
Section 1: Snapshots and Discussion of the Socio-economic Status of Women in Hong Kong by Age Band

February 2013
Louisa Mitchell
About Civic Exchange

Civic Exchange is a Hong Kong-based non-profit public policy think tank that was established in October 2000. It is an independent organisation that has access to policy makers, officials, businesses, media and NGOs—reaching across sectors and borders. Civic Exchange has solid research experience in areas such as air quality, energy, urban planning, climate change, conservation, water, governance, political development, equal opportunities, poverty and gender. For more information about Civic Exchange, visit www.civic-exchange.org.

About The Women’s Foundation

The Women’s Foundation is a non-profit organisation established in 2004 dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Hong Kong through ground-breaking research, impactful and innovative community programmes, and education, media engagement and advocacy. Our three key focus areas are challenging gender stereotypes, increasing the number of women in decision-making and leadership positions, and empowering women in poverty to achieve a better quality of life for themselves and their families. For more information, please visit www.thewomensfoundationhk.org.

About the author

Louisa Mitchell is a freelance social policy researcher and writer based in Hong Kong. She used to be a research director at leading UK think tank, Policy Exchange. She has written for the South China Morning Post and the Financial Times. Previously she was Director of The Whitley Fund for Nature, an international environmental award programme based in London and was the first Director of ASrIA, the Association for Sustainable and Responsible Investment in Asia based in Hong Kong. Her first career was in investment banking. She has a BA Hons from Cambridge University and MSc from the London School of Economics and Political Science.
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 sectors. 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 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. We also hope our research will be a useful resource for shadow reports submitted by international and local Human Rights watchdogs and other groups as part of the United Nation’s next hearing on Hong Kong’s compliance with the UN’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2014.

Building on our earlier research in 2006 and 2008, The Women’s Foundation launched a new series of quantitative and qualitative research studies in 2010, working in collaboration with The Chinese University’s Gender Research Centre, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and Civic Exchange.

This publication is the outcome of our collaboration with Civic Exchange. We are very grateful to Civic Exchange for their excellent work and in particular, to Michael DeGolyer, Yan-yan Yip, Carine Lai, Louisa Mitchell, Yao Yuan, and Tsang Kam-lun. We are also grateful to Christine Loh, former CEO of Civic Exchange and current Under-Secretary for the Environment in the HKSAR government, for sharing her time and expertise in producing this report.
The Women’s Foundation would like to thank the many people at Goldman Sachs who so generously gave their time, advice and financial support to this project through Goldman Sachs Gives.

In addition, we humbly acknowledge the following individuals who provided us with invaluable counsel, encouragement and expertise: Adele Rossi Brunner, Rachel Cartland, Fanny Cheung, Susanne Choi, Marissa Dean, Christine Fang, Staci Ford, Jackie Kim, Estella Huang Lung, Melissa Petros, Samantha Thompson, Anthony Wong, Anna Wu, and Mike Yao. Many thanks also to The Women’s Foundation’s Research Associate, Lisa Moore.

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.

Kay McArdle
Board Chair, The Women’s Foundation

Su-Mei Thompson
CEO, The Women’s Foundation
Civic Exchange’s collaboration with The Women’s Foundation on this research attempts to track the changing status of women over the past 20 years through looking into historical data. The methodology adopted in this research is ground-breaking—both objective and subjective data are used to provide a fuller picture. Objective data come from official government data, published academic research and grey literature while subjective data come from public opinion survey data collected by Hong Kong Transition Project.

This research has generated a total of three reports: One covering objective data, one covering subjective data, and a user-friendly summary report capturing the essence of the two other reports.

• *The Changing Faces of Hong Kong: A Cohort Analysis of Women, 1991-2011*—Civic Exchange engaged Louisa Mitchell, a social policy researcher, to look through statistics published by the HKSAR Government, academic studies, and grey literature. Forming the objective portion of this research, Louisa Mitchell’s findings and analysis are compiled into a 250-page report, entitled *The Changing Faces of Hong Kong: A Cohort Analysis of Women, 1991-2011*. Her report constructs profiles of typical women of different ages today, including, 15-, 20-, 30-, 40-, and over 60-year-olds. It also highlights the alternative life trajectories of atypical groups of women. Comparisons are made in areas such as education, earnings, marital status, and occupation, between women today and men or between women today and women 20 years ago.

