-makers. Their poverty, which tends to be invisible due to their non-income producing roles, is not expressed by statistics.

2001 to 2009 was female. This number increased continually from 335,400 in 2001 to 383,500 in 2010 while the number of men in the same salary bracket decreased very slightly from 83,400 to 83,300.

### 4.3 Position in the Job Market and Poverty

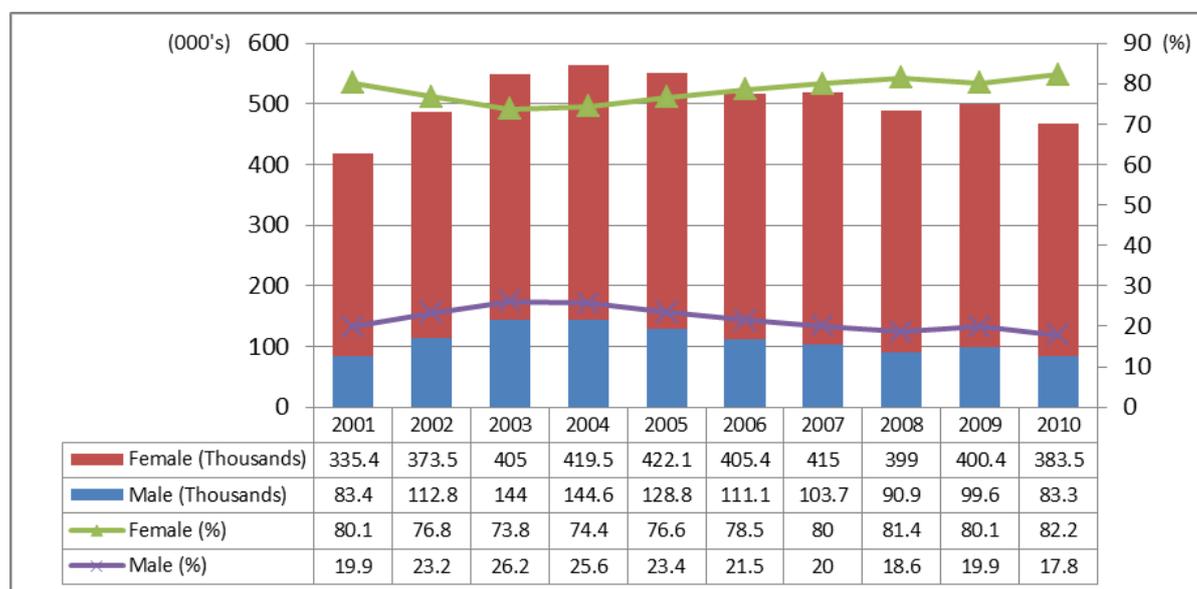
#### No or Low Earnings

Women with full-time jobs are not necessarily doing better. Chart 4.3.1 shows that over 80% of the employed population earning less than HK\$5,000 per month from

#### Occupation Segregation

Women employed in elementary occupations received a median monthly salary lower than 50% of the median monthly personal income for all females in Hong Kong (i.e. HK\$8,500 in 2009). As Chart 4.3.2 shows, in 2009, the median

**Chart 4.3.1:** Number and Percentage of Employed People with Monthly Earnings of less than HK\$5,000/month by Gender, 2001-2010



Source: Census and Statistics Department (Email)

**Chart 4.3.2:** Median Monthly Earnings of Employed People by Main Occupation Group and Gender, 2009

Main Occupation Group	Female (HK\$)	Male (HK\$)
Managers/Administrators	30,000	30,000
Professionals	30,000	32,000
Associate professionals	16,000	16,000
Clerks	10,000	10,000
Service workers/Shop sales workers	7,000	10,000
Craft/Related workers	8,000	10,300
Plant/Machine operators/Assemblers	6,600	9,500
Elementary occupations	3,600	7,000
Overall	8,500	12,000

Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2011

monthly salary of women in elementary occupations was HK\$3,600, only slightly higher than half that of a man in the same occupation. The chart also reveals the ever-widening income gap between men and women as the types of occupations become less skilled. As Chapter 3: *Women and the Economy* details, women occupy a larger proportion of the low-paid elementary work than men and are therefore, more prone to poverty.

As the median working hours of elementary occupations (i.e. 60 hours per week) were the highest of all occupation categories, and higher than the average of 50 hours or less per week, these women find themselves stretched between work and family. They work longer and earn less but are subject to higher pressure to maintain their roles as caregivers and home-makers. As a result, they either become working poor or home-makers without any monetary reward.

### Unemployment

Women's unemployment is not a fully visible phenomenon in Hong Kong. Comparing male and female unemployment rates in 2009, the former (i.e. 6.2%) was higher than the latter (i.e. 4.4%). Furthermore, throughout the last decade, women's unemployment rate has always been lower than men's.

However, the unemployment rate in Hong Kong is calculated based on criteria that could easily mask the actual unemployment rate of women. To be classified as unemployed, a woman has to fulfil several conditions. In addition to not having a paid job during the seven days before classification, she has to report that she has been available for work during that period and that she has sought work during the prior 30 days. If not, she will be considered 'economically inactive.' How a home-maker is defined during the classification process and how she reports

her status determines the category in which she is classified. Cultural stereotypes about a woman's responsibilities in the family can also affect classification. Due to the potential overlap between female unemployment and economic inactivity (i.e. home-makers), women's unemployment may be underreported.

Women have at least one gender-specific set of reasons for being fired, which relate to their family status. Despite underreporting, statistics from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) show that 72.5% (i.e. 37) of complaints against employers for discrimination on the grounds of family status were employment-related in 2010/11.

Furthermore, unemployed women are highly prone to poverty. 44.3% (i.e. 5,400) of unemployed females were living in poverty in 2009.

### Casual Employment and the Working Poor

Chapter 3: *Women and the Economy* notes how women are negatively affected by temporary or casual work, but that this is not easily detectable. Throughout the last decade, women's underemployment rate was always lower than that of men. In 2009, men's underemployment rate (i.e. 3.2%) was nearly 1.5 times higher than women's (i.e. 1.4%)

Compared to about 32% of men, over 75% of women employed as casual workers (i.e. working less than 18 hours per week) earned HK\$4,000 or less in 2009.

Women believe they are 'the last to be hired and the first to be fired.' The job market's response to policy changes often reflects the vulnerable position of women. For example, many grassroots female workers were forced to become underemployed after the MPF was introduced. With the introduction of the Statutory Minimum Wage on 1 May 2011,

it was expected that elementary workers would enjoy better wage protection but this could potentially be achieved at the expense of women’s employment opportunities and remuneration. Since the policy has only recently changed, however, it is too early to comment.

#### 4.4 Social Protection Against Poverty

While poverty seems to be an escalating female phenomenon, Hong Kong’s social protection system does not seem to address the specific situation of women living in poverty.

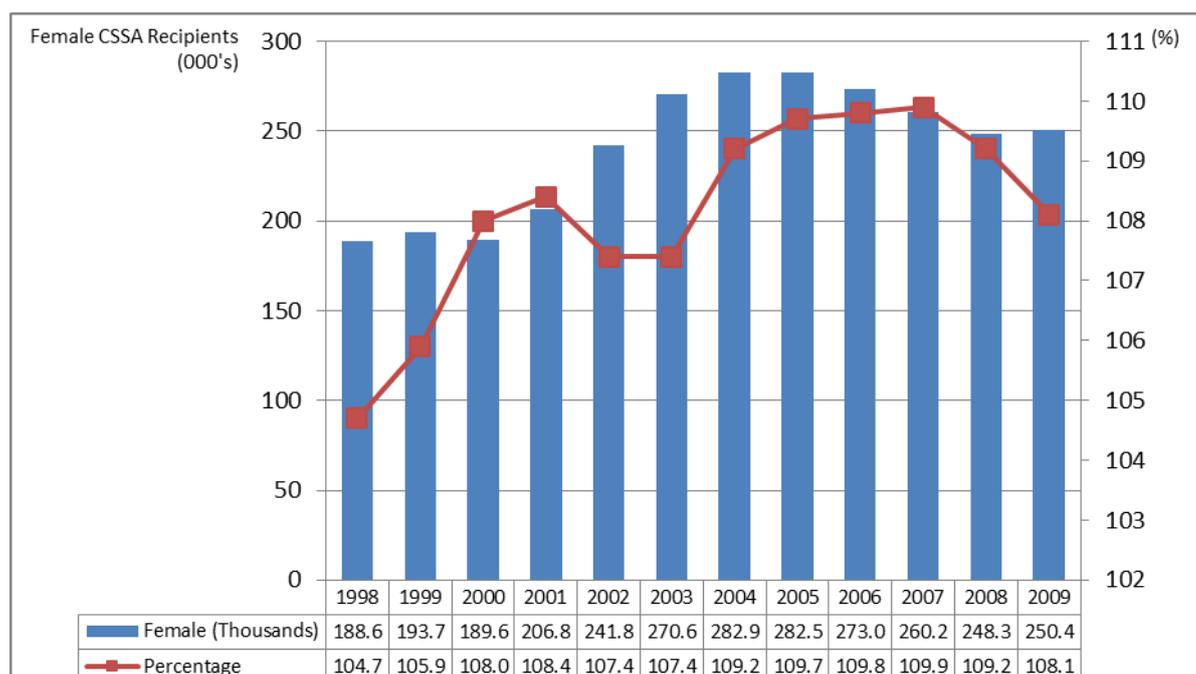
#### Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA)

An increasing number of CSSA recipients are women, and CSSA is the only form of social protection available to women living in poverty. Chart 4.4.1 shows that historically there have been more female than male CSSA recipients. The percentage of the female population in Hong Kong who received CSSA also increased rapidly from 5.5% in 2000 to 6.7% in 2009. The drop in

more recent years is due to several policy factors including the tightening of the eligibility criteria for CSSA and the introduction of the New Dawn Project, which is described in more detail below.

A drop in female single parents receiving CSSA from 60,293 in 2006 to 53,054 in 2010 is due primarily to the New Dawn (ND) Project and its associated New Dawn Intensive Employment Assistance Projects (NDIEAPs), which were introduced under the CSSA scheme in 2006. The ND Project is supposed to encourage single parent recipients of CSSA to seek employment. As part of the Project, they are required to engage in a paid job for no less than 32 hours a month, which allows them to look after their children during non-school hours and work when their children are at school. The ND Project offers recipients employment assistance, which includes regular Work-plan Progress Interviews and access to up-to-date employment information as well as other support services. In addition, single parents and child carers with no or limited work

**Chart 4.4.1:** Number of Female CSSA Recipients and Ratio of Female to Male Recipients, 1998-2009



Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2010

experience are referred to the NDIEAPs launched by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as commissioned by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Under the NDIEAPs, a series of intensive employment assistance services including basic skills and training is provided.

As discussed, most single mothers live in poverty, and find it difficult to look for jobs and work full-time because of their role as caregiver. While the ND Project was established to help these women become self-reliant, the scheme assumes that their children are self-reliant too, or that single mothers would treat their children as such. Instead of providing protection to this group of women, additional demands are made on them without provision of any complementary measures for childcare or home care services. Furthermore, choosing not to join the Project results in a deduction of CSSA assistance.

As of the end of May 2009, a total of 7,047 people had joined the Enhanced ND Project of whom only 1,617 or about 23% had paid employment. By the end of March 2010, a total of only 8,78<sup>1</sup> single mothers had joined the Enhanced ND Project in four years. The yearly average was 2,195, while the average number of female single parents receiving CSSA assistance during the same period was 57,292. The participation rate of all single mothers receiving CSSA in the ND Project was only 3.7%. Over 96% of single mothers chose not to join the Project in spite of the \$200 cash assistance deduction.

No further data on their subsequent experiences could be obtained.

Another employment assistance program, the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme, yields very much the same result. The Scheme is designed to encourage and assist

able-bodied unemployed or underemployed people aged 15 to 59 to secure full-time paid employment and move towards self-reliance. SFS comprises three main components: the Active Employment Assistance Programme, the Community Work Programme, and Disregarded Earnings.

The proportion of female CSSA recipients participating in the Scheme rose from 4.2% (i.e. 10,462) in 2008 to 5.4% (i.e. 13,077) in 2010 – lower and slower to increase than men, which rose from 9.2% (i.e. 20,846) in 2008 to 10.6% (i.e. 23,661) in 2010.

A substantial percentage of all female participants in the SFS Scheme had low education levels in 2010. The highest proportion of women with primary education or lower were those aged 40-59. About 20% of them never attended school. Most had been previously employed as service and shop sales workers, and in elementary occupations. It is unlikely that any job they were able to obtain would be financially rewarding enough to help them get out of poverty. Their choice was to either remain on CSSA as ‘registered poor’ or stay in the job market as ‘working poor.’ This group of women primarily needs social protection.

#### **Retirement Protection: Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF)**

The MPF is fundamentally problematic in terms of providing protection to women for old age and retirement. First, women who are not in the workforce are excluded. Second, although the minimum level of income per month was amended to HK\$6,500 on 1 November 2011 (i.e. employees earning less are not required to contribute), anyone with a relatively low-income level will receive less retirement pension. As women generally earn less and work in low-paid, temporary jobs, a

1 Sources: Social Welfare Department

retirement protection scheme benefits them less than men. Foreign domestic helpers, most of who are women and are not required to join the scheme, are also not protected.

The elderly or those who will soon retire cannot rely on the MPF to provide any immediate financial assistance. Their only option is to fall back on CSSA, which is far from adequate.

For those covered by the MPF, the investment return may not be sufficient to prevent them from falling into poverty when they get old. The investment performance of the MPF is highly unstable, with the annualized internal rate of return fluctuating from -25.9% (2008-2009) to 30.1% (2009-2010). Fund management and administration costs may also eat into the investment return substantially. Moreover, the forecasted amount that the elderly may eventually receive is unlikely to provide adequate protection against poverty once they retire.

#### 4.5 Concluding Observations

- The household/family-based accounting of poverty largely hides women's poverty. Women's poverty is hidden behind the family in the following ways:
  - Married women are more likely to be economically inactive and make up the biggest portion of all women in poverty.

- In 2006, more than 80% of single parents living in low-income households were single mothers and over half of them were out of work.
- Although society is concerned with unemployment and underemployment, women's unemployment and underemployment are hidden behind the category of 'economically inactive.'
- Employment does not necessarily mean full-time, long term employment with fair compensation that will help single mothers get out of poverty.
- Female job security is precarious and their position in the job market is often defined by their position in the household/family. Employed women still run the risk of being poor. Given this economic structure, women may get more job opportunities, but those jobs are often low-paid and casual.
- Social protection schemes such as CSSA are not gender sensitive. Constrained by household duties, women in poverty must also meet certain policy requirements before they can enjoy any protection.
- As a substantial number of women are currently out of the job market, the existing retirement protection systems are unlikely to benefit them when they get old, which makes them vulnerable to poverty in the future.

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# 5 Women and Health

In the context of advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality in Hong Kong, the topic of women and health is often neglected. There are two major and contradictory reasons for this. The first is based on a position that ignores gender differences. Many people believe that the health of the Hong Kong population is generally good based on various overall health indicators. Health-care services in Hong Kong are normally accessible to everyone, irrespective of gender, who can produce their I.D. cards. The second reason is based on the assertion of gender differences – that women are physiologically different from men and have a specific set of health conditions. This view disallows discussion of women and health in the context of gender equality.

This chapter examines empirically whether women in Hong Kong enjoy the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health equal to men, without physiological comparison.

**Survival Opportunity:** In an economically advanced city like Hong Kong, the extent to which a woman's life is protected and cherished is the basic standard against which the health status of women is assessed. Life expectancy and mortality in women and men are examined first.

**Physiological Health Conditions:** Assessing whether women are physiologically healthy is essential in Hong Kong's economically advanced society. The subjective assessment of female health conditions is often neglected but highly relevant as this could conceivably shape their responses.

Among the conditions that allow comparison between men and women are life-threatening diseases. Female-specific physiological conditions, and sexual and reproductive health are examined using indicators such as maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS prevalence, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Women's patterns of medical consultation and hospitalisation are also appraised as behavioural indicators of how women are affected by physiological health problems.

**Mental Health Conditions:** Women's mental or psychological health is another area, which is receiving increasing attention in Hong Kong. The state of women's mental health can be assessed mainly by their use of psychiatric services. In light of the demands from personal, interpersonal, familial as well as societal situations, the pressure that women face in society is high. This can be detrimental to their mental health. Other health-related indicators, including patients with eating disorders and women committing or attempting suicide, help to evaluate how the demands of society may produce an undesirable health consequences for women.

**Healthcare Protection:** Whether women can attain a higher standard of health depends significantly on the accessibility of healthcare protection, medical consultation and hospitalisation, and how these services are organised and provided.

Healthcare service institutions are usually seen as gender neutral where women and men are treated equally. The last part of this chapter examines how the structure of

healthcare service institutions is highly gendered. It further tries to describe the amount of healthcare protection such as health insurance, which is available to women.

### 5.1 Survival Opportunity

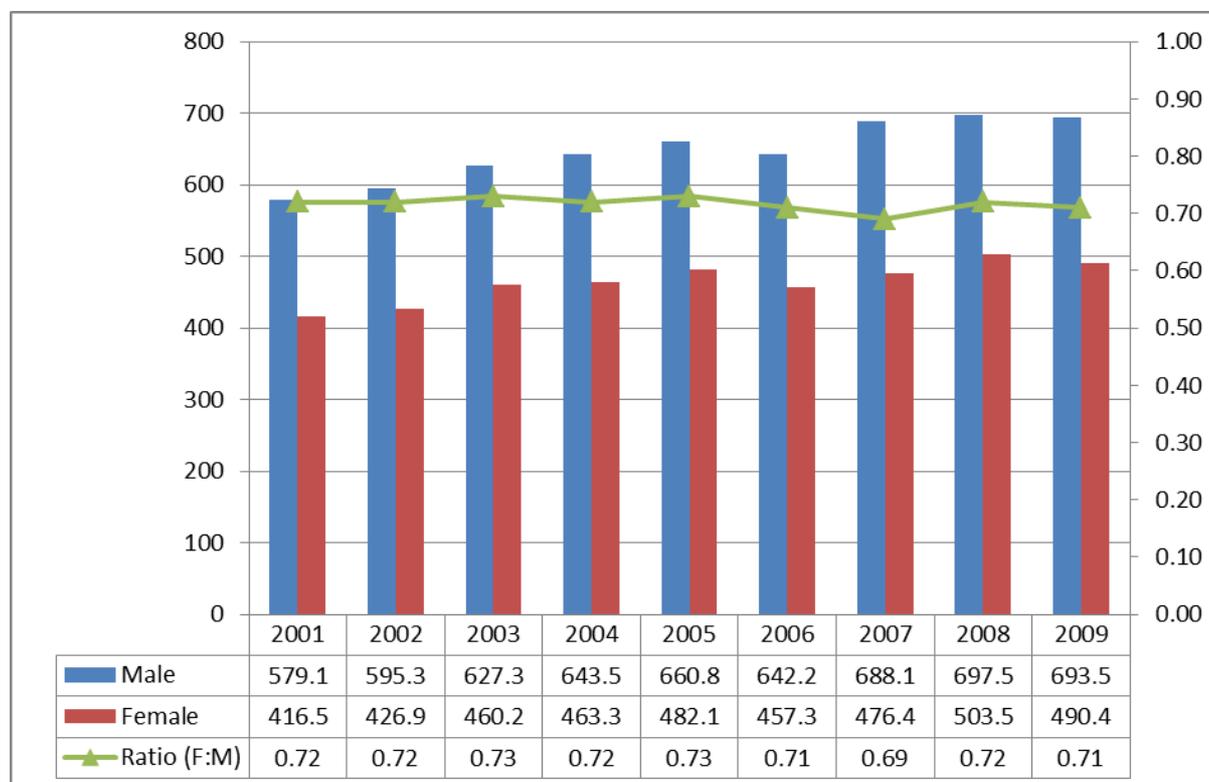
Improvements in medical technology as well as medical and health services have lengthened people's life expectancy. In 2011, the life expectancies of women and men were 86.7 and 80.3 years respectively. The fact that women live about six years longer than men has persisted in the last decade as well as in the preceding two.

