



HONG KONG GENERATIONS AND GENDER SURVEY (GGS)

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP BRIEF SERIES



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The Generations and Gender Survey

Gender Role Attitudes in Hong Kong: Egalitarian versus Traditional Views

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KEY POINTS



- ▶ In Hong Kong, gender role attitudes of young adults are more egalitarian in the public sphere than in the private sphere. Modern career expectations from working women intersect with traditional household responsibilities, creating a double burden.
- ▶ There is a gap in gender role attitudes between men and women in the public sphere, we find that women are more egalitarian than men. Approximately 88% of women and 64% of men have egalitarian gender views when asked about their political stance.
- ▶ Social progress cannot be achieved without egalitarian gender role attitudes in both private and public arenas. We suggest policy initiatives to address structural and culturally rooted gender role disparities.

ISSUE

Industrialisation started in Hong Kong in the 1920s. However, it wasn't until the 1960s that we saw an increase in young women in the workforce driven by increased opportunities in the manufacturing sector (Lee, 2003; Salaff, 1982). In 2023, the percentage of workforce participation for women aged 15 and above in the region was about 52% against 64% for men (Census and Statistics Department, 2024; World Bank Group, 2024). The region has a median monthly wage gap of 6500 HKD between employed men and women (Census and Statistics Department, 2024).

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In Hong Kong, modern career expectations from working women intersect with traditional household responsibilities, including child-rearing, which creates a double burden. According to the theory of gender revolution, the change in gender roles occur in phases (Goldscheider et al., 2015). In the first phase, women become increasingly involved in public activities such as education, politics, and labour force participation. When there is a gendered division of labour, men are believed to be responsible for chores outside the home, and women bear the brunt of all household responsibilities (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). In the second step of the gender revolution, a transformation is expected in the private sphere- when men's participation in household chores becomes more active, and traditional gender role expectations from women may decrease (McDonald, 2000).

In any given region, there are differences in people's expectations of how women and men should behave in a public arena or within their homes. These expected or preferred behaviours are called gender role attitudes (Lappegård et al., 2021). A significant implication of the gender revolution theory is that unless the gender revolution is complete, the fertility rates in the region will remain low. Many industrialised regions follow this two-phased gender revolution towards gender equality. However, the pace at which they progress towards the goal may vary. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the attitudes regarding gender roles to gauge how far or close a region is to achieving gender equality. This brief examines young adults' attitudes regarding gender roles in Hong Kong. It explores how gender role attitudes differ for young men and women in the public and private spheres of life.

ASSESSMENT

A sub-survey based on the generations and gender survey (GGS) was conducted among undergraduate students at a public university in Hong Kong in May 2024 to understand the socio-demographic background of the students and explore their gender role attitudes and fertility preferences. Our pilot sub-survey provides information on 686 undergraduates in the public university. Based on the information provided on the university website regarding the total number of undergraduate students and their gender distribution, we computed design weight and post-stratification weight to make the sample size representative of the university's undergraduate student population.

We asked our group the following question to ascertain expectations from women with public platforms.

“On the whole, who would make better political leaders, men or women?”

Based on their response, we categorised attitudes regarding women in the public sphere into two groups: egalitarian (those who responded- both sexes equally, women slightly, women definitely) and traditional (those who responded- men definitely, men slightly).

To explore attitudes towards gender roles in the private sphere, the following question was asked:

“Who is better at caring for small children, men or women?”

We categorised private sphere attitudes into two groups: egalitarian (those who responded- men definitely, men slightly, both sexes equally) and traditional (those who responded - women slightly, women definitely.)

Figure 1 shows gender role attitudes of young men and women in our study population in the public sphere. We see that approximately 88% of women and 64% of men have egalitarian gender views when asked about their political stance. About 12% of women and 36% of men hold traditional gender views.

Figure 1: Gender role attitudes in public sphere (%)

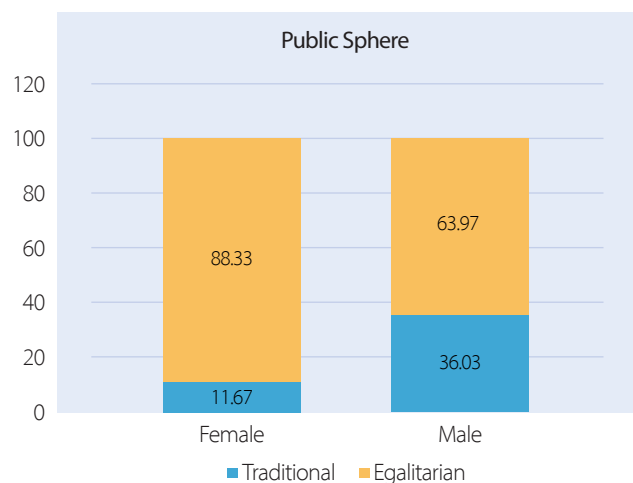
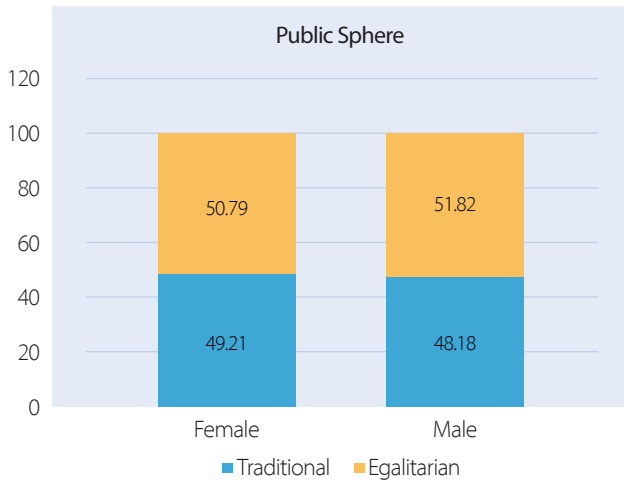


Figure 2 portrays gender role expectations in the private sphere. The ratio between egalitarian to traditional attitudes is more or less equal. Around half of our group demonstrate egalitarian views and half traditional views. There is no major difference in attitudes between men and women.

Figure 2: Gender role attitudes in private sphere (%)



Social progress cannot be reached without fostering egalitarian attitudes in private and public arenas. Our findings show increasing egalitarian attitudes on matters related to the public sphere and stalled improvements on issues pertaining to private household responsibilities. Therefore, policy initiatives must address structural and culturally rooted gender role disparities. There is a need for gender-responsive family policies to overcome gender role expectations and alleviate the double burden of paid and unpaid labour on women.

CONCLUSION

The transition process in gender role attitudes from traditional to egalitarian is uneven, and the change in gender role attitudes starts in the public sphere (England, 2010; Goldscheider et al., 2015). In our study population, the majority of the young adults have egalitarian gender role attitudes when asked about political leadership. However, there is a notable difference in the egalitarian attitude across sexes (Lappegård et al., 2021). We find that the percentage of women holding egalitarian views outpaces men by about 25 percentage points.

We also find that egalitarian attitudes in Hong Kong are less prevalent in the private sphere despite progress in the public arena. This points to a “stalled gender revolution” where men’s participation in household chores is less visible than women’s increased participation in politics, employment or education (England, 2010; Sullivan et al., 2018). This leads to a double burden from unpaid and paid work for women. Moreover, the lack of any noticeable difference between men and women in their gender role attitudes in the private sphere suggests ingrained gender ideologies in the domestic space. It shows how women have internalised the gender role expectations for themselves (Childress et al., 2024).

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