It should be noted that this research had been completed before news broke about HKSAR Government’s falsified census data (especially relating to unemployment). The HKSAR Government is, at the time of publishing, still investigating the problem. Readers are recommended to read the relevant data and analysis with this in mind.

• *The Changing Faces of Hong Kong: Women in the Community and National Context, 1994-2010*—The subjective portion comes from analysis of the public opinion survey data collected by the Hong Kong Transition Project. Civic Exchange worked with Professor Michael DeGolyer and Ms. Cheung Pui-ki of Hong Kong Transition Project based at Hong Kong Baptist University, as well as two postgraduate students of statistics from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology to go through Hong Kong Transition Project’s public opinion survey data since 1994. In the 131-page report, entitled *The Changing Faces of Hong Kong: Women in the Community and National Context, 1994-2010*, regression of survey data and time cohorts (1994-2000, 2000-2005, and 2006-2010) are used to reveal the changing attitudes and behaviours of Hong Kong people in areas such as feelings towards national day, areas of personal concern, and political and civic participation.

• *The Changing Faces of Hong Kong: A Graphical Summary of Women’s Status, 1991-2011*—A graphical summary report produced by Carine Lai of Civic Exchange captures the major points from Louisa Mitchell’s report (Part 1) and the key points related to gender from Professor Michael DeGolyer’s report (Part 2). A list of recommendations is attached to the end of the summary report. Chinese version of this summary report is also available.

It is hoped that this research project will offer better understanding of the changing faces of the Hong Kong society, and thereby policy makers could formulate policies that gear towards meeting the needs of Hong Kong people, which may include some gender-specific policies and/or measures. Readers who are interested in more detailed analysis of changes in people’s attitudes and behaviours in general (ie. not gender-related) are encouraged to read the full report of *The Changing Faces of Hong Kong: Women in the Community and National Context, 1994-2010*. The summary report only captures gender-related data and analysis.
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   Section 5: Women today aged 20-29 years
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Other reports in this series

The changing faces of Hong Kong: Women in the community and national context, 1994-2010

The changing faces of Hong Kong: A graphical summary of women’s status, 1991-2011

Other sections of this report and other reports in this series can be downloaded from www.civic-exchange.org/wp/201302gender_en
Section 1:
Snapshots and discussion of the socio-economic status of women in Hong Kong by age band
Introduction

The aim of this report is to provide a profile of the social and economic conditions confronting women of different ages in Hong Kong today, as well as the context for how that profile has changed over the last 20 years. This study has developed in conjunction with another Civic Exchange research project, which uses Hong Kong Transition Project data by gender to provide new analysis on women’s demographics and attitudes over the last two decades. By building on previous research, these two research reports will be used to expand much needed dialogue regarding the pressing social policy issues for women in Hong Kong today as well as provide a foundation for future policy proposals and issue-specific research.

The research methodology included secondary analysis of publicly available census and by-census data for five key age bands (≥60 years, 40-59 years, 30-39 years, 20-29 years, teenagers/girls). This data was combined with a literature review of academic research as well as “grey literature” (surveys by NGOs and market research groups, media articles and policy speeches). It draws heavily on several of the most relevant and recent surveys, in particular a 2008 survey by the University of Hong Kong for the Central Policy Unit on family values, as well as research published in 2011 by the Women’s Commission regarding attitudes towards women at home and work.

Age bands provide the structure for the report and were chosen because Hong Kong’s rapid pace of change over the last century means that the profile of women ≥60 years today differs markedly to the profile of women in their 20s and 30s. Transformations in the key social and economic structures that define Hong Kong society have reverberated across generations, bringing with them a range of new and complex challenges. From a policy perspective, these challenges are interrelated, but differ across the age groups. Hong Kong’s oldest women today, for example, grew up when the use of mui tsai (girl slaves) was still in practice and polygamy was still legitimate, when Hong Kong was a British colony and the thriving manufacturing hub for Asia. Today’s girls and young women are growing up in an increasingly international special administrative region of China and a knowledge and service economy; they emerge from education with qualifications on a par with their male peers, hoping for equality in the workplace and in the home.

The policy areas of focus that cut across the age bands were selected to formulate a socio-economic profile based on a number of social and economic variables—ethnicity, educational attainment, employment and earnings, marriage and family, housing types and household sizes, criminal activity, political participation. All data is derived from the Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) unless otherwise noted and reflects the latest figures available at the time of writing. This means the majority of data is from 2011, but in some areas, 2010 or earlier data is used. 20 year comparisons are made to 1991 where possible, however, in some areas, data was not collected or was collected in a different way in 1991, thus requiring data from alternative dates or sources for comparison.