The death rate for women, which stood at 490.44 per 100,000 women in 2009, has always been about 30% lower than that for men in the past decade.

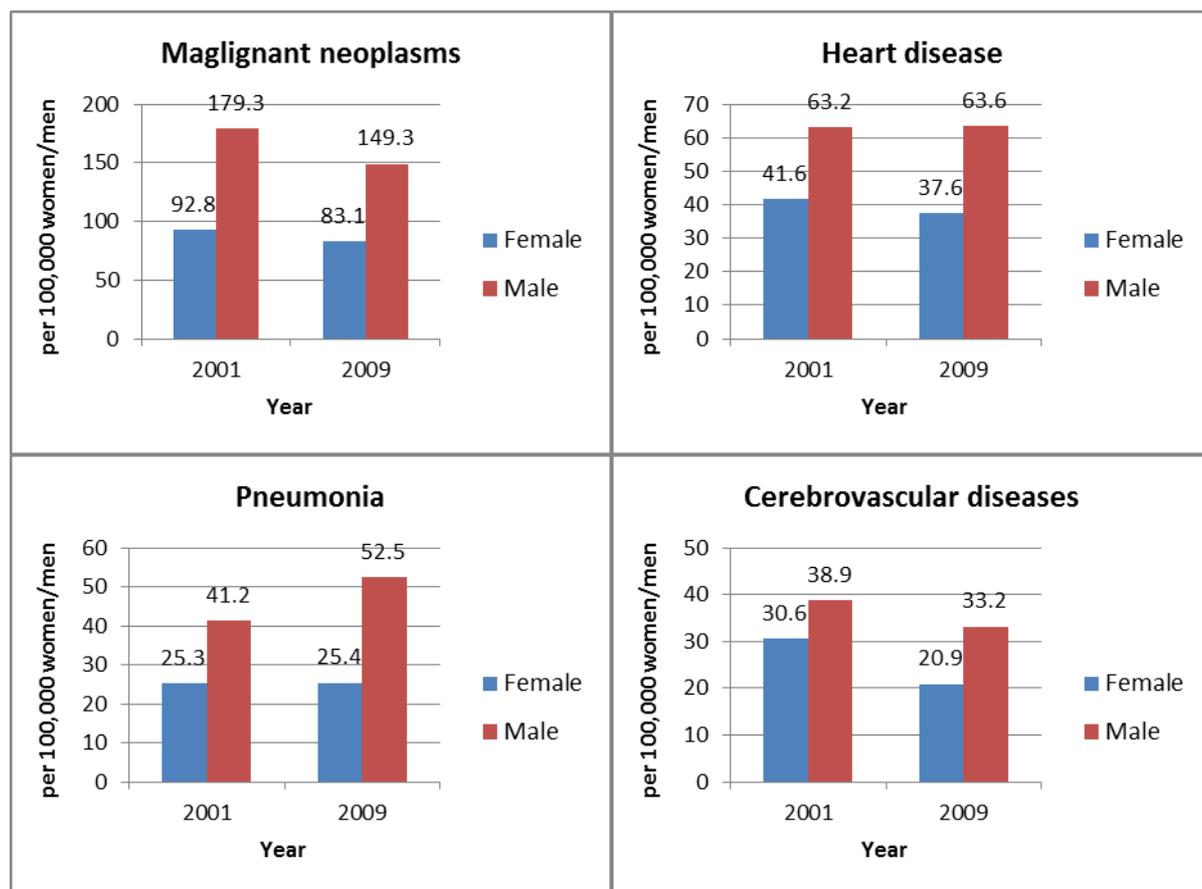
Malignant neoplasms, popularly known as cancer, are the major cause of death for both women and men, followed by heart disease. In 2009, the total numbers of female and male deaths from cancer in 2009 were 5,157 and 7,682 respectively. 3,070 women and 3,344 men died from heart disease. Interestingly, as shown in Chart 5.1.1, the differences between the death rates of women and men dying of the four most common major causes were all higher than the gap for the overall death rate. Of death caused by cancer or pneumonia, for example, the differences could be up to 50% lower in women than men.

Although the above figures indicate that the death rates for men caused by the top four major causes are much higher than among women, data separated by age

**Chart 4.1.2:** Death Rates by Sex and Female to Male Ratio, 2001-2009



Source: Department of Health  
 URL: <http://www.healthyhk.gov.hk/phsisweb/zh/enquiry/index.html> (Jun 2011)

**Chart 5.1.1:** Death Rates of Top Four Causes of Death, by Gender, 2001 and 2009

Source: Centre for Health Protection  
 URL: <http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/data/4/10/27/340.html> (June 2011)

shows that the death rate by cancer among women aged 15-44 in 2009 was only slightly lower than that for men. Additionally, the death rate from heart disease among women aged 65 and over was higher than that among men.

The death rates for men are higher from most causes apart from diabetes, anaemia and dementia, which seem highly related to both the physiological of women and the social conditions in which they live. (Marino. et.al. 2011, Santos, Ebrahim, & Barros, 2008) Marino et.al. (2011) has extensively reviewed researches on nutrition and its association with the health of women and men. Stress, depression, metabolic syndrome, eating disorder, which are believed to be associated with the societal demands on women at different stages of

development, have been found to be associated with diabetes, anaemia and dementia.

## 5.2 Physical Health Conditions: Subjective Self-Assessment

Most indicators show that women live longer than men but this does not necessarily mean they lead healthier lives.

From 2005-2009, the Census and Statistics Department conducted General Household Surveys reporting how many people rated their physical health as excellent, very good, or good. Consistently, a greater percentage of women (i.e. 69.7% in 2009) than men (i.e. 73.2% in 2009) rated their health less positively during this time period.

## Dual Patterns of Physiological Morbidity: Objective Assessment

### Fatal or life-threatening diseases:

Women's subjective health ratings can be verified by other objective measures. The incidence rate of life-threatening diseases in women has always been lower than in men although figures seem to be converging. The incidence rate in women (i.e. 211.4) was only slightly lower in 2008 than among men (i.e. 272), whereas in 1999 it was much lower (i.e. 223.8 vs. 305.4). Notably, while the cancer incidence rate for women dropped gradually, the cancer incidence rate for men dropped faster.

The median age of incidence and death by cancer has also changed over a decade. In 2008, women were found to contract cancer earlier (i.e. age 60-64) than in 1999 (i.e. age 65-69), and their expected life span with cancer remained at 70-74 years. In contrast, men's median age of cancer incidence remained the same over time (i.e. age 65-69), but their life expectancy actually increased from 65-69 years in 1999 to 70-74 years in 2008.

Women and men also die from different types of cancer, which are often gender-specific. In 2009, most women died from breast cancer (i.e. 2,616 cases, 22.8%), followed by colorectal cancer (i.e. 1,764 cases, 15.3%) and lung cancer (i.e. 1,443 cases, 12.6%). The majority of men died from lung cancer (i.e. 2,793 cases, 21.3%), colorectal cancer (i.e. 2,267 cases, 17.3%), and prostate cancer (i.e. 1,369 cases, 10.4%).

It has been widely established and accepted that smoking is a major cause of cancer and other diseases that commonly cause death in Hong Kong. In 2008, 105,900 women smoked cigarettes daily as did 571,000 men. This gender ratio of about 1 woman:5 men was much lower

than the gender ratio for the death rate of lung cancer, which was about 1:2.4 in 2009.

Smoking is currently prohibited in most public closed-door areas and some open areas but second-hand smoke can still be present at home. Only a negligible change to the gender ratio for the death rate from lung cancer was observed after Hong Kong's smoking ban in January 2007. Despite the ban, certain entertainment facilities and restaurants where most of the service workers are women, subtly allow customers to smoke.

From 2000-2008, the proportion of male daily smokers decreased across all age groups while the proportion of female daily smokers continued to increase in the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups. No data is available on why this occurred.

### Sexual and Reproductive Health

While infant mortality continues to steadily decrease over time, fluctuations in maternal mortality between 2000 and 2009 imply that women's reproductive risks are still not adequately controlled. However, overall the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 registered live births has decreased from 5.9 in 2000 to 2.4 in 2009.

**Contraceptive prevalence:** Contraceptive prevalence on its own does not have much direct bearing on women's health. If it is taken as an indicator of sexual and reproductive freedom, it can illustrate how women's health depends on men. Male condom use has increased continuously over the past two decades, and 50.3% of male respondents used condoms according to a 2007 survey by the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong.

A large proportion of men also ask their female partners to use contraceptive devices other than condoms. Contraceptive pills, for example, may have negative side effects on women's health. Sterilisation as

a means of contraception is available for men and women but over the past two decades more women than men have been sterilised. However, the increased prevalence of other contraceptive methods has significantly decreased the proportion of women getting sterilised, from over 22.9% in the 1987 to 7.1% in 2007.

**HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs):** Over the last decade, the number of reported cases of HIV in men has increased more than 50%. In 2009, there were only 88 cases of women with HIV as compared to 308 men. Similarly, there were only 12 reported cases of AIDS in women as compared to 64 in men in 2009. The gender ratio of female to male reported HIV cases dropped from 0.32 in 2000 to 0.29 in 2009. However, there has been increasing proportion of cases in the past decade in which patients were unable to determine how they contracted HIV (Centre of Health Protection, 2010).

While the number of reported HIV/AIDS cases has generally increased, STD cases handled by clinics that are operated by the Department of Health dropped substantially over the last decade. The number of reported male STD cases dropped slightly faster from 15,331 in 2001 to 6,779 in 2010 than the female number (i.e. 12,246 in 2001 to 5,565 in 2010) - although the number of cases for the latter has historically been consistently lower.

**Unwanted pregnancy:** Unwanted pregnancy, both within and outside of marriage, is another result of women's limited sexual and reproductive freedom. An unwanted pregnancy typically creates great emotional, psychological, and mental strain on a woman. If it leads to termination of the pregnancy, a woman's physiological health is also affected. The number of cases of legal termination in the

past decade have dropped substantially over time. The number of single females and those who had been or are married who chose legal termination amounted to 6,362 and 5,660 cases respectively, in 2009, as compared to 9,662 and 11,713 cases respectively, in 2000.

#### **Medical consultation and Hospitalisation: Behavioural Indications of Health**

From 1999 to 2009, the percentage of women, who consulted a doctor during a 14- or 30-day period before being surveyed, was always higher than that the percentage of men. In 2009, about 1 out of 4 women consulted the doctor 30 days before enumeration as compared to less than one in five men.

The number of female patients discharged from the Hospital Authority's (HA) hospitals in 2009 reached 344,598, representing an increase of almost 5% from 2001. In the past decade, despite an increasing trend from 84 to 86, the ratio of male patients per 100 female patients indicates that more women were hospitalised than men.

Chart 5.5.1 shows the ratio of female to male patients by age in 2001, 2006, and 2009. The 15-19 age group in which the gender ratio was about 100, is a dividing line in the overall age distribution. In subsequent age groups under the 55-59 age group, more men were admitted to hospital. Furthermore, over the past decade, the ratio of female to male middle-aged patients (i.e. aged 30-34, 35-39, 40-44) decreased.

### 5.3 Mental Health Conditions

Compared with their physiological health, the state of women's mental health seems less ambiguous, and indicators suggest that women suffer the majority of mental health issues.

**Chart 5.2.1:** Ratio of Female to Male Patients Discharged from HA Hospitals (In-patient Services) by Age Group, 2001, 2006, and 2009

	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-65	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85+
<b>2001</b>	131	151	156	96	57	41	36	49	78	84	97	121	136	123	111	91	73	44
<b>2006</b>	120	147	150	100	50	34	30	41	73	93	100	122	143	150	128	106	82	51
<b>2009</b>	120	150	158	105	57	35	28	38	65	81	95	113	129	151	131	113	86	52

Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2010a

**Chart 5.3.1:** Sex Ratio of Male to Female Patients Receiving Out-patient Psychiatric Treatment at the Hospital Authority's Hospitals by Age, 2001, 2006, and 2009

	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-65	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85+
<b>2001</b>	502	510	293	113	112	107	87	73	77	75	78	79	78	61	53	47	38	24
<b>2006</b>	524	558	300	105	98	89	80	68	63	69	66	71	73	72	56	49	41	30
<b>2009</b>	445	517	369	102	105	87	76	68	62	61	65	67	67	72	61	50	41	33

Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2010a

More than double the number of women as compared to men were hospitalised for depression from 2007-2009. During those same years, the ratio of men per 100 women reached its lowest in age groups 25-34 and 35-44 and then gradually increased.

Reproduction entails psychological and mental consequences as well as a physiological impact. Studies conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong consistently showed that about 10-11% of women who give birth suffer from postpartum depression (Lee, et al., 1998; Lee, et al., 2001, Department of Health, 2008). New mothers are particularly vulnerable if they are confronted by concurrent changes in their life situation without receiving sufficient support (Lee, et al., 2000; Leung, et al., 2005). Family expectations may add more risk factors.

Society's stereotypic expectations of women – where slimness is perceived as beauty – may also generate psychological and mental health issues. The number of female in-patient discharges in public and private hospitals due to eating disorders dropped slightly from 165 in 2007 to 154 in 2009, but the low prevalence of male

discharges (i.e. 23 cases in 2007; 18 cases in 2009) highlights that eating disorders are a predominantly female issue. Moreover, a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Eating Disorders Association, as reported by Hong Kong Headlines in 2007, interviewed 600 women aged 16 and over, and found that 66% of women were sensitive to the way others looked at them when they were buying clothes. Stress relating to their bodies caused 4% of women to contemplate suicide.

Substantially more women than men receive out-patient psychiatric specialist services in the Hospital Authority's hospitals. Women accounted for a larger proportion of patients in 2001, 2006, and 2009. In 2009, only 70 men out of every 100 women attended psychiatric outpatient clinics.

Chart 5.3.1 shows the sex ratio of patients having out-patient psychiatric treatment at the Hospital Authority's hospitals by age. Figures reveal that after age 29, gender differences became gradually more marked with more female than male out-patients in each age group. The ratio of women to men for all age groups from 30 to 64 decreased from 2001 to 2009. This signifies

that from 2001 to 2009, the number of women needing out-patient psychiatric services in public hospitals increased much faster than men. From 75-79 years, there were 50 or fewer male patients per 100 females, and 33 male patients per 100 females aged 85 and over in 2009 partly due to the difference in life expectancy between the genders. A local study based on a random sample of the population aged 60 and over shows that 11% of men and 14.5% of female respondents were found to have clinically significant levels of depression. Specific attention needs to be paid to the reasons why elderly women disproportionately suffer from mental health problems.

**Suicide and attempted suicide:** Like many countries, the male suicide rate (i.e. 18.4 per 100,000 in 2009) in Hong Kong is higher than for females (i.e. 9.8 per 100,000 in 2009).

By contrast, the rate of attempted suicide by women was always higher than that of men based on the latest available data by The University of Hong Kong in 2003. Breaking down the available data by age, proportionally more women aged 15-24 attempted suicide, followed by those aged 25-34. (The University of Hong Kong, 2004)

#### 5.4 Access to Health Care Protection

As previously discussed, women are in contact with health-care institutions and consult doctors more often than men. However, men dominate Hong Kong's healthcare institutions.

While, almost equal numbers of male and female students enrol in medical programs, 72% of registered doctors in 2009 were men. Thus, equal opportunities in education do not necessarily produce equal access for women to participate in medical and healthcare institutions.

Gender segregation in the health care industry is similar to the occupational structure in many other industries. Male medical professionals tend to occupy treatment-related positions that are further up the hierarchy, while female medical professionals tend to occupy less prestigious care-related positions. Although, the ratio of male to female doctors and dentists has significantly decreased in the last decade, in 2009 the ratios are still high at 252 for doctors and 263 for dentists. Conversely, for positions such as nurses, the male to female ratio was below ten in 2000, 2005, and 2009. Furthermore, far fewer men are found in positions that require significant communication skills, such as clinical psychologists and dieticians.

Although Hong Kong's public health service is well acclaimed, a lack of opportunity for women to choose private health care, which is believed to be of a higher quality, may have an impact on women's health.

Women pay higher medical insurance premiums than men. Proportionally, slightly more women (i.e. 57.8%) than men (i.e. 56.7%) are not covered by medical benefits provided by employers or medical insurance purchased individually. Specifically, the percentage of women aged 35 and older who are not entitled to medical benefits or covered medical insurance is higher than that of men. Furthermore, compared to the economically active, home-makers are far less protected in terms of medical benefits. In Hong Kong, more than half of all private health insurance is associated with employment (Food and Health Bureau, 2010: 72-73).

The Census and Statistics Department (2010) data reveal that 42.2% of female employees in the private sector were entitled to medical benefits provided by their own employers/companies compared

to only 35.4% of male employees. However, only jobs at higher levels of the occupational hierarchy came with medical insurance benefits. Given the horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market, as described in Chapter Three: *Women and the Economy*, fewer women are medically insured for private healthcare.