Section 1 includes a summary of statistics on each age band of women today, highlighting the fundamental changes and trends since 1991. A discussion of the socio-economic profile of women specific to that age band and related
key issues is also included. For example, welfare support is covered in the analysis pertaining to women ≥60 years, whilst issues of balancing work and family responsibilities are more reflective of women in the 30-39 years age band. Sections 2-6 provide the detailed age band analysis, which informs Section 1, with an explanation of the analysis at each stage.

This piece of work is a practical study of women’s socio-economic profiles today based on available data and existing research. By illustrating the impact of the changing social and economic landscape in Hong Kong on women of different age bands in the last 20 years, key social policy areas and important gender-related issues are illuminated. It should be noted, however, that this research is not an analysis of the women’s movement, nor a discussion of the evolving gender debate or ideology over the last two decades. Many of the improvements in women’s lives of the last two decades owe themselves to the women’s movement, both locally and globally, but the focus of this report is to gain a better understanding of how the shifting social and economic conditions of Hong Kong impact women today.

Some clear trends have emerged across the age bands that necessitate a new perspective for framing current and future policy discussions and each of these areas requires further, detailed research. Whilst none of these are particularly surprising, their clarity is stark in the age band analysis, including:

Demographics and nationalities

- the rapid rate of aging of the female, and male, populations
- the high proportion of elderly women registered with disabilities
- the higher proportions of non-Chinese in the younger age groups than older age groups, including the large influx of foreign domestic helpers

Marriage and family

- the shrinking size of households
- the shift to later marriage and childbirth
- the low, but recently rising, total fertility rate
- the decline in the proportions of married women across age bands
- the increase in single parent families (whether due to divorce or working abroad)
- the reliance of young and middle-aged women on foreign domestic helpers

Household and living arrangements

- the growing numbers of young people living with their parents
- the increasing number of elderly living on their own
- the migration to the New Territories
- the increase in subsidised home ownership in older and younger age groups and private housing in the middle aged

Educational attainment, employment and earnings

- the burden of poor skills and poverty amongst the elderly, particularly women
- the lag of middle-aged women’s occupational and earnings status to middle-aged men
• the lack of women in senior positions in the private, public and academic sectors
• the economic polarization amongst middle aged women
• the continued significant drop in labour force participation of women after marriage
• the influence of past education reform on educational attainment levelling employment opportunities and earnings for young men and women
• the negative impact of inflation, making earnings stagnant and narrowing economic opportunities for increasingly highly educated young people

**Criminal activity**

• increased criminal activity in the older age groups and a decline in the younger age groups
• the reverse trend for drug abuse

**Political participation**

• weak political participation among older and younger women, with middle aged women the most active

The plights and the future prospects of the different age groups that have emerged from this analysis, and from these trends highlighted above, suggest the following social policy priorities for discussion:

- Improving the lives of the elderly while transitioning them from a burden to an asset is essential for the overall stability of Hong Kong. With an operating surplus of HK$38 billion for 2011-12, the government has the resources to provide the necessary support, both in terms of short-term fixes for today’s elderly and longer-term fixes for the elderly of the future.

- Research should begin now to gain a more detailed representation of the expectations and needs of today’s middle-aged women as they prepare for their old age, so that Hong Kong does not let its old people down again. These women came of age within a social and economic environment context that differs significantly from the elderly women in this study. They possess higher levels of education, higher earnings potential and independence and have better established identities in the work place. They therefore require different strategies to meet their needs as they grow into the next generation of the elderly.

- Deeper understanding of the constraints and incentives faced by women of child-bearing age is required so that policies that remove gender-specific opportunity costs can be initiated. More broadly these should be aimed at making Hong Kong a more family-friendly place to live and raise children and include a range of policy areas including education, housing, environment, working practices and the prospects of young adults generally.

- High levels of educational attainment, including education and work experience overseas in some cases, have not translated to improved earnings for young adults whose real earnings have been flat to down over the last decade. Policies are required that expand economic opportunities for young people and ensure that they obtain and use the skills needed for today’s economy and share in the proceeds of its growth.
Pressure is mounting on our teenagers and young women growing into adulthood today. They emerge from what is now 12 years of free education with attainment on a par with their male peers and high expectations for their careers, their roles within their families and their lifestyles. Government, business and the non-profit sector need to work together to ensure that our girls and young women have role models and support at the key transition points in their lives.

A deeper understanding of important social, cultural and economic conditions influencing Hong Kong today is contingent on more, comprehensive, gender-specific research. In particular more data is needed on immigrants (of all nationalities), ethnic minorities, mothers and children, different family structures, saving and investment patterns, spending and consumption behaviour.

Detailed understanding of Hong Kong’s increasingly diverse ethnic populations and related impact of these cultural influences in our globalized world needs to be developed. Hong Kong people today, particularly young people, are confronted with balancing traditional Chinese values within the context of newly emerging globalized values that permeate deeper into society. These changes and conflicts have an influence on family structures, housing, benefits, the tax system as well as a number of other policy considerations.

Government, business and the non-profit sector need to work together to ensure that our girls and young women have role models.
Section 1: Snapshots and discussion of the socio-economic status of women in Hong Kong by age band

Snapshot of women today aged ≥ 60 years

Notes:

• Age band: all information is for women ≥60 years old unless stated (where information could not be found for women ≥60 years, it is presented for other relevant age groups, e.g., ≥65 years)
• Latest data: in every age band, 2011 data is used where possible, but in some areas only 2010 data was available at the time of writing
• Historical data: in every age band, 1991 data is used where available to make comparisons over 20 years, but in some areas, data was not collected or was collected in a different way in 1991, so an alternative date is used for comparison
• Summary statistics below are derived from detailed analysis and more complete statistics of women ≥60 years presented in Section 2

Most likely characteristics of a ≥ 60-year-old woman today:

• Chinese
• Retired
• Still married after getting married in early/mid-20s and having first child mid-20s
• Living in two or three person household, in private, permanent housing in the New Territories, with spouse and/or children
• No or primary only schooling
• Can expect to live until 88.41 years
• Neither arrested nor sentenced
• Not a reported drug abuser
• Did not vote in recent District Council elections or Legislative Council elections

Other trajectories:

• Living with a disability, claiming Disability Allowance
• Claiming CSSA for Old Age
• Widowed, separated or divorced
• Living in subsidised home ownership housing or public rental housing
• Employed in an elementary occupation in retail, finance or care earning around HK$6,800 per month
• Living alone
# Women aged ≥ 60 years

## Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 398,600 women</td>
<td>• 707,700 women (643,300 men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 14.2% of total female population</td>
<td>• 18.8% of total female population (19.4% male)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: 77.6% growth in age specific population (compared to 33.9% for total female population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 60-year-old woman lived, on average, a further 23.4 years, to the age of 83.4</td>
<td>A 60-year-old woman lived, on average, a further 28.41 years, to the age of 88.4 (men up to age 82.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 148,900 women ≥60 years with disabilities (98,400 men) in 2007 representing 24.8% of total women ≥60 years population (18.1% men).
- Of all 203,200 women with disabilities in 2007, women ≥60 years constituted 73.3% of them (62.3% men)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7,068 total women received CSSA for permanent disability</td>
<td>12,188 total women received CSSA for permanent disability (13,757 men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1996-2011: 72.4% increase in recipients of CSSA for permanent disability (all ages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50,573 women claimed CSSA for old age representing 10.4% ≥60 years female population</td>
<td>102,349 women claimed CSSA for old age representing 14.5% of ≥60 years female population (men 14.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1996-2011: A 102.4% increase in female recipients of CSSA for old age

## Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97.7% Chinese</td>
<td>98.5% Chinese (98.3% men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highest Chinese proportion of any age group
### Educational attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1961</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 90.8% had no or primary only schooling</td>
<td>• 69.6% had no or primary only schooling (50.7% men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1.5% had postsecondary education</td>
<td>• 5.5% had postsecondary education (20.6% men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of all women with no education in 2011, 87.5% were ≥60 years

### Household and living arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 46.1% in private permanent housing</td>
<td>• 44.5% in private permanent housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 5.8% in subsidized home ownership housing</td>
<td>• 18.7% in subsidized home ownership housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 42.5% in public rental housing</td>
<td>• 42.5% in public rental housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of all women living alone in 2011, 43.2% were ≥60 years (31.6% men)