## 5.5 Concluding Observations

- Basic survival is not a major issue for women in Hong Kong and they outlive men for a significant number of years.
- A longer life span does not necessarily imply a better quality of life in terms of health conditions. Women are threatened by gender-specific fatal or terminal illnesses such as breast cancer, though these types of threats are lower than for men. There is also a worrying trend that women succumb to these illnesses earlier in life than men.
- Although there has been significant improvement in terms of women's sexual and reproductive health, the current standard is still sub-optimal. While more men than women suffer from HIV/AIDS and STDs, data suggests that recovery from the latter over time for men is faster than for women. Many reported cases of HIV/AIDS, in which the patients were unable to determine how they got the diseases, were found to be associated with women. Together with the data on unwanted pregnancy, this shows that although women's sexual and reproductive freedom and health has improved, women may still face barriers in achieving the highest standards of health.
- The mental health condition of women in Hong Kong is concerning. The prevalence of depression, attempted suicide, and eating disorders show that women are facing disproportionately higher levels of stress from within the household and relationships as well as from society as a whole. Women's stress levels and the impact this creates on women's mental health has escalated and requires urgent action.
- Data on both physiological and mental health seem to suggest that from age 30 onwards, women have more health problems than men. The age at which mental health problems begin to emerge is even earlier.
- Women's access to medical insurance protection is not much worse than men's, but their access is better if they participate in the labour market. As many medical benefits are associated with employment, home-makers and other economically inactive women are left with the choice of either relying on their bread-winning spouses, whose medical insurance may cover family members, or having no insurance protection at all. This limits women's opportunity to access higher quality private medical services.
- Simple sex disaggregated data do not allow for the exploration of the variation among different socio-economic groups of women nor help to isolate pure physiological from socio-economic factors.

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## 6 Violence against Women

In a survey carried out by the Women's Commission (WoC) in 2009, most respondents felt that improving 'women's safety issues' should be given top priority by the Hong Kong government. Although institutionalised violence against women is prohibited in Hong Kong, women's safety issues remain an area of concern because a substantial number of women are still subject to different levels and intensities of violence.

According to the Beijing Platform for Action, 'violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women.' While women's access to power is touched upon in Chapter Eight, this chapter will describe the violence suffered by women.

As much of the institutionalised violence has been eliminated in Hong Kong, most violence against women takes place within the so-called 'private' sphere. Culturally speaking, families in Hong Kong are still governed by traditional Chinese values. The patriarchal idea that a woman should obey her male family members such as her father, husband, and son is still widely practised – albeit in a subtle form. Notwithstanding the prevalence of violence based on gender, traditional cultural values often keep violence contained within the household and make violence against women in the household externally invisible.

Violence including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse poses a threat to

women at different life stages and is related to the various close relationships they form during their lives rather than to age. At each stage of a woman's life, the representation and cause of violence differs.

**Child abuse:** A girl's closest relationship is typically with her parents. Children depend on their parents financially and emotionally but are also exposed to a risk of abuse by their parents, often without the necessary self-protection skills.

**Spousal abuse:** Adult females may face the threat of violence from intimate relationships with co-habitants or spouses. At this stage, violence is shaped by the socio-economic structure of the family and a substantial proportion of women who are mostly economically inactive (see Chapter Three: *Women and the Economy*) suffer from long-term maltreatment.

**Elder abuse:** Women in Hong Kong tend to live, on average, a decade longer than their male counterparts. Although elder abuse has decreased since 2005, the gender gap has widened with elderly women proportionally suffering more abuse.

**Sexual abuse:** Women consistently come up against sexual abuse at various stages in their lives. Cultural pressure on women means sexual abuse tends to be invisible to the public. It is worth noting that the public sometimes blames the victims of sexual abuse rather than the perpetrators.

**Chart 6.1.1:** Number of Children Abused per 100,000 by Gender, 2001-2009

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Female</b> (No. per 100,000)	36	42	46	43	52	68	70	87	79	94
<b>Male</b> (No. per 100,000)	28	29	25	24	36	42	48	53	55	60

Source: Social Welfare Department (email 2011)

## 6.1 Child Abuse Against Girls

### The prevalence of child abuse

In 2009, 59.3% of child abuse victims were girls and 41.7% were boys. Child abuse also increased rapidly from 2000 to 2009, especially of girls.

Chart 6.1.1 illustrates that 36 out of every 100,000 girls under 19 were victims of child abuse in 2000. The number almost tripled to 94 in 2009, with an average annual rate of increase of 29%. The number of abused boys also increased but at a relatively slower pace. In 2000, there were 28 boy victims per 100,000 boys and 60 in 2009.

Girls suffer more abuse as they get older whereas boys suffer less. Chart 6.1.2 shows that the majority of girl victims in 2009 were found in the 12-14 age group, followed by the 15-17 age group, with a combined total of over 350 cases (i.e. 35.4% of total cases). For boys, only 113 cases (i.e. 11.4% of total cases) were found in these two age groups combined.

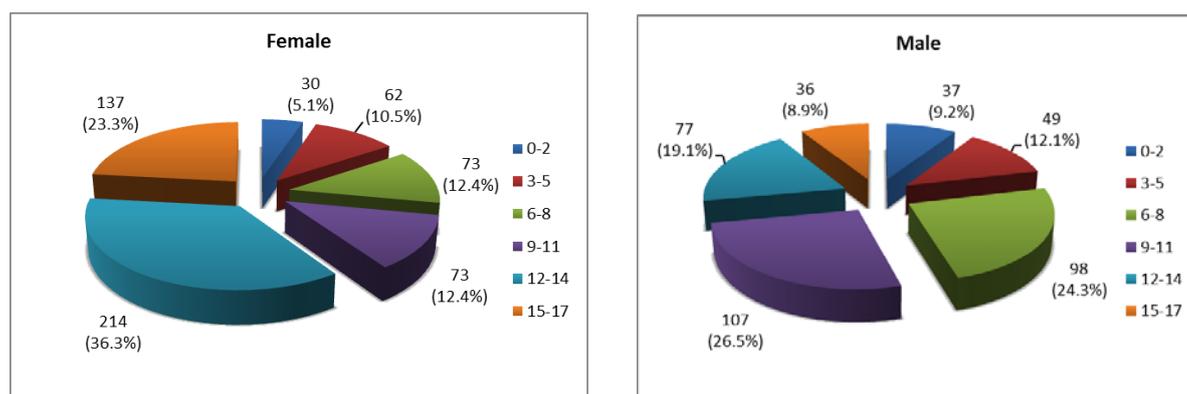
Boys suffered the most abuse from the ages of nine to 11, accounting for 10.8% of total cases.

### Types of Abuse

Most cases of child abuse involving both girls and boys were physical abuse, followed by sexual abuse and neglect. Chart 6.1.3 shows that over 80% of abused girls suffered from sexual and physical abuse, and the percentage increased from 84.1% in 2000 to 88% in 2009. Sexual abuse cases accounted for a higher percentage than physical abuse cases. In 2009, the former accounted for 48.9% of the total cases while the latter accounted for 39.1%.

Among the different types of abuse, sexual abuse shows the biggest gender gap with girls proportionally suffering from sexual abuse nearly 4.5 times more than boys. Furthermore, the gender gap in sexual abuse cases has increased over time from 126 girl victims (i.e. 45.7% of all abuse cases involving girls in 200) to 288 girl victims (i.e. 48.9% of all abuse

**Chart 6.1.2:** Number and Percentage of Child Abuse Cases by Age and Gender, 2009



Source: Child Protection Registry (CPR), Social Welfare Department, 2011

**Chart 6.1.3:** Number of Girl Abuse Cases by Case Type, 2000-2009

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Multiple Abuse</b>	21	17	9	18	22	34	29	17	18	21
<b>Psychological Abuse</b>	7	10	7	2	6	9	5	10	9	8
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	126	129	162	126	161	201	202	232	227	288
<b>Neglect</b>	16	12	8	8	11	14	38	54	38	42
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	106	140	145	149	162	204	193	258	216	230

Source: Child Protection Registry (CPR), Social Welfare Department, 2011

cases involving girls) in 2009. However, the proportion of male victims of sexual abuse remained nearly the same from 10.7% of all abuse cases involving boys in 2001 to 10.6% in 2009.

**Perpetrators’ Profiles**

Parents appear to be the largest group of abusers. In 2009, they were the perpetrators in over 60.5% of 569 child abuse cases. The second- and third-largest groups of abusers were unrelated persons and family friends/friends, accounting for 10.9% (i.e. 103 cases) and 8.4% (i.e. 79 cases) respectively in 2009. The gender breakdown of these figures is not available and there is no information

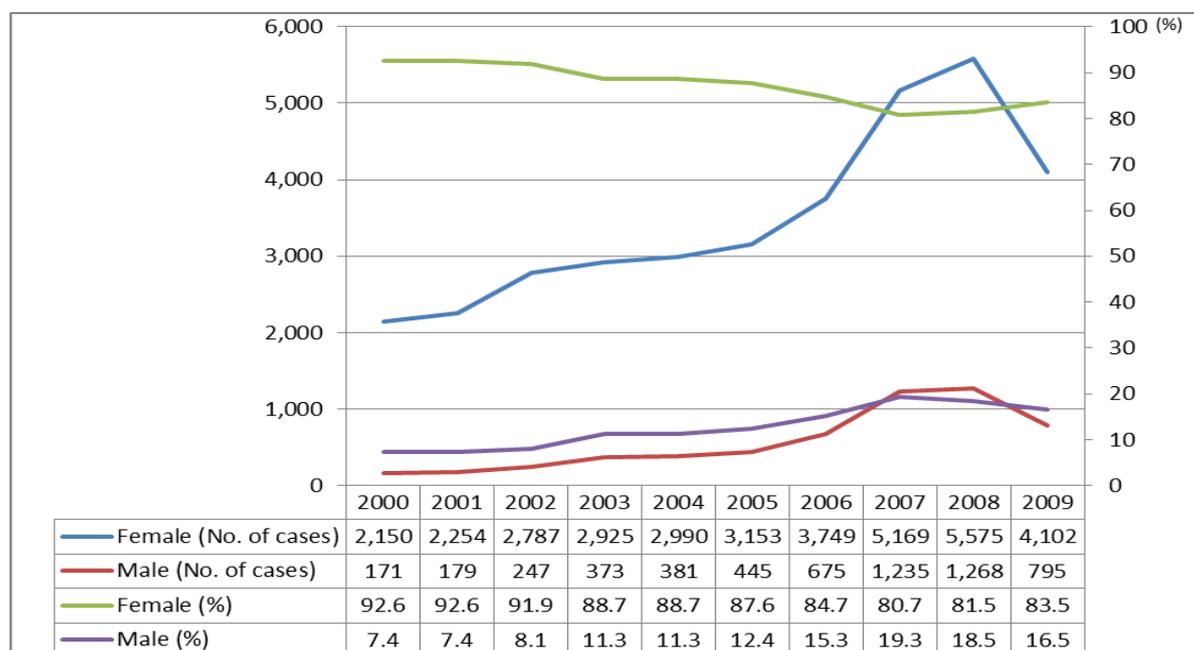
describing how male and female victims suffer from their relationships with different groups.

**6.2 Spousal Battery**

**Prevalence of battered spouses**

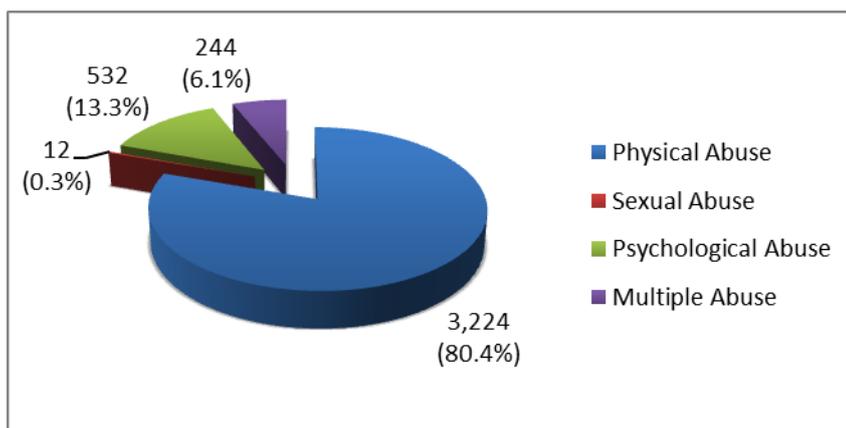
Chart 6.2.1 shows that over 80% of battered spouses were women in 2009. The number of battered female spouses has doubled in the past decade, from 2,150 cases in 2000 to 4,102 cases in 2009. Although the number of battered male spouses increased more than seven times from 171 cases in 2000 to 1,268 cases in 2008, this number dropped to 795 cases in 2009.

**Chart 6.2.1:** Number and Percentage of Battered Spouse Cases by Gender, 2000-2009



Source: Central Information System on Battered Spouse Cases and Sexual Violence Cases, Social Welfare Department (email received, 2011)



**Chart 6.2.2:** Cases of battered female spouses by type, 2009

Source: Central Information System on Battered Spouse Cases and Sexual Violence Cases, Social Welfare Department (email received, 2011)

### Types of Spouse Abuse

Most battered women suffer from physical abuse. Chart 6.2.2 shows that, in 2009, 67.1% (i.e. 3,224 cases) of battered female spouses were abused physically. Psychological abuse is the second most common type of spousal abuse against women (i.e. 11.1%).

According to Harmony House's figures, 62.2% (i.e. 123) of battered women admitted to domestic shelters in 2009 and 2010 (Harmony, 2010) suffered three years of abuse or more and 25.3% (i.e. 50) had suffered abuse for between five to nine years. 16.7% (i.e. 33) had endured domestic abuse for 10 years or more.

### Perpetrators' Profiles

From January-September 2010, 67% (i.e. 1,594) of abusers were the victim's husband, followed by the victim's wife (i.e. 12.9%, 306), boyfriend (i.e. 8.1%, 193), and a male cohabitant (i.e. 5.3%, 126).

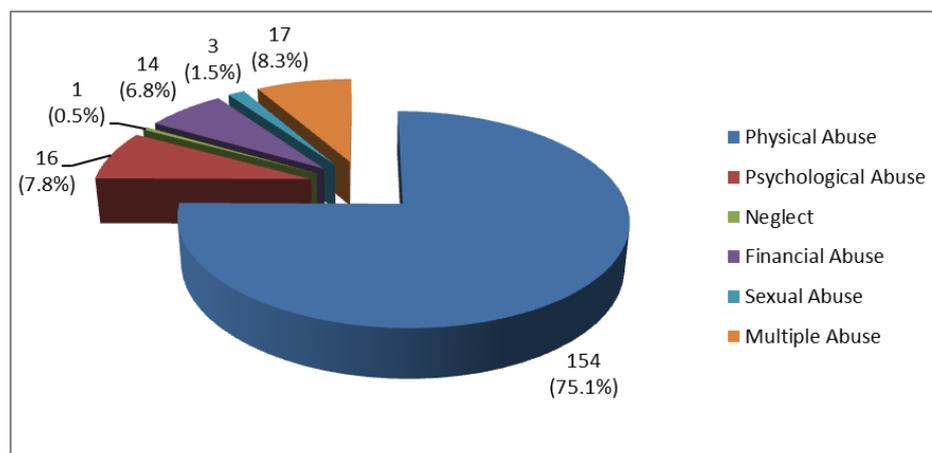
Among all battered women admitted to domestic shelters from 2009-2010, 53% of their spouses also abused their children, causing psychological and sexual harm.

Children living in households exhibiting domestic violence are emotionally affected. Among the 182 children admitted to shelters from 2009-2010, 36.7% of children felt scared and about 30% of them felt angry (i.e. 28.4%) and helpless (i.e. 26.6%).

### Causes of Abuse

In 2009, about one-sixth of abuse victims were new arrivals to Hong Kong. As mentioned in Chapter Ten: *Migrant Women*, these new arrivals from mainland China often feel dislocated and face adaptation problems. Many new arrival women are married to low-income, older men in Hong Kong. They have to rely on their husbands for food and accommodation, but many end up controlled by them. These women typically have no alternatives because most relinquish their citizenship in mainland China once they leave for Hong Kong.

In 2009, 1,356 victims of newly reported battered spouse cases were born in Hong Kong. They accounted for 28.2% of the total number of victims of the newly reported cases in the year.

**Chart 6.3.1:** Number and Percentage Distribution of Female Elderly Abuse by Type, 2010

Source: Social Welfare Department,  
[http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/fcw/CISEAC%20Statistics\\_Jan%20to%20Dec%2005.pdf](http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/fcw/CISEAC%20Statistics_Jan%20to%20Dec%2005.pdf) and  
[http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/family/sw/CISEAC\\_English\\_\\_Jan%20to%20Dec%202010.pdf](http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/family/sw/CISEAC_English__Jan%20to%20Dec%202010.pdf)

### 6.3 Elder Abuse

In Hong Kong, women have a longer life expectancy than men by about ten years. However, a substantial number of women aged over 60 do not enjoy their retirement due to the prevalence of elder abuse.

#### Prevalence of elder abuse

There is a wide gender gap for elder abuse. In 2005, there were 93 female abuse victims per 100,000 elderly women and 51 male victims per 100,000 elderly men. Both figures went down in 2010 to 46 female victims and 18 males. Although elder abuse decreased, the gender ratio of female to male victims widened from 1.8 to 2.6.

#### Types of elder abuse

Chart 6.3.1 shows that 75% of elderly female victims were physically abused in 2010. Psychological abuse and multiple types of abuse were the second and third most common types of abuse. These same patterns appear for male cases of

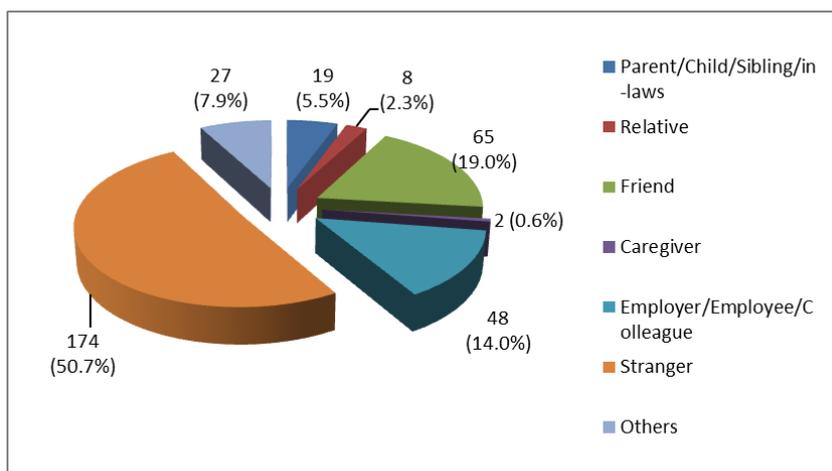
elder abuse in 2010. In 2010, 82% of elderly male abuse victims (i.e. 94 cases) were abused physically.

While proportionally fewer women than men suffer physical abuse, psychological, financial<sup>1</sup> and sexual abuse against elderly women were proportionally higher than against men. About 8% of all elderly female abuse victims were psychologically abused, which was proportionally slightly higher than for elderly male victims. There is also a significant gender difference in the category of financial abuse. In 2010, 7.8% female victims were financially abused, while male victims accounted for only 3.5%.

#### Perpetrators' Profiles

In 2010, spouses (i.e. 78.4%) were the most common perpetrators of elderly abuse, followed by sons (i.e. 8.5%), and domestic helpers (i.e. 4.7%). Again, there is a lack of available gender segregated data.

<sup>1</sup> In a survey commissioned by the Social Welfare Department and conducted by Hong Kong Christian Service, financial abuse situations include 'cheating an old person out of money,' and 'taking the property and belongings of an elderly person without his/her consent.' In general, it refers to illegal or unauthorised use of property, money, or other valuable items that belong to elderly people.

**Chart 6.4.1:** Number and Percentage of Sexual Violence Cases by Relationship with Victim, 2010

Source: <http://www.swd.gov.hk/vs/english/stat.html>, Social Welfare Department

## 6.4 Prevalence of Sexual Violence

As compared to 2004 when 99.7% of sexual violence victims were female, the 2010 proportion remains largely the same at 98.8%.

### Types of abuse

In 2010, multiple incidents (50.1%) comprised the largest proportion of sexual violence cases, followed by indecent assault (35.5%) and rape (10.5%).

Sexual harassment in the workplace also constitutes a prevalent and highly invisible form of sexual violence against women. Particularly in occupations such as airline hostesses, waitresses, nurses, and beauticians where female workers have to engage in personal communication and the provision of services, sexual violence occurs more frequently and less visibly. Many customers regard sexual advances or harassment as part of the service they are due.

According to a survey by the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF) published in October 2011, 32.3% of 195 respondents reported that they had

experienced sexual harassment in their workplace. In 53.8% of these cases, the victims were blamed for 'causing' the harassment.

Sexual harassment in schools, universities, and other public places should not be underestimated. Data on sexually abuse against domestic workers is also not available and the revised Domestic Violence Ordinance does not offer them any specific protection.

### Perpetrators' profiles

In 2010, half the perpetrators of sexual violence were strangers to the victims. Nearly one-fifth was friends, as illustrated by Chart 6.4.1.

Although the majority of the perpetrators of the reported sexual abuse cases were strangers to the victims, friends and employers/employees/colleagues constituted over 30% of the perpetrators in all cases. Other kinds of sexual violence include date rape, marital rape, and assault. Data on these cases is either unavailable or largely inaccurate due to serious underreporting.

## 6.5 Violence and Sexual Crimes against Women

Chart 6.5.1 shows an increase in cases of rape and indecent assault from 1999 to 2010, with 112 and 1,448 reported cases in 2010, respectively.

The number of reported rape cases is high, but not as many are detected<sup>2</sup> and arrested among reported cases, as shown in Chart 6.5.2. The ratio of detected rape cases to reported rape cases increased from 76.9% in 1999 to 89%.

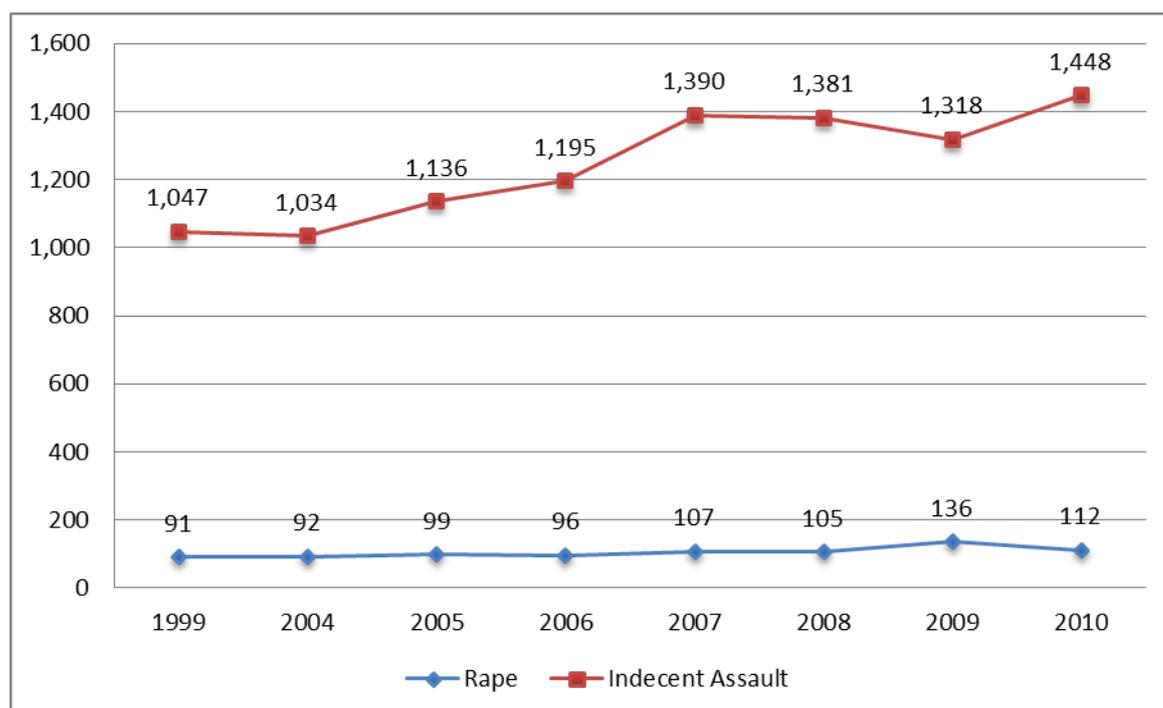
Chart 6.5.3 shows that the ratio of detected cases to reported detected indecent assault cases was relatively lower than for rape cases.

Chart 6.5.4 shows that the number of arrests has improved in recent years. Not only did most of the reported cases lead to arrests, arrested cases also outstripped detected cases.

The ratios of detected and arrested indecent assault cases were relatively lower than those for the rape cases, although the ratios remain at a high level. In 2009, the ratio of arrested indecent assault cases to detected indecent assault cases was 93.8%, as shown in Chart 6.5.5.

The data shows that if a case of serious sexual violence crime is reported, the perpetrators have a high likelihood of being arrested. However, the number of reported cases represents only a small percentage – less than half – of the number of cases received by the Rape Crisis Centre.

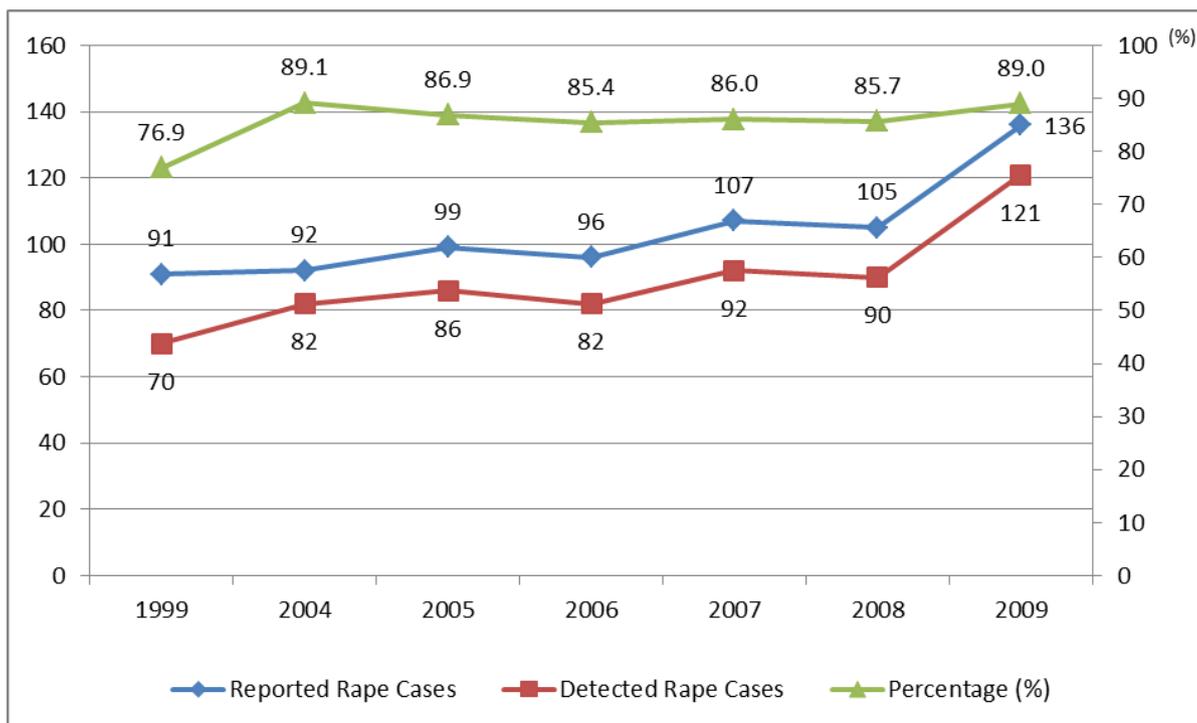
**Chart 6.5.1:** Number of Reported Rape and Sexual Assault Cases, 1999 and 2004-2010



Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2011; Hong Kong Police Force, 2011

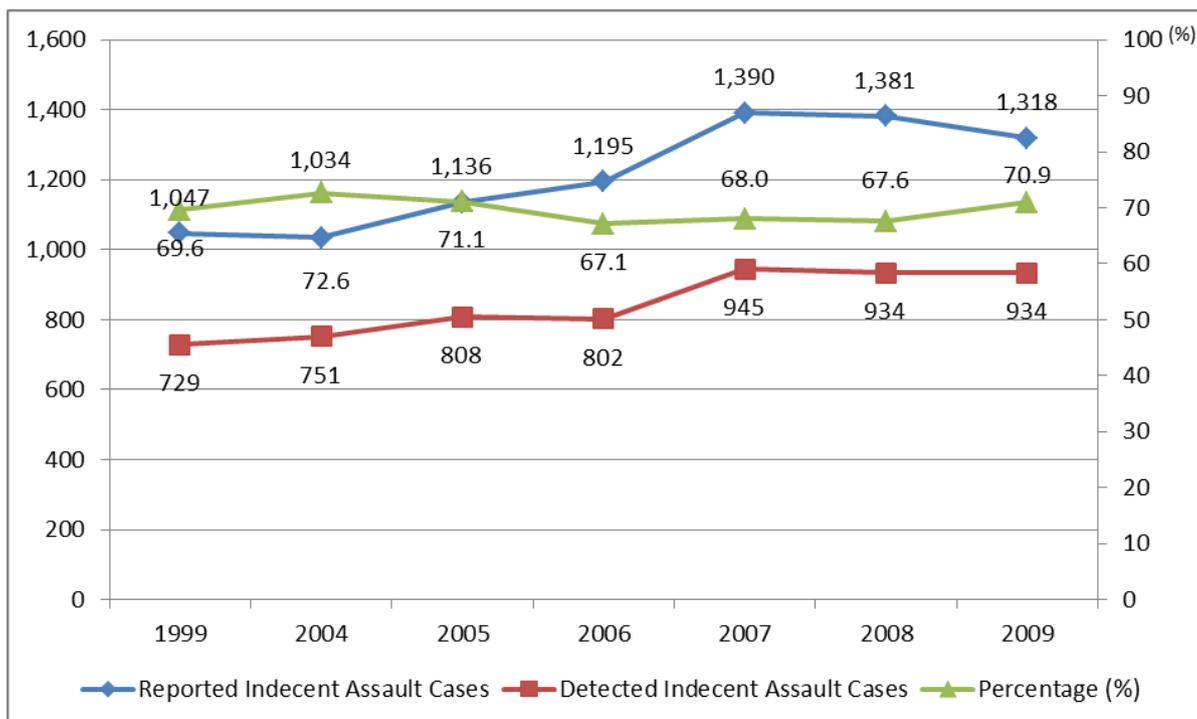
<sup>2</sup> Detected cases refer to cases that have been investigated.

**Chart 6.5.2:** Number of Reported and Detected Rape Cases, and Ratio of Detected Cases to Reported Cases, 1999 and 2004-2009



\*%=No. of detected rape cases/ No. of reported rape cases  
 Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2011

**Chart 6.5.3:** Number of Reported and Detected Indecent Assault Case, and Ratio of Detected Cases to Reported Cases, 1999 and 2004-2009



\*%=No. of detected indecent assault cases/ No. of reported indecent assault cases  
 Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2011

**Chart 6.5.4:** Number of Reported, Detected, and Arrested Rape Cases, and the Detected and Arrested Ratios, 2000-2009

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Reported Rape</b>	104	95	95	70	92	99	96	107	105	136
<b>Detected Rape</b>	84	83	83	60	82	86	82	92	90	121
<b>Arrested Rape</b>	99	85	97	77	87	95	102	100	108	134
<b>Detected Ratio (%)</b>	80.8	87.4	87.4	85.7	89.1	86.9	85.4	86.0	85.7	89.0
<b>Arrested Ratio (%)</b>	117.9	102.4	116.9	128.3	106.1	110.5	124.4	108.7	120.0	110.7

\*Detected ratio= detected cases/ reported cases

\*Arrested ratio= arrested cases/ detected cases

Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010

**Chart 6.5.5:** Number of Reported, Detected, and Arrested Indecent Assault Cases and Detected and Arrested Ratios, 2000-2009

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Reported Indecent Assault</b>	1,124	1,007	991	1,018	1,034	1,136	1,195	1,390	1,381	1,318
<b>Detected Indecent Assault</b>	804	696	728	696	751	808	802	945	934	934
<b>Arrested Indecent Assault</b>	745	658	687	678	707	760	742	854	847	876
<b>Detected Ratio (%)</b>	71.5	69.1	73.5	68.4	72.6	71.1	67.1	68.0	67.6	70.9
<b>Arrested Ratio (%)</b>	92.7	94.5	94.4	97.4	94.1	94.1	92.5	90.4	90.7	93.8

\*Detected ratio= detected cases/ reported cases

\*Arrested ratio= arrested cases/ detected cases

Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010

## 6.6 Concluding Observations

- Women are constantly exposed to violence of various kinds throughout their lives.
- Violence against women is embedded in close relationships between women and members of their families. Girls suffer more abuse as they get older, and are much more vulnerable to sexual abuse than boys.
- Over 80% of battered spouses were women in 2009, and the number of battered female spouses has doubled in the past decade.
- One-sixth of abused women are new arrivals from mainland China to Hong Kong.
- Elderly women experience more financial, psychological, and sexual abuse than elderly men.
- Most sexual abusers are strangers, friends, and employers/employees/colleagues of the victims.
- Other forms of sexual abuse go unnoticed. There are no official statistics on the prevalence of violence or abuse against domestic workers, date rape, marital rape, or sexual assault by ex-husband/partners.

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# 7 Women in the Family

In traditional Chinese society, men are supposed to be the breadwinners and the head of the family while women are expected to stay at home to rear children. With improvements in education and increased economic independence, the roles of women in the family have transformed significantly, influencing women's social status and well-being.

As many of the previous chapters have shown, women's health, education, employment, and even survival have been negatively impacted by their position in the family. This chapter focuses on the changing patterns of marriage and childbirth, which greatly affect the family structure and the roles of family members as well as the relationship within couples. To examine how various family types may differently impact a woman's position in the family, comparisons are made between families containing married couples with children, single parents, and married couples with children where the spouses live apart (e.g. cross-border families) as well as ethnic minorities.

## 7.1 Women in Marriage and Family

In the past decade, an increasing number of women have chosen to marry later in life. Furthermore, the proportion of married women aged 20 to 49 has either stayed the same or decreased from 2006 to 2009. As in 2006, the percentage of married women aged 20-29 in 2009 remained at 5.8%. Meanwhile, the

proportion of married women aged 30-49 dropped from 57% in 2006 to 53.4% in 2009.

In addition, the proportion of women who have never married continues to increase. In 2009, the percentage of never married women aged 30-49 increased from 28.1% in 2006 to 28.3%.

Women's median age of first marriage is also rising gradually over time and was 28.4, 28.5, and 28.7<sup>1</sup> in 2008, 2009, and 2010 respectively.

While women and men are marrying later in life, the age gap between men and women in terms of their median age of first marriage has remained relatively consistent, ranging from 2.4-3 years during 2006-2010.<sup>2</sup>

Due to an improvement in education, employment opportunities, and general conditions for women, they have become more career-oriented. However, women are still usually required to be or are still perceived as the de facto main caretakers in the family. This societal expectation can become burdensome, not to the extent that it is completely preventing women from participating in the employment market but significant enough to disrupt their career path.

The crude marriage rate<sup>3</sup> for men and women share a similar pattern of fluctuation from 2006-2009. From its

1 This is the Census and Statistic Department's provisional figure for 2010.

2 The Census and Statistic Department's figure of 31.1 for men in 2010 is provisional.

3 The crude marriage rate refers to the number of marriages in a calendar year per 1,000 mid-year population of the same sex of that year.

highest point at 14 in 2006, the female marriage rate decreased by about 1 point in 2007 and 2008, and then increased to 13.8 in 2009. The male marriage rate, which was 15.5 in 2009, has been consistently higher than the female rate since 2006. Women's desire for more independence is not mutually exclusive from their desire to engage in relationships including marriage. While the trend is moving towards an increase in women's independence, how women can strive for personal independence while also having a marriage and family deserves more attention.

The number of divorces also fluctuated from 2006-2009. From 17,424 in 2006, the number of divorces rose in 2007 and 2008 before decreasing to 17,002 in 2009.

The number of marriages increased from 2006 (i.e. 33,352) to 2009 (i.e. 35,338). However, what deserves attention is the difference between men and women regarding remarriage. In 2009, the number of marriages between a woman marrying for the first time to a man remarrying (i.e. 6,316) is about 66% greater than the number of marriages between a man marrying for the first time to a woman remarrying (i.e. 3,803).

Women's median age of first childbirth has also risen in recent years. Their median age of first childbirth was 29.2 years in 2006 and rose to 29.8 years in 2007 where it remained constant in 2008 and 2009.

Furthermore, over the past decade an increasing number of women have been giving birth between ages 30-34 and 35-39. In 2009, most women had children from ages 30-44.

## 7.2 Women's Roles and Position in the Family

**Head of Household:** In 2001, the ratio of male to female heads was as high as three to one for the age groups 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54. Interestingly, after the rule on reporting headship changed prior to 2006 to allow more than one head per household, the ratio substantially decreased to less than two to one across all age groups in 2006. Nevertheless, men are still more often identified as the head of the household, signifying an unfavourable balance of domestic power against women. The increase in the rate of female headship due to the change in the reporting rule shows that women's disadvantaged position in the household is, to some extent, a socially constructed phenomenon. However, the fact that women were much less identified as heads of households implies a deep-seated gender bias regarding women's position in the family.

**Home-making and housework:** From 2006-2009, the percentage of male home-makers constituted a negligible proportion of less than 1% (i.e. 0.45% from 2006-2009; 0.49% in 2009). While more men have taken up home-making duties, over 99% of home-makers are women.

**Domestic Violence:** Women are still disproportionately the victims of spousal abuse. Among physical, sexual, physical, and multiple types of abuse, 80.4% (i.e. 3,324 of 4,012) of total female spousal abuse victims were physically abused in 2009. Of all physical abuse victims in 2009, women comprised 83.1% (i.e. 3,324 of 3,880).