Number of women ≥60 years in subsidized home ownership housing rose six fold

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1961</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 33.0% New Territories, 42.7% Kowloon, 24.3% Hong Kong Island</td>
<td>• 44.4% New Territories, 35.2% Kowloon, 20.4% Hong Kong Island</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Marriage and family

| 1991-2011: 97.5% increase in number of married women and as people live longer |
| Women aged ≥60 years married in their early 20s (median age at first marriage in 1981 was 23.9 years, 27.0 years for men) and had first child in mid-20s (median age at first childbirth in 1981 was 25.1 years) |
| Women born in 1936 (aged 78 years today) had on average 2.5 children by the time they were 30 years old and 3.67 children by the time they were 40 |
| Women born in 1956 (58 years old today) had on average 1.28 children by the time they were 30 years old and 1.84 by the time they were 40 years old |
## Employment and earnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39,200 women economically active</td>
<td>54,200 women economically active</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: 38.3% increase, 7.7% of women officially economically active in 2011

- 31.2% working women in manufacturing
- 38.9% in retail
- 23.5% in care
- 1.5% in finance

- 4.3% working women in manufacturing
- 15.3% in import/export and 23.0% in retail
- 21.3% in care
- 30.8% in finance

1991-2011: decline of 26.9 percentage points in proportion in manufacturing and increase of 29.3 percentage points in finance

- 4.8% managers, administrators, professionals, associate professionals
- 71.9% elementary occupations


- 20.7% managers, administrators, professionals, associate professionals (36.4% men)
- 52.2% elementary occupations (27.0% men)

1991-2011: 38.3% increase, 7.7% of women officially economically active in 2011

- 31.2% working women in manufacturing
- 38.9% in retail
- 23.5% in care
- 1.5% in finance

- 4.3% working women in manufacturing
- 15.3% in import/export and 23.0% in retail
- 21.3% in care
- 30.8% in finance

1991-2011: decline of 26.9 percentage points in proportion in manufacturing and increase of 29.3 percentage points in finance

- 4.8% managers, administrators, professionals, associate professionals
- 71.9% elementary occupations


- 20.7% managers, administrators, professionals, associate professionals (36.4% men)
- 52.2% elementary occupations (27.0% men)

- 43.1% homemakers
- 45.9% retired

- 15.5% homemakers
- 74.8% retired

- Median nominal monthly earnings HK$2,800
- Median inflation-adjusted earnings HK$4,291

- Median nominal monthly earnings HK$6,800 (HK$10,000 men)

Lowest median monthly earnings of all age groups but steady increase in inflation-adjusted earnings, unlike younger age groups who have remained flat
**Crime**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrests</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
<th>Drug Abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1,286</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: six fold increase in arrests. Numbers of men were higher but growth slower.

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**Political participation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>District Council</th>
<th>Legislative Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Voters: 18.1%</td>
<td>Voters: 25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Voters: 26.3%</td>
<td>Voters: 26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td>(men 31.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voters in District Council elections as proportion of total female population ≥61 years: 18.1%

Voters in Legislative Council elections as proportion of total female population ≥61 years: 26.3% (men 31.6%)

- Steady increase in number and proportion of ≥61 years female voters in District Council over recent years and high compared to other age groups but low compared to men the same age
- Increase in actual numbers of voters in Legislative Council elections but varied in terms of proportions. Consistently lower than for men the same age
A significant proportion of elderly women are undereducated, under-resourced and under-supported

“A group of special concern…”

A publication released by the Women’s Foundation in 2008 recounting conversations with the community about women stated that “a group of special concern is elderly women.” Four years later little has changed, so that concern has compounded. The analysis presented in this paper suggests that a significant proportion of elderly women are undereducated, under-resourced and under-supported. In short, they have been neglected and today form the backbone of Hong Kong’s underclass.

Experts have been predicting a growing ageing population for some time, basing their forecasts on a number of factors including the ageing of the postwar baby boomers, the Touch Base Policy, the extended life expectancies of men and women in general and the low fertility rate of Hong Kong women. Yet it is our elderly women that represent the most overlooked segment of this ageing cohort. The chronic wealth gap in Hong Kong, currently at its widest in 30 years and amongst the widest in the world according to the Gini coefficient scale calculated on 2011 income data, hits both elderly men and women. But the situation is generally compounded for women due to an overarching societal tendency to view older women less favorably than older men.

Unlike younger age groups, which reflect more women of diverse ethnic origins, almost all of women ≥60 years in Hong Kong today are Chinese. The total number of women ≥60 years grew by 77.6 per cent from 1991 to 2011 and now constitutes 18.8 per cent of the total female population. There are fewer men ≥60 years and their population has grown by a smaller margin, 56.9 per cent since 1991, comprising 19.4 per cent of the overall male population.