**Chart 7.2.1:** Newly-reported Cases of Spousal Abuse, by Type of Abuse and Sex of Victim (2006-2009)

		2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	Female	3,034	3,564	3,440	3,224
	Male	568	835	702	656
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	Female	11	10	16	12
	Male	0	0	0	0
<b>Psychological Abuse</b>	Female	513	1,364	1,965	532
	Male	96	373	544	130
<b>Multiple Abuse</b>	Female	191	231	154	244
	Male	11	27	22	9
<b>Overall</b>	Female	3,749	5,169	5,575	4,012
	Male	675	1,235	1,268	795

Source: Social Welfare Department (email)

**Chart 7.2.2:** Number and Percentage of Married Couples with Children (below age 18) in Domestic Households, by Gender, Economic Activity Status and Whether They Live in Low-income Households (2009)

	Low-income households		Non-low-income households	
	Number (%)		Number (%)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Employed people</b>	32,200 (25)	86,700 (67.3)	326,100 (61.8)	499,200 (94.6)
<b>Unemployed people</b>	5,400 (4.2)	17,500 (13.6)	6,900 (1.3)	9,800 (1.9)
<b>Economically inactive</b>	91,400 (70.9)	24,600 (19.1)	194,800 (36.9)	18,700 (3.5)
<b>Overall</b>	128,900 (100)	128,900 (100)	527,700 (100)	527,700 (100)

Source: Census and Statistics Department

The gender ratio of female to male victims of newly reported spousal abuse cases also decreased slightly from 2006 to 2009 at 5.55 and 5.05, respectively.

Although the trend is changing, many husbands of the New Arrivals are much older and many worry that their wives will become 'too independent.' Furthermore, these older husbands might actually be relying economically on their New Arrival wives. Even with better access to financial resources, some women remain deprived of even the most basic safety in the family.

**Work and housework:** Chart 7.2.2 shows that the majority of married women living in low-income households (i.e. 75.1%) were unemployed or economically inactive

in 2009, meaning they had to rely on their husbands or the government for their livelihood. In higher income households, the majority of married women were economically active with 38.2% who were either unemployed or economically inactive. However, there is a much lower ratio of economically inactive women to men in low-income households than in non-low-income households. In 2009, the ratio of economically inactive women to men in low-income households was 100 women to 26.9 men while the corresponding ratio in non-low-income households was 100 women to 9.6 men. Thus, improvement in income level seems to have a greater impact on men's economic activity status than women's.

However, single-parent households reveal different patterns. In 2006, income improvement increased the proportion of employed women among all female single parents (i.e. 41.9%) by almost as much as the proportion of employed men among all male single parents (i.e. 45.7%). However, income improvement reduced the number of home-makers among male single parents by 80.8% while it reduced the number among female single parents by only around 59.2%.

The aforementioned figures suggest that it is more likely for women in low-income households to perform the role of stay-at-home mother. Women living in non-low-income households may enjoy greater flexibility to pursue their career, but women in general do not enjoy as much flexibility as men do in terms of giving up their role as home-makers.

In 2006, regardless of whether women are living with their spouse and dependent children, living with their dependent children but not their spouse, or acting as single parent, they comprised about 45% of the non-working population. In contrast, the proportion of non-working men grew larger when they were single parents (i.e. 29.6%) and living with their dependent children but not their spouse (i.e. 20.1%). In other words, unless their female spouse was absent, men were much less likely to stay at home for the family.

### 7.3 Women's Position in Special Family Types

#### **New Arrival Women**

As an international metropolis, Hong Kong has resident families, who are cross-boundary. New arrivals from mainland China, most of whom are women, constitute those who are married to permanent Hong Kong residents and have

lived in Hong Kong for less than seven years.

Chapter Ten: *Migrant Women* discusses how this group of women are discriminated against by Hong Kong society. However, much of the discrimination and inequality they face comes from within their families.

New Arrivals are usually given a one-way exit permit, which means they cannot go back to their hometown for seven years once they set foot in Hong Kong (Immigration Regulations, 2003). Like other non-residents, new arrival spouses of Hong Kong permanent residents who wish to give birth in Hong Kong, are excluded from the inexpensive public healthcare and charged from HK\$39,000-HK\$48,000 for a natural delivery.

The number of parents with minors who have been living in Hong Kong for less than seven years increased from 77,905 in 2001 to 79,877 in 2006. Among them, over 90% were women, although both the number and proportion of female parents decreased from 73,660 (i.e. 94.6%) in 2001 to 72,194 (i.e. 90.4%) in 2006.

While the majority of parents were both present in a family, the number of female single parents and females whose children were living with only one of two parents also increased by more than 20% from 2001 to 2006. The number of single mothers (i.e. 4,247) in 2006 was more than 39 times the number of single fathers (i.e. 108). While these single mothers moved to and resided in Hong Kong mainly for family reunion purposes, they were actually living without their husbands and were the sole means of family support.

The majority (i.e. 83%) of New Arrival mothers were age 30-44 and the proportion of this age group increased steadily from 2001 to 2006.

The father was the only employed person in nearly half of all immigrant dual-parent families in 2006 (i.e. 48.2%). Dual-parent families where only the mother was employed comprised 7.9%, a drop from 9% in 2001.

The employed proportion of female single-parent families was 35.2%, which was lower than that of dual-parent families (i.e. 38.7%) in 2006.

New Arrivals often find their academic qualifications from mainland China irrelevant. Many with an educational level of secondary or above only find elementary occupations.

Previously, a lack of Cantonese-speaking ability also inhibited their participation in the labour market but in 2006 less than 2% of new arrival women in both dual-parent and single-parent families couldn't speak Cantonese.

### **Ethnic Minority Women**

A total of 342,198 ethnic minorities constituted 5% Hong Kong's entire population in July 2006.

The number of ethnic-minority families with children decreased from 45,134 in 2001 to 42,512 in 2006. Most were dual-parent families. The number of female parents in dual-parent families and dual-parent families where the female parent is living with children decreased but the number of single mothers increased from 1,031 in 2001 to 1,177 in 2006.

From 2001-2006, the percentage of ethnic minority mothers who could speak Cantonese rose in dual-parent families and stayed about the same in single parent families. In 2006, the proportion of mothers who could speak Cantonese remained proportionally higher in single parent families (i.e. 73.8%, 869) than dual-parent families (i.e. 51.3%, 11,510). Based

on data provided by the Census and Statistics Department, only 16.4% of single fathers could do so in 2006.

In total, there were proportionally fewer working women (i.e. 40.6%) than working men (i.e. 87.5%) in ethnic minority dual-parent families in 2006 ethnic minority families in which only the mother was employed accounted for 4.8% in 2006. In single parent ethnic minority families, over half of single mothers (i.e. 50.6%) in 2006 were employed, although this proportion was still significantly below that of employed single fathers (i.e. 81.4% in 2006).

### **Women in Cross-Border Families**

Another special category of family in Hong Kong is the cross-border family, of which there are two types. In one, the spouse works outside Hong Kong, mostly in mainland China. In 2006, the fathers of 89.6% of these types of families worked outside Hong Kong. This means that the mothers of around 30,000 families had to take care of the whole family by themselves nearly all time, a situation similar to that of single parents.

Surveys with representative samples, which explore the impact of cross-border employment on marital and family relationships are rare. Lau's exploratory study (2006) points out the impact of non-residential parenting on children includes extra problems, which the resident parent, who is usually female, must address. Thus, for women in these families, their physical, social, and psychological freedom and autonomy may, therefore, be severely undermined.

The other type of cross-border family is one whose members originate from mainland China and have not yet obtained

**Chart 7.3.1:** Number of Cross-Border Students, by Level of Education, 2006-2010

Year	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Total
2006/07	797	2,878	799	4,474
2007/08	1,456	3,466	937	5,859
2008/09	1,780	3,910	1,078	6,768
2009/10	2,681	4,090	1,267	8,038

Source: Education Bureau

a one-way permit, but have established a family with Hong Kong permanent residents. Women from mainland China and men from Hong Kong constitute many of these families. Of all registered marriages in Hong Kong in 2009, 43.7% (i.e. 22,339) involved Hong Kong residents and people from mainland China in 2009. This proportion has gradually been decreasing from 68.8% (i.e. 34,628) in 2006.

These types of couples usually have children. While waiting for a one-way permit, the mothers and their children typically live in Shenzhen with the children commuting to school in Hong Kong for a better education. Chart 7.3.1 show that the number of cross-border students increased steadily for all levels of education from 2006/2007 to 2009/2010. The men in these families either work in Hong Kong or in another part of China.

As these families are scattered between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, conducting research on them is difficult. However, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service conducted a focus group survey in 2008. Findings showed that typical family functions such as child care, parenting, household division of labour were sub-optimal in cross-border families. For example, providing adequate parenting was particularly difficult due to the frequent absence of the father, and many mothers in these families complained that their spouses spoiled the children with

unnecessary gifts to compensate for their absence. Women took up most of the family caring duties and household responsibilities. Women who were living in Shenzhen and waiting for a one-way permit were particularly vulnerable. Not only did they receive inadequate support from their husbands but their ability to migrate was also dependent on their husbands.

#### 7.4 Concluding Observations

- While many believe that women have become independent of the traditional burdens imposed by social expectations, the reality of modern women in Hong Kong households suggest that they may not be as free and autonomous.
- Women in Hong Kong have developed their own aspirations, but society continues to expect them to play a major role in the family. Although men are increasingly willing to share the responsibilities of caregiving and housework, the lion's share of these tasks is still mainly performed by women.
- Women's roles in marriage and the family are not absolute imperatives and they are not overtly blocked from working. However, cultural expectations that assume women will be carers and home-makers can and do significantly disrupt their participation in society such as in the labour market.

- The relative power position of women in the family can be gauged by the following:
  - Many were only acknowledged as heads of the household when the prevailing norms or regulations changed to allow both men and women to become heads.
  - Irrespective of their economic status, their employment status, and their family situation (e.g. single parent), women remain the gender who is expected to take care of children and other family members, and they primarily fulfil this role.
  - Women are more vulnerable to spousal abuse.
- All of the aforementioned points severely affect women’s actual position as well as their perceived position in the family and reproduces their situation of being the secondary sex in the family, if not in society as a whole.
- New Arrivals and other groups of migrant or ethnic minority women may face an even harsher situation. As dislocated women, they typically cannot turn to anyone except their husbands or partners, who may often manipulate or subject them to a set of unfavourable household/family conditions. Specifically, they may not be able to enjoy equality in their own households/families.

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# 8 Women in Power and Decision-Making

As a basic human right, women's equal access to power and full participation in decision-making plays a pivotal role in their advancement. As stated at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, this right is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of a female perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development, and peace cannot be achieved (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995).

As early as 1990, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution put forward targets for increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions: 30% by 1995 and 50% by 2000. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 also included similar gender balance goals in government bodies and committees, public administrative entities, and the judiciary, requiring constant monitoring by the UN.

**Power and Decision-making in the Political Arena:** Women's power in society is best manifested by the way in which they participate in major political institutions including the Executive Council (ExCo), the Legislative Council (LegCo), select traditionally male-dominated bureaus or departments, District Councils (DCs), and power networks such as the Representatives of Hong Kong in the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). While NPC and CPPCC representatives do not have formal power in Hong Kong, they occupy positions that influence national and local affairs. In

addition to political institutions, women's participation in public statutory and advisory bodies should also be examined. In accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the political arena requires a central institutional mechanism to promote women's development. As data on related commissions is extremely limited, this chapter attempts to highlight the performance of the Women's Commission (WoC), the central mechanism responsible for promoting the advancement of women, as compared to other similar commissions in Hong Kong.

**Power and Decision-making in Other Public Arenas:** Outside the core political institutions, this chapter examines how women participate as board members and CEOs in listed companies; and in employer associations, unions, and professional bodies.

**Power and Decision-making in the Private Sphere:** Women's access to power in the private sphere is often neglected. However, their access to power in their families or at home undeniably shapes their participation in the public as well as in the political arena.

Against internationally set standards, women in Hong Kong have extremely limited access to power. It was not until 2004 that Hong Kong started to set a gender benchmark for women's participation in the political sphere, stating that the proportion of women in statutory bodies and on advisory committees should be no less than 25% (The Second Report of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region on the

**Chart 8.1.1:** Number and Percentage of Female Official Members and Non-Official Members, 1997-2010

Figures as at	Female Official Members		Female Non-Official Members	
	No.	%	No.	%
1.1.1997	1	33%	2	25%
1.1.1998	2	67%	2	18%
1.1.1999	2	67%	2	18%
1.1.2000	2	67%	2	20%
1.1.2001	2	67%	2	20%
1.1.2002	1	33%	2	22%
1.1.2003	3	21%	0	0%
1.1.2004	2	14%	1	20%
1.1.2005	2	14%	2	29%
1.1.2006	1	7%	2	13%
1.1.2007	2	14%	2	13%
1.1.2008	3	20%	2	13%
1.1.2009	4	27%	1	7%
1.1.2010	4	27%	3	21%

Source: ExCo Secretariat (email 2011)

Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action). Even against this internal standard, data shows that little progress has been made in Hong Kong relating to women's achievement in power structures and decision-making. The Hong Kong government has largely failed to attain even this relatively low standard and a male-dominated political system prevails.

## 8.1 Political Arena

Like Renzetti and Curran (1989), sociologists have repeatedly pointed out that when we talk about politics, we are essentially talking about power – the power to distribute resources, to institutionalise particular values, and to legitimately use force or violence. This section will explore the gender patterns of voting, election, and political appointment, which are traditionally dominated by men. Although people have called for more democracy in Hong Kong's political system since the Handover in 1997, they assume this will lead to gender equality. The following sections test this assumption against the evidence.

### The Government's Executive

**The Executive Council (ExCo):** Under the executive-led political system, the Executive Council is the most important political institution for decision-making in Hong Kong. After the introduction of the Principal Officials Accountability System (POAS) in 2002, all principal officials (i.e. three Secretaries of Department and twelve Bureau Secretaries) who are appointed by the Chief Executive, become official members of the ExCo. The Chief Executive, who was elected by an 800-member Election Committee, also appoints the ExCo's non-official members.

After the POAS was introduced and the Chief Executive's centralisation of power increased, female representation in the ExCo decreased. In particular, the gender ratio of female to male official members and non-official members declined significantly.

Female non-official members made up a small proportion of all members from 1997 to 2010. For the majority of the last decade, the ratio was less than one female

to four male members. In 2003, the number of female non-official members dropped to zero.

Regarding official members, Chart 8.1.1 shows that men have dominated the ExCo since 2002. Before POAS was established, the proportion of female official members was 67% from 1998-2001 because at the time, the Secretary for Justice and the Chief Secretary were both female, and there were only three official ExCo members. After 2002, the number and the proportion of male official members increased rapidly and the gender gap widened. The proportion of female official members reached 27%, slightly over the 25% standard set by the government, only after 2009.

The ExCo has always been formed by appointment. Before 2002, most members were non-official with the Chief Executive (or Governor) and the official members holding the main power. The number of official members increased substantially after 2002, when the Principal Officials Accountability System (POAS) was first introduced.

**Disciplined services:** Within the executive-led administration, Hong Kong's disciplined services represent the government departments that overtly exercise legitimate force and power. How women are represented in different disciplined services reflects their authority to exert force and power.

In general, there were less than 20% women in the disciplined services, which does not meet the 25% standard. Men occupied more than 80% of positions ranked officer or above from 2000 to 2009, although there was a slight rise in the proportion of female officers from 11.9% in 2000 to 13.9% in 2010.

The total percentage of female officers in disciplined services was bolstered by the high percentage of female immigration officers (i.e. 26.5% in 2010), who are often not required to employ legitimate force and power. Women are rarely found in the Fire Service Department and the Government Flying Services, which each contained 1.4% women in 2010. Finally, unlike all other disciplined services, the percentage of female officers in the Customs and Excise Department decreased from 17.3% in 2000 to 17% in 2010.

**Directorate Grade in the Civil Service:** Civil servants constitute a very important part of Hong Kong's power centre. However, since 2002, civil servants' power has gradually decreased and they now report to the politically appointed secretaries or undersecretaries. The proportion of women at the top level of the Civil Service increased quite substantially from 21.6% of women at Directorate grade in 2000 to 32.1% in 2010. Additional information about the background of these Directorate-grade civil servants such as their age and marital status was not available through the Civil Service Bureau.

**Public Sector Advisory and Statutory Bodies:** According to the Home Affairs Bureau, public advisory and statutory bodies were established to provide ongoing information, professional expertise, and advice to the government on the development of policies or the delivery of services. The Bureau instituted a standard stipulating that 25% of the members of these advisory and statutory bodies should be female. Since 2008, the proportion of female members has reached and remained at 25%.

### **The Legislature**

According to the Basic Law, the legislative functions of the HKSAR are performed by

the Legislative Council (LegCo). The main functions of LegCo are to enact laws, examine and approve budgets, tax and spend public funds, and monitor the government's work. It consists of 60 elected members: 30 from geographical constituencies (GCs), and 30 from functional constituencies (FCs). GCs consist of Hong Kong registered voters while FCs constitute a limited number of voters whose votes are not of equal weight. Some seats (e.g. sports) are elected by corporate representatives or organisations and others (e.g. social welfare) by a larger group of designated individuals in the constituency. Private bills or motions raised by members must be passed by the majority of members from the GCs and FCs. This arrangement substantially limits the power of members who are not in favour of the current government.

**Voter Registration and Voting in Geographical Constituency Elections:** The percentages of male and female electors have been converging since 2000 with a gap of less than 1% in 2009 (i.e. male: 50.3%; female: 49.7%).

**Geographical Constituency Voter Turnout:** The gender gap among voters has become more significant since 2000. In 2000, the voter turnout rate of women and men was the same (i.e. 43.6%). In 2004, voting by both genders at the LegCo election rose, with a slightly higher male turnout rate (i.e. 55.9%) than female rate (i.e. 55.4%). The gender gap widened further in 2008 with 45.9% male and 44.5% female voters.

**Running for LegCo:** Compared with the voter turnout rate, the proportion of women among all LegCo GC election candidates was much lower than the male rate. 77.5% (i.e. 110) of candidates at the LegCo GC election were men in 2008, and 22.5% (i.e. 32) were women.

Figures broken down by geographical constituency show that in the Kowloon East District, 88.2% (i.e. 15) of candidates were men and 11.8% (i.e. 2) were women in 2008. The percentage of female candidates (i.e. 33.3%, 8) in Hong Kong Island was still much lower than that of male candidates (i.e. 66.7%, 16), but it was nearly twice as high as the female percentage (i.e. 17.2%, 5) in New Territories East and nearly three times higher than in Kowloon East's female proportion.

**Voter Registration and Voting in Functional Constituency Elections:** In contrast to the GC scenario, the number and percentage of female registered electors in the FC were higher than male registered electors, as shown in Chart 8.1.8. The proportion of female electors rose steadily from 2006 (i.e. 55.7%) to 2009 (i.e. 56.1%).