A history of Chinese traditions

For the cohort of women spotlighted here, marriage represented the cornerstone of their lives. During the 1940s and 1950s, traditional Chinese values permeated the social fabric of everyday life—the three obediences (to father, husband and son) still applied, the practice of mui tsai was still covertly sanctioned, despite efforts to regulate it, and polygamy was still acceptable (the Marriage Reform Ordinance, intended to make monogamy the only legal form of marriage, was only passed in 1971).

An extract from a piece of research exploring women workers attending night school in the 1970s illustrated the prevailing mind-set of the day: “Female factory workers in general wished to get married early. They thought they would not have to work anymore after they married.” The vast majority of women aged ≥60 years today were married at some point in their lives, with only 2.8 per cent never married in 2011. A survey published in 2008 found that support for marriage was strong amongst older adults (aged 60 years and over) and that older respondents (aged 50 years and over) were more likely to agree that married people are happier.

These women were also expected to bear more children than younger women today. In traditional Chinese culture, a woman who failed to give birth was considered to be failing in her filial piety duties. It was only in the 1950s, when these women were children and teenagers, that the Family Planning Association first introduced effective contraception broadly...
and free of charge into the lower-income groups of society. Even then, however, this initiative was deemed acceptable only because it was framed within the wider context of women’s health.

**Living in a modern society**

Over time, traditional Chinese culture has been influenced by economic and social developments, dramatically shifting the social institutions defining everyday life in Hong Kong. In particular, family structures have experienced considerable changes—both in terms of size and composition. Whilst many of these women grew up in multigenerational households, in 2011 the most prevalent household size amongst women aged ≥60 years were three and two person households. In addition, a significant 12.8 per cent of women ≥60 years were living alone in 2011, and that proportion increased to 16.3 per cent for women ≥65 years. There were more women ≥60 years living alone in 2011 than any other age group, representing 43.2 per cent of all women living alone. In spite of this trend, a survey on family values published in 2008 found that respondents aged ≥65 years were more likely to agree that an extended family is more ideal than a nuclear family.  

Analysis of household and living arrangements also indicates ≥60 years women to be the only age group of women to have experienced a decline in private permanent housing, from 46.1 per cent in 1991 to 44.5 per cent in 2011. However, this age group was also a significant beneficiary of the home ownership scheme launched in 1976. The proportion of women ≥60 years living in subsidised home ownership housing grew from 5.8 per cent in 1991 to 18.7 per cent in 2011.

This is broadly in line with men of the same age, as are the geographical locations where they live. A total of 44.4 per cent of women aged ≥60 years were living in the New Territories in 2011 compared to 47.5 per cent of males from the same group. This migration of elderly women to the New Territories reflects an increase of 11.4 percentage points from 33.0 per cent in 1991. Meanwhile there were slightly higher proportions of women than men living in Kowloon and on Hong Kong Island.

**Unskilled and unsupported**

Many of the challenges confronting this cohort of elderly women today can be attributed to their lack of education. They were born before the educational reforms of the 1970s when free schooling was first introduced. In 2011, 30.9 per cent of women aged ≥60 years received no schooling and 38.7 per cent received only primary education. Proportions for men of the same age were also high, but notably not as high in the no schooling category—10.9 per cent of ≥60 years men had no schooling in 2011 and 39.8 per cent primary education only. As the educated younger generation of women (and men) have grown up, living standards and expectations have likewise risen, leaving those who were not privy to the same educational opportunities far behind and with little opportunity or options available to them.

As Hong Kong continues its transition from a manufacturing hub and financial centre to a knowledge and service economy, the manufacturing industry’s “working daughters” of the 1970s have been further
For older women, retraining is often an insurmountable obstacle with little or no existing education or skills to build on. Compounding this is the unfortunate reality that women are more likely to suffer age discrimination than men—often confronted with the tacit understanding that a female employee must be young and attractive to fulfil certain jobs. Recent research shows that age as well as birthplace plays a large part in explaining income disparities in Hong Kong today. The prospects for middle-aged and younger women who have obtained higher levels of education appear to be more optimistic. Data indicates that these two cohorts of younger women are more successful in adapting their skills and experiences to make themselves relevant in the new economy.