In spite of comprising the majority of electors, only 10% of women stood as candidates in the FC election. This was much lower than the proportion of female candidates in direct elections.

Women are particularly disadvantaged in the FCs, and in 2008, there were no female candidates in most functional constituencies. In constituencies where female candidates were found such as Accountancy, Education, and Labour, the majority of candidates were still male. In constituencies such as Legal, Textiles and Garment, and Transport, women and men were equally represented.

**Outcome of Women's Political Participation:** Only 11 women (i.e. 18.3%) were successfully elected at the LegCo elections in 2004 and 2008, falling far below the internationally agreed 25% benchmark set by the Hong Kong government.

The above figures show that as electors women enjoy equal access in comparison to men. In FC elections, there were more female than male electors. Furthermore, women and men voters are more or less equally active although the women's turnout rate dropped below the rate of men's turnout in the 2008 GC elections. However, far fewer women stood for LegCo elections than men, and their rate of success was much lower than that of the male candidates.

One reason for the small number of female candidates in GCs may be the Proportional Representation system used in this type of election. All candidates have to be listed by political parties to become a candidate, but political parties in Hong Kong are still quite male-dominated. Coupled with the cultural stereotypes against women (e.g. women should not be politicians; women should play a supportive rather than a leadership role), not many women stand for election. When they do, they are usually relegated to the role of a supportive candidate on a party's list. Electors exacerbate the situation with their tendency to continue choosing male candidates.

The FC elections are even less likely to promote women's access to LegCo. A Functional Constituency is based on occupation. Thus, is a form of de facto gender discrimination because a substantial proportion of women in Hong Kong are not in the employment market, and are therefore excluded. Moreover, although the majority of functional constituency electors are women, many factors actually prevent them from exercising their power. First, as mentioned in Chapter Three: Women and the Economy, occupational segregation means that in some male-dominated industries, women may not even be able to participate as electors. Second, vertical segregation in the labour market produces two negative

effects on women's access to power. In many functional constituencies, only owners of entities such as companies and organisations are eligible to vote. As a result, it is mostly men who have a right to vote in these constituencies. Finally, if the labour market is vertically segregated in such a way that those at the top tend to be male, candidates nominated in the functional constituencies would tend to be male too. As FC electors, women outnumbered men, but as candidates only a few women won seats.

### **District Administration**

There are 18 District Councils in Hong Kong. They constitute the consultative institution of the Hong Kong political system at the district level, under the secretarial support of the Home Affairs Bureau.

**Voter Turnout Rate in DC Elections:** The voter turnout rates of women and men were similar in 2003 and 2007 with a slightly higher female turnout rate (i.e. 44.4% in 2003; 39.4% in 2007).

**Women Candidates and their Success Rate:** Similar to the pattern in the LegCo election, the percentages of female candidates in DC elections were less than 20%. The final success rates for women as appointed and elected DC members also accounted for less than 20%, as shown in Chart 8.1.2.

Comparing the figures for the 2003 and 2007 elections, the percentage of female candidates in 2007 (i.e. 18.4%) was slightly higher than that in 2003 (i.e. 17.4%). A similar observation can be made for elected members. In contrast, the percentage of female-appointed members remains unchanged over time.

At the DC level, female candidates' success rate was slightly higher in 2003 (i.e. 48.6%) and 2007 (i.e. 46.7%) than that of men's.

**Chart 8.1.2:** Number and Percentage Distribution of Candidates, Elected Members, and Appointed Members on Government Councils/Boards, by Gender, 2003 and 2007

	Candidates		Elected members		Appointed members	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>2003</b>	146 (17.4%)	691 (82.6%)	71 (17.8%)	329 (82.3%)	19 (18.6%)	83 (81.4%)
<b>2007</b>	167 (18.4%)	740 (81.6%)	78 (19.3%)	327 (80.7%)	19 (18.6%)	83 (81.4%)

Source: Registration and Electoral Office (email 2011)

### Village Representative Elections

Apart from being electors, women have a very limited role in Village Representative Elections. The percentages of registered female and male electors was similar in 2003, 2007, and 2011: 46.7% female and 53.3% male in 2003; 47% female and 53% male in 2007; and 47.3% female and 52.7% male in 2011. However, only a small percentage of women stood as candidates with 1.8% in 2003, and 2.2% in both 2007 and 2011.

The percentage of elected male members (i.e. over 97% in 2003, 2007, and 2011) shows that elections in traditional villages continue to favour men.

Apart from Village Representative Elections, the Heung Yee Kuk (i.e. rural council) election, a statutory advisory body representing establishment interests in the New Territories, should also be one of the major village-level elections that is examined. However, the Heung Yee Kuk did not reply to a request for data for this report.

### Power of the Central Government

In addition to executive, legislative, and judicial powers, the power of the central government, namely the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), have also played a role in Hong Kong's

political arena since 1997. According to The Basic Law, NPC deputies and CPPCC members constitute one section of the Election Committee, which elects the Chief Executive of the HKSAR.<sup>1</sup> The 'Two Meetings,' the NPC and CPPCC, are the highest central authorities of the People's Republic of China. Representatives from the 'Two Meetings' have the right to participate in the decision-making process at the central government level. The representatives of the 'Two Meetings' may have some subtle influence on Hong Kong's social development, and female participation in the NPC and CPPCC may also determine their influence in national affairs, central authorities, and local affairs.

**National People's Congress:** The current method of electing delegates to the NPC to represent Hong Kong is via an electoral college rather than by popular vote. Only a few significant political or business figures can be delegates and men still dominate this small power circle. Interestingly, the proportion of women in the NPC is higher than in other institutions of power discussed above. The number of female NPC deputies grew from 6 (i.e. 16.7%) in 2003 to 10 (i.e. 27.8%) in 2008.

**The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference:** Other than the NPC, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference is another significant organ of the central state power. In practice, its

1 [http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/annex\\_1.html](http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/annex_1.html), 3rd November 2011

roles and power are somewhat analogous to an advisory legislative upper house and there have been occasional proposals to formalise this role in the PRC Constitution. CPPCC's Standing Committee handles daily affairs.

There were two vice chairmen in the tenth CPPCC from Hong Kong, namely Henry Fok and Tung Chee-hwa, and 122 'specially-invited members from Hong Kong.' Of these 122 members female members accounted for only 10.7% (i.e. 13), while male members accounted for a majority of 89.3% (i.e. 109).

An imbalance in gender ratio was also found among the Hong Kong members of the CPPCC's Standing Committee. In 2006, two female members (i.e. 14.3%) and 12 male members (85.7%) were from Hong Kong.

### **Central Mechanisms for the Promotion of Women's Interests and Rights**

In Hong Kong, the Women's Commission is supposed to be the central mechanism that promotes women's development and rights. It was set up in 2001 and the Chief Executive appoints all members. The Women's Commission has three missions, namely the provision of an enabling environment for women, the empowerment of women, and public education. However, concrete data related to the outcomes of this three-pronged strategy are unavailable. Even the Women's Commission's annual reports do not mention this achievement data or financial highlights. While meaningful evaluation of the performance of this central mechanism may not be entirely possible, a basic comparison with other similar commissions in the government would provide insights.

As a high-level central mechanism to promote the well-being and interests of women, the Women's Commission receives

substantial financial support from the Hong Kong government every year. The WoC's budget grew from HK\$16.1 million in 2008-09 to HK\$19.6 million in 2009-2010, and was estimated at HK\$23.8 million for 2010-2011.

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), an independent statutory body established in 1996, was once considered the only central mechanism to promote women's interests in Hong Kong before the Women's Commission was set up. The EOC is vested with the power to oversee the implementation of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO), the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO), the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance (FSDO), and the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO).

Commensurate with its functions and responsibilities, the EOC has received relatively more financial resources from the Hong Kong government compared to the Women's Commission. From 2008-2009, EOC received with HK\$76.5 million of government financial support. This support was increased to HK\$80.2 million from 2009-2010, representing an increase of 4.8%.

The EOC has demonstrated considerable achievement in terms of handling complaints and cases under the SDO. Chart 8.1.3 shows that enquiries relating to SDO increased by 12.8% from 18,493 in 2008 to 20,852 in 2009, and complaints received rose by 5% during this time period. Of all complaints handled in 2008 and 2009, about 26% were active cases.

Six out of 26 legal assistance cases received a legal grant in 2010 - a success rate of 23.1%

The work of the Women's Commission as a central mechanism to promote women's interests is not as visible as that of the EOC.

**Chart 8.1.3:** Number of EOC Enquiries and Complaints by Case Status, 2008-2010

	2008 (Actual)	2009 (Actual)	2010 (Estimate)
<b>Enquiries</b>	18,493	20,852	22,950
<b>Complaints received</b>	318	334	370
<b>Complaints handled</b>	450	452	490
<b>Active cases at year end</b>	118	118	90
<b>Complaints where legal assistance was granted</b>	4	10	–
<b>Complaints taken to court</b>	1	4	–

Source: Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government, 2011

No publicly intelligible indicators have been established to allow the public to track WoC's progress on the promotion of women's development and interests, and the empowerment of women.

Although the amount of subvention given to the Women's Commission has not led to a lot of publicly shared outcomes, the Commission is relatively small and powerless compared to the EOC. It does not have any responsibility for enforcing ordinances that are enacted to protect women or prevent discrimination against them. By placing the Women's Commission under the Labour and Welfare Bureau women's interests are being defined as welfare issues. Without any legal tools or overarching administrative authority, the Women's Commission, which endeavours to promote the interests of half of Hong Kong's population, may not have sufficient power to achieve what it has been set up to do.

## 8.2 Public Arena

### The Corporate World

As in the political arena, women's access to power and decision-making in the public arena is still substantially hindered and the corporate world is still dominated by men. Chapter Three: *Women and the Economy* reveals that women represent only a small proportion of employers and senior-level professionals. Furthermore, women's representation in civil society organisations

is an important issue that deserves attention.

**Women on Boards:** A company's Board of Directors represents the most powerful body in the corporate world. While it is in the private sector, it is an important public institution where pivotal decisions are made. According to an international statistical review from Governance Metrics International, an average of only 7.6% of board members in Hong Kong were women in 2009 Hong Kong's average rate of female board members ranked in the middle among industrialised countries in the Asia-Pacific region but fell behind other industrialised countries in Europe and North America. The average percentage of female board members in Norway, Sweden, and Finland were 35.9%, 23%, and 21%, respectively. Even emerging markets such as the Philippines, Israel, and South Africa had much higher rates of female board members than Hong Kong (i.e. Philippines: 23%; Israel: 12.5%; South Africa: 14.6%).

**Women in Trade Unions:** From 2005-2010, the increase in female members (i.e. 25.6%) in employee's associations was more than double the rate of the increase in male members (12%). However, the percentage of female participants continues to remain lower (i.e. 44.5% in 2010) than their male counterparts (i.e. 55.5% in 2010).

Furthermore, in 2010, employee unions in eight out of 17 industries either had relatively equal gender ratios or higher female ratios (e.g. Manufacturing and Education), while nine (e.g. Public Administration and Construction) were dominated by men in 2010.

**Women in Employers' Associations:** The gender gap between members of employers' associations widened from 2005 to 2010. In 2010, there were 18 such associations for the main industry groups in Hong Kong. Ten declared members were women, and 1,253 were men (Registry of Trade Unions Labour Department). If these associations represent major interests, this extremely low gender ratio of one woman to about 125 men implies that the interests being represented would unlikely be those of female employers.

Additionally, from 2005 to 2008, employers' associations experienced a dramatic drop in membership, although this decrease was less pronounced in male members. During this time period, the number of female members dropped by 97.5% and male members by 26.3%.

**Women in Professional Groups:** The situation in the majority of professional fields remains largely unknown because many professional organisations do not provide any time-series data with a gender breakdown. However, data was obtained from the Engineer Registration Board. Due primarily to the difficulty women experience in gaining access to this industry, an overwhelmingly high proportion of all types of Registered Professional Engineers (R.P.E.s) were men according to March 2011 data. The chemical sector had the highest proportion of females R.P.E.s (i.e. one-third).

### 8.3 Private Sphere

Women's power in the private arena is also an important issue, although the power distribution in the household is usually not easily detectable.

**Rate of Women who are Heads of Households:** The headship rate of women in domestic households rose from 20% in 1996 to 32.6% in 2006. However, this was primarily a result of an administrative change in how heads of household are counted. Since 2006, the Census and Statistics Department has allowed for more than one household head, which led immediately to a substantial increase in female headship rates. In 2006, the rate of women who were household head was approximately half the male rate (i.e. 59.5%).

Chapter Four: *Women and Poverty* looks at how women's position in the household has affected their role in the job market. However, no data is available to describe how a lower position in the household creates negative impacts for women in the public and political arenas. Some qualitative studies have examined how, for example, female politicians package themselves as professional career women to help them avoid the image of being someone's mother.

### 8.4 Concluding Observations

- Contrary to the public impression that women now have more access to power and full participation in decision-making, which is usually propagated by quoting rare examples of female high officials, women's access to and full participation in power and decision-making is not comparable to men in the political, public, and private arenas.

- The lower the level of political participation (i.e. elector), the higher the number and proportion of women. At higher levels where real power is located, men still have disproportionately more access.
- Women are generally under-represented in the Executive, Legislative, and District Councils as both candidates and members. However, the success rate of women holding powerful positions is higher at a local (i.e. District Council) than a central level with the exception of Village Representative elections.
- There are many cultural and institutional hurdles that block women from taking part in elections.
- Women are not well represented in other public domains. In the corporate sector, men dominate powerful positions. Women are underrepresented on boards and in employers' associations.
- Given the under-representation of women in the political system and other public domains, the central mechanism represented by the Women's Commission must continue to play a prominent role in making a relevant and more visible impact on improving women's access to power and participation in decision-making.
- However, compared with other similar commissions in the government, the work and the impact of the Women's Commission are not sufficiently visible. The Women's Commission lacks the necessary power to command more resources and call upon other government departments to work collaboratively for the interests and rights of women.
- In the private sphere, most women remain subordinate to male heads of household.

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# 9 Women and the Media

This chapter deals with the image of women in society, specifically as portrayed in the media, a woman's own self-image, and others' perceptions. This involves two broad areas of research including gender self-perception and gender stereotypes.

The media can largely be divided into two domains: mainstream media including television, radio, newspapers and magazines; and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

## 9.1 Mainstream Media

The lack of gender sensitivity in the mainstream media is often criticised by local women's organisations, who say that images of women are negative, degrading, and subordinate in mass communications. These images systematically reproduce patterns of sex segregation in education and employment, and in public and private spheres as described in other chapters of this report.

Data relating to the structure of the mainstream media is also not available in Hong Kong. Although the Vocation Training Council conducted a survey report – *2010 Manpower Survey Report on the Mass Communication Industry* – the questionnaire given to media institutions does not require them to provide any information on the gender of their employees.

## 9.2 Access to Information Technology

As the Internet has become one of the most important global communication channels, women's access to the Internet and related Information and Communications Technology (ICT) media should be studied.

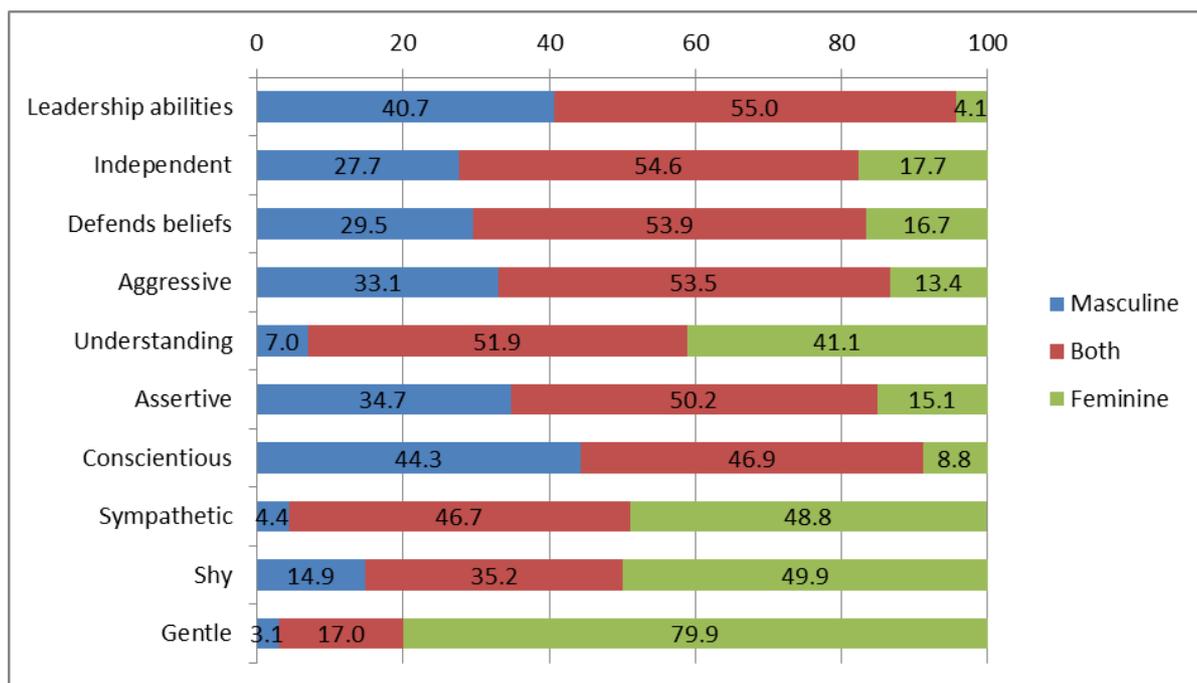
Chart 9.1.1 shows that, in 2010, women's overall Internet usage rate was 66.1%, which was slightly lower than men's (i.e. 72.9%). Broken down by age, a divergent pattern is found after 34. From 10-34, women and men had similar rates of Internet usage. The rate of Internet usage for women aged 35-44 was 82.1%, slightly less than that of men (i.e. 89.9%). The gap increases as the age spectrum rises. The rate for women aged 45-55 was only 62.8% compared to 72.3% for men. For 55- to 64-year olds, the rate for women was 31.5% compared to 44.1% for men. For the oldest age group, 65 or above, female Internet usage rate was 4.4% and for men it was 13.7%.

In addition to women's access to ICT as consumers or users is their participation as producers or infrastructural builders. Data regarding the way in which women take part in ICT as researchers or technicians is not available. The closest proxy is the gender ratio of women to men working in the information and communications

**Chart 9.1.1:** Percentage of People Aged 10 and Over Using the Internet During the 12 Months before Enumeration, by Age and Gender in 2010

	Age Group							Overall
	10-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 or above	
<b>Male</b>	99.0	99.1	96.2	89.9	72.3	44.1	13.7	72.9
<b>Female</b>	98.6	99.2	94.2	82.1	62.8	31.5	4.4	66.1

**Chart 9.2.1:** Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Identification of Masculine and Feminine Characteristics



Source: Equal Opportunities Commission (2009)

industry. In 2008 and 2009, the ratio of women to men working in the ICT industry was about 1:2. However, this may underestimate women's disadvantage in the field as there may be more women working in related industries such as customer service or telephone operators.

### 9.3 Perceptions and Stereotypes of Women

In 2009, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) conducted research entitled 'Study on the Public Perception of the Portrayal of the Female Gender in the Hong Kong Media.' The study attempted to identify the association between the media, and the public perception of women and sexual stereotyping. A gender stereotype is defined as 'a conventionally simplified and standardised conception or image concerning the typical social roles of male and female, both domestically and socially.' Gender stereotypes are beliefs held about characteristics, traits, and activity domains that are deemed

appropriate for men and women (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2009).

**Media consumption:** According to the EOC study, the median time spent reading the newspaper by 87.7% of readers was about five hours per week. 53.7% of readers spent about five hours per week reading magazines. The most popular types of magazines read were infotainment (i.e. 77.8%), followed by fashion (i.e. 14.2%). Searching for information on websites was the most popular Internet activity (i.e. 41.4%), followed by browsing online sites for local media (i.e. 20.6%) (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2009).

**Feminine and masculine characteristics:** Chart 9.2 shows how the surveyed respondents identified characteristics in terms of femininity and masculinity. Respondents could identify each characteristic as either 'Feminine,' 'Masculine,' or 'Both.' For the characteristics including 'Understanding,'

'Sympathetic,' 'Shy,' and 'Gentle,' respondents tended to identify them as 'Female' or 'Both.' For characteristics like 'Leadership abilities,' 'Independent,' 'Defends beliefs,' 'Aggressive,' 'Assertive,' and 'Conscientious,' respondents tended to identify them as 'Masculine' or 'Both.'

**Gender stereotypes:** Traditional values governing women's behaviour in the household remain influential for both men and women. Of all respondents, 67.9% agreed that 'Family should come before a career for women,' and 37.6% disagreed that 'A woman should leave if her husband hits her.' Sixty per cent of respondents agreed that 'Braless women are asking for trouble.'

In 2009, the Women's Commission conducted a telephone survey regarding the community's perceptions on gender issues. About 50% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that 'women should put more emphasis on family than career.'

Women also do not think that they are being discriminated against. This is particularly true for younger generations, who think that men and women are equal in Hong Kong, even when their perceptions of gender roles are highly gendered.

A substantial proportion of respondents strongly disagreed and somewhat disagreed that women could do jobs traditionally filled by men. For example, a combined 40.4% strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that women could be construction workers. The corresponding percentages regarding whether women could be fire fighters and electrical technicians were 33.5% and 28.3% respectively. Similarly, for jobs traditionally executed by women namely, domestic

helpers and kindergarten teachers, 38.1% and 22.2% respectively strongly disagreed and somewhat disagreed that men should do those jobs.

Figures also show that 42% of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the mass media affected their attitudes towards gender roles. After media other major influences include family life (i.e. 35%), occupation (i.e. 30.7%), social life (i.e. 30.1%), school textbooks (i.e. 25.6%), school life (i.e. 24.7%), and cultural activities (i.e. 22.2%).

While many accept that women should be economically independent and have their own careers, others think that women should become home-makers. Over 80% of women and men agreed that "both women and men should contribute to the household income" (i.e. men: 80.4%; women: 83.7%), and only less than half of society (48.4% total → women: 52.3%; men: 43.9%) thought that men should take on a larger share of the household duties (Women's Commission, 2010). Based solely on the Women's Commission findings, there appears to be a positive change in the traditional concept of men as sole breadwinners. Now women are also viewed as breadwinners, although they are still expected to retain their household responsibilities.

Moreover, findings also show gender stereotyping in the division of household work. Women were expected to focus on child caring and cleaning with men responsible for minor repairs. Finally, about a third of people (i.e. men: 32.8%; women: 36.8%) still think that male supremacy is still prevalent in Hong Kong families today.

#### 9.4 Concluding Observations

- Nothing conclusive can be said about whether women are treated equally in the mainstream media as too little is known about whether and how women are represented in this sector.
- Women's internet use starts to decrease more significantly in relation to men's around age 34 and continues to decrease as women get older. Traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity continue to significantly shape people's perceptions.
- Gender stereotyping in the media often takes a more subtle form that reflexively reproduces stereotypes.

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# 10 Migrant and Ethnic Minority Women

Migrant women suffer dislocation for many reasons – the change of geographical location as well as social, economic, cultural, and political differences in their adopted country.

New arrivals from mainland China, women who reside in Shenzhen but earn their living in Hong Kong, ethnic-minority groups (particularly those from South and South-East Asia), and domestic workers constitute different groups of migrant women with their own issues. Smaller groups such as asylum seekers also deserve attention, but a lack of precise data prevents any systematic analysis of their situation in Hong Kong.

Although these women are unique, they all face discrimination in Hong Kong at differing levels. This discrimination is understood less as gender discrimination than as discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and class.

## 10.1 Mainland Chinese Migrants

Mainland China has been recognised as the ‘World Factory’ over the past three decades under its Open Door Policy. Foreign direct investment allows enormous amounts of capital from Hong Kong and other countries to flow into the Mainland to set up manufacturing complexes for the production of consumer goods to supply overseas markets. Cross-border human activities have increased tremendously,

providing a fertile ground for the increase of cross-border marriages. The situation of new migrants from mainland China, who are mainly women and known as New Arrivals, must be understood in this context of increased global supply and demand.

New Arrivals constitute migrants from mainland China who have been in Hong Kong for less than seven years. Their basic profile is summarised below.

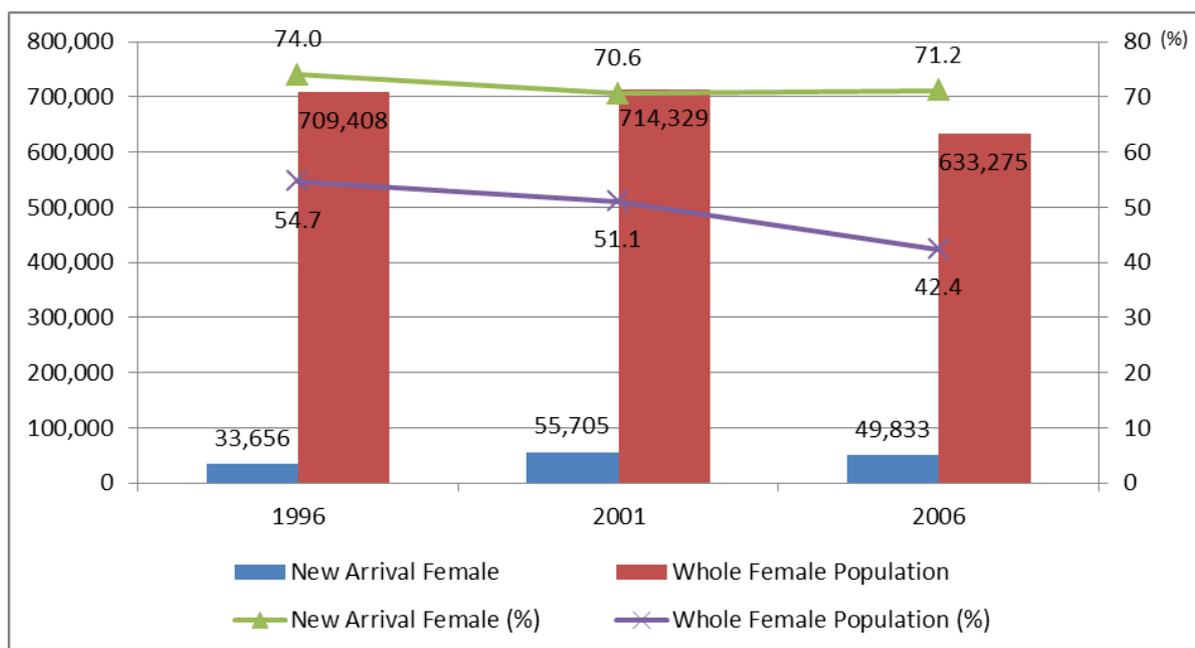
The vast majority of New Arrivals were women in 2006, most of whom were aged 15-64 (i.e. 53.1% of total New Arrivals). In keeping with this trend, from 2006-2010 the ratio of males per 1,000 females of those granted one-way permits<sup>1</sup> has decreased from 579 in 2006 to 394 in 2010.

Since they are ineligible for public housing, newly arrived women usually stay in privately owned bedsits unless their family members already live in public housing. However, 37.3% were living in private housing flats in 2006, representing a significant drop from 61.2% in 1996 and 43.7% in 2001.

New Arrivals’ living conditions are believed to be unfavourable but a lack of data prevents detailed analysis of this. On average, households with New Arrivals had a larger household size than the rest of the population.

1 Residents from mainland China may come to Hong Kong for settlement through the One-way Permit Scheme. The Scheme regulates the entry of mainland Chinese residents into Hong Kong for settlement and permits are issued by the relevant authorities of the Public Security Bureau in mainland China. The daily quota of one-way permits is 150. Of these 150, 60 are reserved for persons who were born in mainland China and have the right of abode in Hong Kong by descent from either parent in accordance with Article 24(2)(3) of the Basic Law. A further 30 are reserved for spouses who have been separated for a long period.

**Chart 10.1.1:** Number and Percentage of New Female Arrival Home-makers, by Gender, 1996, 2001 and 2006 (compared with whole population)



New Arrivals are more likely to be living in poverty because of their lack of opportunities, limited access to the job market, and ineligibility for social protection such as Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) until they have lived in Hong Kong for seven years. In 2006, the monthly domestic household income of households with New Arrivals was 70% (i.e. HK\$12,000) of other households (i.e. HK\$17,250).

Furthermore, 41.9% of families in which both parents were New Arrivals and 68.2% of New Arrival single mothers were living in poverty in 2006.

Although many newly arrived women are living in poverty, the protection available to them is continuously decreasing, particularly since 2006 when New Arrivals who have been in Hong Kong for less than seven years became ineligible for CSSA. In the last decade the number of CSSA applicants, who are living with New Arrivals, decreased. From the peak in 2004, with over 41,571 such applicants, a dramatic drop to 17,921 in 2009 was

recorded. With a continuous increase in low-income households, this drop was unlikely a result of improvement of their livelihoods but rather due to the change in policy.

The educational attainment of female New Arrivals is lower than that of the average Hong Kong female. In 2006, 54.3% of women in Hong Kong attained upper-secondary or post-secondary levels of education, while only one third of New Arrivals reached these levels, a trend which has continued since 1996.

Newly arrived women have a lower participation rate in the labour force than the general population, and their participation rate is one-third lower than New Arrival men. Chart 10.1.1 shows that although women account for a substantial proportion of the economically inactive population in Hong Kong, their overall proportion was still much less than for newly arrived women, over 70% of whom were economically inactive home-makers in 2006. In contrast, the proportions of economically inactive men within the

whole population and the newly arrived population were relatively similar at 3.3% and 2.4% respectively, in 2006. As many women migrated for the purposes of family union, their lack of participation in the employment market means that they rely on their families for their livelihood.

Wages are comparatively low for female New Arrivals who find employment. The median monthly personal income of the New Arrivals continues to be about 60% that of the entire population. In 2006, the median monthly income of a new arrival was HK\$6,000 as compared to HK\$10,000 for the general population

Female New Arrivals have limited opportunities. Attention should also be given to their offspring so their experiences will not be repeated. While access to formal education is the same, whether New Arrival children enjoy the same opportunities and material support as those born locally is hard to examine based on existing data. Over the past decade there has been an improvement in school attendance of New Arrival children. In 2006, school attendance rates for New Arrival children were nearly on par with those of locally born children for all age groups from age 3-18.

## 10.2 Ethnic Minority Women

Ethnic minority women may have different experiences to female New Arrivals from Mainland China. Official data on ethnic minorities encompasses every ethnic minority group including non-Asians and North Asians. Although these two groups tend to come from economically advanced countries, it should not be assumed that these women enjoy good conditions in Hong Kong. However, neither public attention nor official statistics portray them as anything other than well-off.

Official data often includes foreign domestic workers from the global South. In stark contrast to those from the global North, domestic workers come to Hong Kong to make money for their families in their own countries of origin. As they are almost all females, mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, including them in this analysis would give a different picture of the general situation of ethnic minority women in Hong Kong. As official data does not distinguish this group of domestic workers, data and analysis should be read with caution.

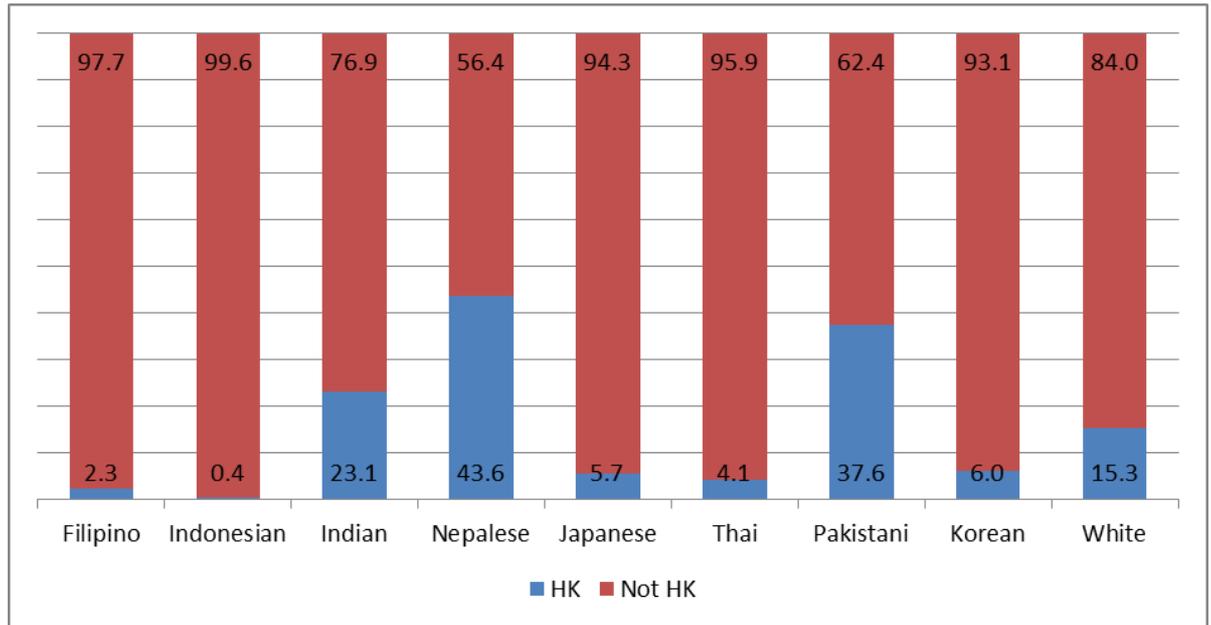
Other unique groups are the Indian, Pakistani, and Nepalese populations whose situation is more a result of British colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The first generation of these migrants served in the British troops, were cheap labour, or were escaped soldiers from India and Pakistan. Many have already been in Hong Kong for generations, and have had their own locally born offspring.

Chart 10.2.1 shows the breakdown of the various major ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong.

Irrespective of their ethnic origins, most ethnic minority women lived in Hong Kong for less than four years (i.e. 41.2%) in 2006, while most ethnic minority men stayed in Hong Kong for more than 10 years in 2006 (i.e. 47.1%).

The gender and age profiles of ethnic minorities regardless of their ethnic origin, resemble those of New Arrival women. Women comprise the greatest number of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, particularly from ages 15-54. Assuming that most domestic workers fall within the ages of 15-54, the gender profile of the ethnic minorities looks relatively balanced. Europeans, North Americans, Australians and New Zealanders had a much higher gender ratio (i.e. number of men per 1,000 women) in 2006.

**Chart 10.2.1:** Percentage Distribution of Ethnic Minority Groups, by Place of Birth (HK and not HK), 2006



Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2007a

The more locally attached ethnic minority groups (i.e. Indian, Pakistani, and Nepalese) have distinctly different lives from those of domestic workers and migrants from the global North. While they are no longer experiencing geographical transition, many are still adapting to Hong Kong’s cultural environment and globalising economic environment because Hong Kong has not been especially racially inclusive in past decades.

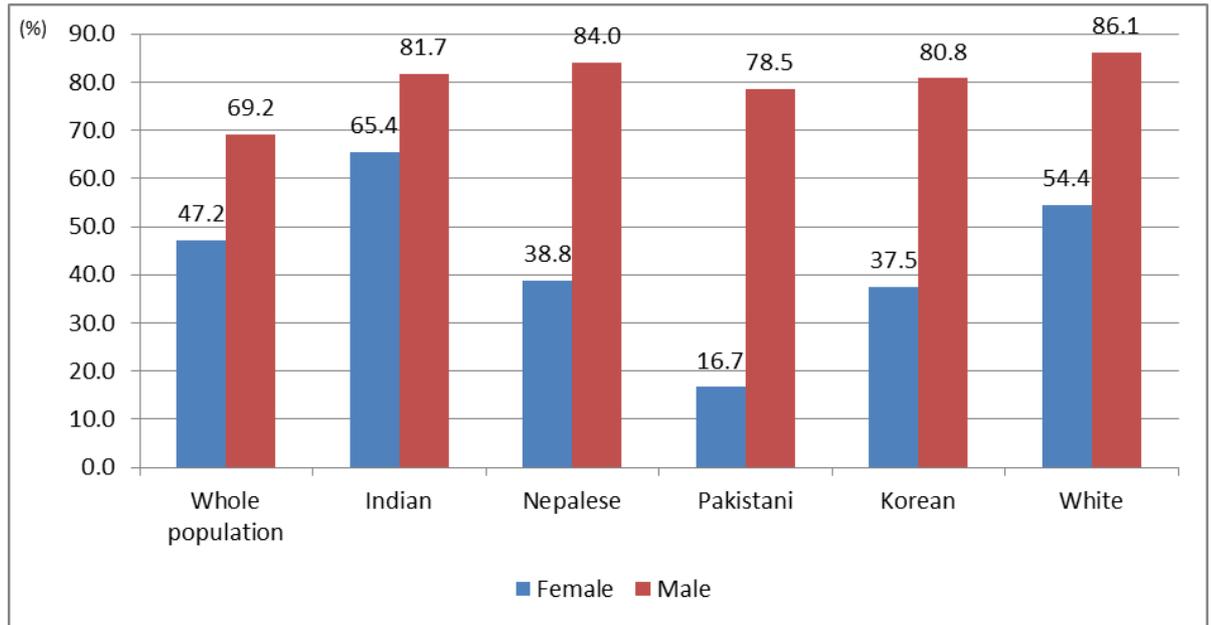
In terms of education, young children from ethnic minority families enjoy equal opportunities to access primary and secondary education. In the case of early (i.e. ages 3-5) and higher education (i.e. ages 19-24), the school attendance rate of ethnic minority girls is lower than that of Hong Kong girls with a differences of 6.6% and 11.8% respectively, in 2006. The school attendance rates of very young ethnic minority girls (i.e. 81.7%) and those aged 19-25 (i.e. 28.5%) are also lower than that of ethnic minority boys in the corresponding age groups (i.e. 86.1% and 32.6% respectively). By contrast, girls in the entire population have a better school

attendance rate (i.e. 40.3%) than boys (i.e. 38.4%) when they reach the level of higher education.