Naturally, most of these women aged ≥60 years today are not in employment, even if they were when they were younger. The burden of those not working will become greater in the coming years. The Population Policy Progress Report published in May 2012 predicted that Hong Kong’s ratio of non-workers to workers—which mainly include the elderly and children—will grow from 95.2 non-workers to 100 workers in 2015 to 104 in 2010 to 126 by 2029. In 2011, 74.8 per cent of women aged ≥60 years were retired and 15.5 per cent were homemakers, with the other 9.7 per cent in the employed, unemployed and other categories.

The labour force participation rate for women age 60-64 years was reported at 21.3 per cent in 2011 and for women ≥65 years, this figure dropped considerably to 2.3 per cent. Whilst the labour force rate rose fairly steadily for women in the younger age groups from 1991 to 2011, for women ≥60 years old, employment patterns were far more sensitive to the overall economic climate of Hong Kong—dramatically rising and falling with the economic cycle. This trend suggests that older women with poor skills in low-level, low-paying jobs are more vulnerable to market instabilities and this find it more difficult to ride the economic troughs, something that has made the wealth gap one of the public’s greatest concerns over the last decade.

And these older women have the highest proportion of all age groups in low-level, low-paying jobs. Of the small proportion of women aged ≥60 years that were still officially employed in 2011 (although there may be more who were conducting sporadic or part-time work “off the books”), 52.2 per cent of them were in low-level occupations, with the vast majority of these women were in elementary positions. Of the remaining women aged ≥60 years in employment in 2011, very small proportions were craft workers or plant and machine operators, 25.0 per cent were service workers, shop sales workers and clerks, whilst only 20.7 per cent were in the high-level occupations of managers and administrators, professionals and associate professionals. Whilst men aged ≥60 years had a similar proportion in low-level occupations at 51.2 per cent, they had a much higher proportion in high-level occupations at 36.4 per cent and a small proportion in the mid-level occupations at only 12.1 per cent.
The Changing Faces of Hong Kong

The differences in occupational status between men and women are naturally reflected in earnings. A total of 35.51 per cent of working women aged ≥60 years earned <HK$6,000 per month compared to 13.3 per cent of men the same age in 2011. Although as a proportion of the total, this is an improvement on the 95.6 per cent of working women ≥60 years who earned <HK$6,000 per month in 1991, it still reflects the largest proportion of women in the lowest earnings bracket of all age groups analysed in this paper. However, there was also an increase in women earning in the top earnings bracket of ≥HK$20,000 from 6.5 per cent in 1991 to 12.0 per cent in 2011. These would be the women who have managed to develop professional skills that make them relevant for the new economy.

The median nominal monthly earnings of HK$6,800 in 2011 for employed women aged ≥60 years was the lowest of any age group. Although it was below the HK$10,000 average for men of the same age, the difference is smaller than for the 50-59, 40-49 and 30-39 years age groups. In addition, when adjusted for inflation, median nominal monthly earnings for women ≥60 years have risen steadily since 1991, which is not the case for younger women whose inflation-adjusted earnings have remained flat. Nonetheless, their earnings are still the lowest of all age groups and these monthly earnings figures do not reflect the lack of benefits for many older employed women. The Mandatory Provident Scheme was launched in 2000 and it takes a long time for an employee to save a meaningful amount of money, particularly those in low-level occupations.

Whilst the government points to the introduction of the minimum wage in May 2011 as being a specific measure designed to improve earnings for women such as these and to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) as an adequate safety net for those in need, many have criticised these measures as being insufficient. The view that too many of our elderly are “in a minimum living standard without dignity” has persisted over the last 20 years.21

A paper published by Oxfam Hong Kong in 2006 found that women constituted the majority, 63 per cent (excluding foreign domestic helpers), of “working poor”22 and that in terms of age groups, the elderly (aged ≥65 years) had the largest proportion in poverty at 35.9 per cent, increased from 26.5 per cent in 1996. The next largest group were children, with 22.9 per cent of those aged 0-14 years in poverty, compared to 18.8 per cent in 1996. Between 1996 and 2006, the number of working poor had increased by 87.9 per cent.23