In comparison to the entire population, the overall labour force participation rate of different ethnic groups, excluding major ethnic groups who are primarily domestic workers in Hong Kong, is not significantly different. However, once the data is broken down by gender, significant differences emerge among women of various ethnic minority groups. Chart 10.2.2 shows that Pakistani women had the lowest labour force participation rate in 2006 (i.e. 16.7%), many times lower than both Hong Kong’s entire female population (i.e. 47.2%), Hong Kong’s entire population, and Pakistani men (i.e. 78.5%). The gap between the labour force participation rate of Pakistani men and women was also the highest among all groups.

Indian, Pakistani, and Nepalese ethnic minorities work mainly in non-pillar industries in Hong Kong or at elementary levels of the occupational ladder. After the

**Chart 10.2.2:** Labour Force Participation Rate, by Ethnicity and Gender, 2006



Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2002a and 2007a

**Chart 10.2.3:** Median Monthly Income, by Gender (Including and Excluding Domestic Workers), 2006



Source: Census and Statistics Department, 2002a and 2007a

handover in 1997, for example, many former Nepalese soldiers who had served under the British were unable to make a living unless they became construction workers. This type of hard labour, which is relatively higher paid than elementary jobs in other industries, is less available to local

women, and unavailable to women of ethnic minority. Such jobs were once available to them in 2001 but the proportion dropped from 13.2% to 4.1%. South Asian women often only find work as cleaners due to a lack of competence in Cantonese.

On the whole, the median monthly income of ethnic minorities was higher than the entire population. This pattern holds when comparing male ethnic minority income earners with male income earners of the entire Hong Kong population, as shown in Chart 10.2.3. By contrast, female ethnic minority income earners earn less than their Hong Kong counterparts. Even excluding domestic workers, the former earned 89.5% of the latter in 2006, and 56.7% of the salary enjoyed by male ethnic minority income earners.

Similar to New Arrivals from mainland China, 87.1% of ethnic minority households excluding domestic workers lived in private housing in 2006, although the percentage is decreasing slowly. While over 31% of total households in Hong Kong lived in public rental housing flats in 2006, only a small proportion (i.e. 8.5%) of ethnic minority households did. The data available is insufficient to explore the kind of housing conditions of different ethnic groups.

### 10.3 Foreign Domestic Workers

Foreign domestic workers are not wholly considered migrants but they lead a similar type of life. Unlike the New Arrivals and ethnic minorities, foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong are nearly all women. Like the former two groups, the problems they face are de facto gender problems. The number of foreign domestic

workers has increased over the last decade, and by the end of 2010, there were 285,700 foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong. In 2010, Indonesian domestic workers (i.e. 49.3%) were the largest group of domestic workers in Hong Kong, followed by Filipinas (i.e. 48.1%).

Foreign domestic workers often choose to work in Hong Kong for financial reasons, and as a result may be more prone to exploitation and mistreatment in their workplace. Problems faced by foreign domestic workers include underpayment, surveillance and lack of privacy, sexual assaults of varying severity, and bullying or violence by employers. According to many reports and the NGO papers, despite incidences of maltreatment, the proportion of Indonesian domestic workers continues to grow. Furthermore, Indonesian domestic workers are often paid substantially less (i.e. as low as HK\$2,000 or under) than the current legal minimum monthly wage of HK\$3,740 (Novianti, 2007).

Complaints about underpayment or excessive agent fees have been recorded by the Labour Department, but are not accessible. Data that can be accessed relatively regularly was reported in the *Human Rights Report: China (Hong Kong)*, written by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour of the United States Government. Figures were reported in 2008, 2009, and 2010 as below:

**Chart 10.3.1:** Employers Convicted or Criminal Suits Filed Against Employers

	1st 7 months of 2008	1st 7 months of 2009	1st 7 months of 2010
Employers Convicted for Labour Law Mistreatment Violations Relating to the Employment of Foreign Domestic Workers	4	7	4
Criminal Suits Filed Against Employers: Rape	47	5	1
Criminal Suits Filed Against Employers: Indecent Assault		4	10
Criminal Suits Filed Against Employers: Injury and serious assault		34	31

2010 (2009, 2008) Human Rights Report: China (Hong Kong) Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the government of the United States.

However, many of the above phenomena are highly invisible and substantially underreported.

#### 10.4 Trafficking of Women

In addition to the deliberate migration of either women or families, there is a group of involuntary female migrants who are being controlled by illegal networks of human traffickers. According to a report by the United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR), women from Hong Kong are subjected to forced prostitution in Canada and women from other countries are lured and forced into prostitution in Hong Kong. However, due to unavailable figures the true extent of human trafficking in Hong Kong remains unknown. The UNHCR report mentioned that in 2010, the Hong Kong government identified 11 victims in four human trafficking cases. Two of the female victims were Chinese, four were Thai, and five were Filipina; all of them were forced into prostitution. However, these figures may not fully illustrate how serious female trafficking is in Hong Kong as it is not a visible phenomenon.

#### 10.5 Concluding Observations

- For New Arrivals from mainland China, resettlement in Hong Kong often results in poverty and a lack of access to social protection.
- Many minority groups such as Westerners, Japanese, and South Koreans are typically more well-off than ethnic minorities from South Asia. Lacking other strong social and economic means, the latter's Chinese competence is not always strong enough for educational and occupational advancement.
- Over 285,000 foreign domestic workers worked in Hong Kong in 2010.
- Although they are able to send money back home, they frequently face restrictions, harassment, assault, and a lack of protection.
- The disadvantages, deprivations, and discriminations experienced by migrant and ethnic minority women are being framed primarily in terms of ethnicity, race and class. The gender dimension of their experiences is largely obscured. There is a great need to re-assert this gender dimension because their identity as women is one of the fundamental elements that gives rise to their disadvantaged position.

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# 11 Girls

What defines a girl can be a complicated and controversial concept that varies according to culture and society. Defining what it means to be a girl goes beyond simply sex/gender and age, and it is necessary to take into account a set of specific cultural, historical, and generational conditions that determines what it means to be a girl in Hong Kong.

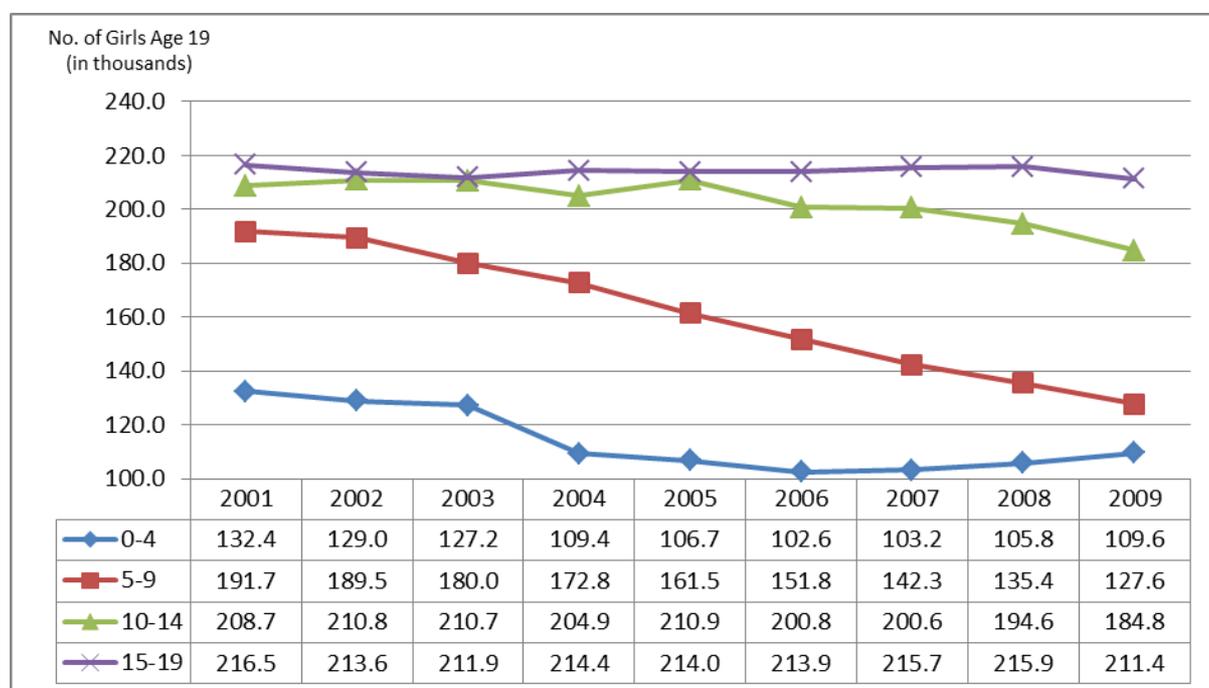
Statistical data on what girlhood means to girls is not available, but the transition of girls from girlhood to womanhood may reveal how contradictory social expectations are mapped onto their lives. This chapter reveals some of these social expectations and explores how the

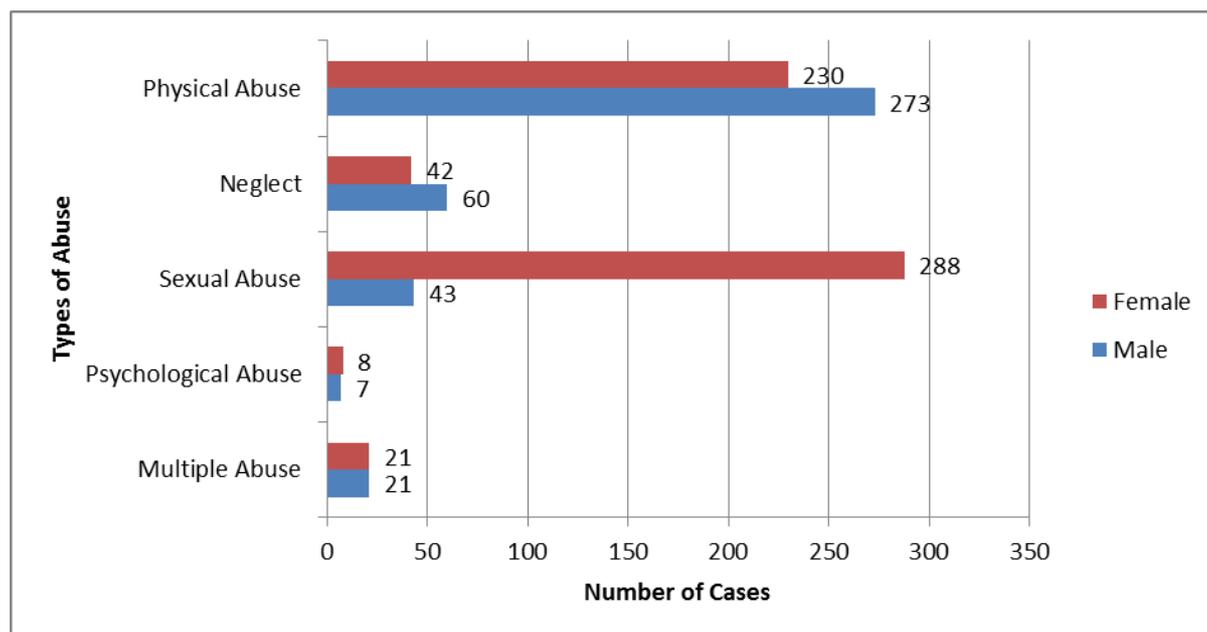
situation of girls in contemporary Hong Kong is being distinctly shaped by social expectations. While prenatal selection by gender is not prevalent in Hong Kong and girls are as likely to be born as boys, the former is constantly subjected to social and cultural selection in subtle ways.

## 11.1 Girls in Hong Kong

Chart 11.1.1 shows that the number of girls in Hong Kong has decreased over the last decade. Compared to 2001, when there were over 700,000 girls aged 19 or below, the number of girls in 2009 amounted to slightly over 620,000. The number of those aged 5-9 decreased most significantly.

**Chart 11.1.1:** Number of Girls Aged 19 or Below, by Age Group, 2001-2009



**Chart 11.2.1:** Cases of Child Abuse, by Type and Gender, 2009

Source: Child Protection Registry (CPR), Social Welfare Department, 2011

The mortality rate among girls is a significant indicator of parents' preference regarding their infant's sex. In some places such as mainland China where the one-child policy is in force, the societal preference for male children is easily identifiable. This is not the case in Hong Kong, which has no birth control policy. Thus, the female infant mortality rate in Hong Kong is persistently low at 1.6 in 2009, and almost on par with the male infant mortality rate (e.g. 1.7 in 2009).

The non-existence of prenatal sex selection in Hong Kong does not mean that girls are equally preferred. They are either sexually preferred in such a way that they become vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence, or given lower priority than boys in the process of social and cultural distribution of power and resources.

Chart 11.2.1 shows that, in 2009, girls are consistently seen more as sex objects than targets for physical violence in comparison to boys.

Other social perceptions that place pressure on girls relate to their health and appearance. The number of in-patient discharges and deaths from eating disorders is indicative. In 2007, 2008, and 2009, there were 14, 8, and 12 male cases of eating disorders, respectively, for every 100 female cases.

In addition, girls who are born in Hong Kong to women from mainland China may face social exclusion. A large number of women from mainland China choose to come to Hong Kong to give birth. This phenomenon is worthy of attention here particularly in light of the prevalent discrimination against newly arrived women in Hong Kong. Issues of identity and cultural belonging of girls, who are born here to Mainland mothers, are complex as they may still be perceived as 'mainland Chinese' in the eyes of other locally born Hong Kong residents. They are growing up in a society in which many of their peers strongly identify themselves as Hong Kong locals and may perceive these children of migrants as outsiders.

## 11.2 Girls at School

Increased educational opportunities for girls may not guarantee them a smooth path towards equality because boys and girls face differing expectations in terms of educational achievement and fields of study. Although there is no data showing a causal relationship between pressure from school and examinations, and the mental condition of girls, they often face as much pressure as adult women. Parental expectations (e.g. the nurtured female sense of responsibility for others' happiness), and the intense workload of examinations and homework all shape the life patterns of female students, often denying them time to explore other aspects of life appropriate to their age.

Free primary education was introduced in all government and aided primary schools<sup>1</sup> in 1971, and sufficient places were available to every child of primary-school age. Although the Education Ordinance was not particularly aimed at girls, it dramatically increased their levels of school attendance. In 2006, girls and boys had equal or nearly equal school attendance rates until the 17-18 age group where the girls' rate (i.e. 85%) was higher than the boys' (i.e. 81%).

Not only has the Ordinance provided girls with a much greater chance of receiving education, it has also incorporated them into a gendered school system.

All students, regardless of gender, are supposed to be given an equal opportunity to choose subjects to suit their interests but a gendered pattern of subject choice is discernible with boys more often choosing math and science subjects than girls (see Chapter 2: *Women's Education and Training* for further details). Personal and Social Education, which includes civic

education, also has a bearing on the development of individual identity. Civic education specifies that the purpose of education is to equip students with the appropriate technical and social skills required for their entry into the employment market and the public sphere. In Chapter Three: *Women and the Economy* and Chapter Eight: *Women in Power and Decision-Making*, women are often discouraged, if not excluded, from participating fully in the job market and public sphere because they are still regarded – and regard themselves – as primary caregivers and home-makers. This type of gendered consequence seems likely to be linked with the civic education that girls receive at school.

## 11.3 Girls in the Family

The impact of an increased number of working mothers in the employment force on the division of labour among household members needs to be examined, such as the extent to which daughters shoulder household duties. In many cases, girls are expected to take up household duties traditionally considered 'women's work' including doing a larger amount of housework than male family members.

An increased level of educational attainment by girls may not necessarily change what society expects of them or what they envisage for themselves. Other than attitudes and values that stereotypically associate girls with home-making, the household structure and economy also forge a contextual background based on which parents in the family distribute housework. Parents' demands on their daughters to share housework are shaped by other factors like the number and sex distribution of siblings in the family, and the ability of the family to seek external help such as hiring a

<sup>1</sup> Aided primary schools are primary schools that are subsidised but not run by the Hong Kong government.

domestic worker. Data regarding these factors was not available.

Industrialisation provides education and employment opportunities, which are open to girls. Since women's paid employment enhances the bargaining power of working mothers in terms of sharing household tasks and decision-making, it may also bring about changes in the socialisation process for girls in the family. In particular, they may begin to realize that their life options are not simply restricted to marriage and being a housewife. Although there is no readily available statistical data to show the present condition and perception of girls towards the household division of labour and their future aspirations in contemporary Hong Kong, a consistently lower birth rate and later marriage might provide some indirect indication in this regard.

#### 11.4 Girls in the Community

Aligned with educational opportunities, girls now have more opportunities to take part in civic activities organised by schools or outside the classroom under the framework of whole-person development. Data on volunteering shows that female volunteers always outnumber male volunteers, although the gap has narrowed over the last decade. In 2008, there were 326,032 male volunteers and 473,527 female volunteers. However, there is no data on the number of girl volunteers.

Although there have been a number of surveys about the teenage community and political participation, most of them do not identify girls as a unique group and explore their pattern of participation as compared to boys. Girls and boys are often grouped together under the category of 'youth.' (Breakthrough, 2007 and 2008) Furthermore, no analysis by gender can be found in large-scale studies such as 'A Longitudinal Study on Civic Engagement

and Social Networks of Youth in Hong Kong' by the Commission of Youth (2010).

Lately, society has been concerned with opening up more channels for young people to participate in social and political affairs. However, because those born in the 1990's onwards are consistently "sexless" in terms of categorisation, it is extremely difficult to trace the footprints of girls in the community including how they participate and fit into the power structure of different community settings.

#### 11.5 Concluding Observations

- Generally speaking, girls' social roles (e.g. as children, daughters, youth, students, etc.) play a significant part in defining their identities in such a way that their identities as girls are often almost entirely obscured.
- While girls in Hong Kong are not prenatally selected, this does not imply that they are treated equally with boys. Girls are subject to highly gendered social pressures regarding their appearance and how they identify themselves.
- Although girls have essentially the same or better school attendance rates compared to boys, gendered patterns of school subject choice are apparent (i.e. boys more often choose math and science subjects than girls).
- Daughters are often expected to perform more household chores than sons. This expectation is not only shared by male members of the family and society but also by female members, often including the girls themselves.
- Girls are often lumped in under the umbrella category of 'youth' at a community level and are thus, not visible. Without understanding the specific patterns of girls' participation in the community, further promotion of youth participation may reproduce male domination in the community.

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