Whilst the introduction of the minimum wage was one of the recommendations of the Oxfam paper and has brought about some improvements, the current inflationary environment has brought some of the potential benefits into question. A further report released by Oxfam in April 2012 showed that even though about 70 per cent of the low-income workers and their families surveyed earn more income after the introduction of the statutory minimum wage, about 40 per cent of them continue to live in deprivation (according to the deprivation index compiled for the report).24 Another report published in April 2012 stated that, “...the rise in wages for low income earners still fails to keep up with the spiralling inflation rate.”25 At the time of writing, the Minimum Wage Commission was in the process of recommending an increase to the minimum wage from HK$28 to HK$30, though some say it will do little to ease poverty.
Whilst the number of women aged ≥60 years receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance for old age increased from 50,573 in 1996 to 102,349 in 2011, representing 14.5 per cent of the ≥60 years female population; and the total number of women receiving the Disability Allowance (DA) increased from 7,068 women in 1996 to 12,188 women in 2011, many of whom will be aged ≥60 years (in 2007, 24.8 per cent of the ≥60 years old female population was registered with disabilities), a significant number of women in this age group did not receive adequate support. Director of the Society for Community Organisation, Ho Hei-wah has criticised the CSSA scheme for leaving out the working poor who are ineligible because their earnings cover the basic threshold, saying: “The scheme means that you either are covered, or you have nothing”.

Problems with the application procedures for CSSA have also been reported and a 2006 report by Oxfam Hong Kong referred to the “increasing stigmatisation faced by recipients of CSSA”. It has also been criticised for not being available to residents who have been in Hong Kong for less than seven years, although the government argues this is a prudent use of public money and exemptions have been made when necessary.

An example given in 1998 by the Society for Community Organisation of a woman who had slipped through all these safety nets, would still ring true today: “…the old persons spend over 10 hours on picking up cardboard boxes by hauling a trolley through the traffic. They can only earn about HKD5 (USD0.65) a day or HKD150 (USD19.4) a month. A catty of cardboard boxes (about 600 grams) cost HKD15 cents (USD0.02).”

These are the people whom social workers have coined “N-nothings”, said to be “the poorest of the poor who often are left out of government handouts” with “N” referring to the constantly rising number of welfare services for which this group do not qualify. They are part of Hong Kong’s growing “underclass” that lives in poverty and consists of the socially excluded which are broadly considered to include the unemployed, new migrants, the elderly, the chronically ill and the disabled. As our numbers of elderly grow, they have also become a larger proportion of the underclass.

Ultimately CSSA is a security net and does not solve the long-term problems that lead to social exclusion of poor and elderly women in Hong Kong. These women should have had access to skills and long-term opportunities in middle age which would have allowed them to build up sustainable earnings when the manufacturing industry started to collapse. Whilst there are now programmes for youths (Special Training and Enhancement) and single parents (New Dawn) to help them move towards self-reliance and off CSSA, there were no programmes in place 20 years ago when these older women could have made use of such assistance and who today find themselves a burden on society.

Indications of social exclusion

The many difficult obstacles and challenges confronting older women today might explain the rising number of arrests amongst women of this age. Further analysis is needed but it is likely that arrests of women of this age are often for petty crime. Although the official numbers of arrests were small at 1,286 women in 2011, and the proportion of all women aged ≥60 years who were arrested was only 0.18 per cent, this figure represents a significant six fold increase between 1991 and 2011.
The number of women aged ≥60 years admitted to penal institutions also increased, although again this number was very small at 120 women in 2011. Overall, Hong Kong has one of the highest percentage levels of women in prison of any country at 20.0 per cent in 2012 compared to an average of between two and nine per cent in 80 per cent of all prison systems around the world, and higher than Macau-China’s 14.8 per cent. Despite rising crime, this was the only age group of women in which there was a decline in the number of reported drug abusers.

Often poverty creates an inability to engage in social, community or political activities, thus leading to a downward spiral of decreased social support and resources and increased social exclusion. However, ≥60 years women show themselves to be more involved in local affairs than women of younger age groups through their higher and increasing proportion of voter turnout as a proportion of registered electors and of the total age specific population at District Council elections over recent years. Recent research (non-age specific) shows that women of all ages have significantly increased their involvement in social, charitable, religious and environmental organisations in recent years but attendance at political and pressure groups has not changed.

For the Legislative Council Elections, the ≥60 years women were underrepresented compared to younger women. In both the District Council elections and Legislative Council elections, men of the same age have consistently maintained a higher proportion of voter turnout to registered electors and total age specific population. This is further confirmed by recent research which shows that men slightly lead women in almost all forms of political and civic participation.

The mystery of the fortunate

The use of publicly available data for this report is derived largely from information relating to the low-status end of women aged ≥60 years—the women who are still working or who claim CSSA for instance. As such, it has not been possible to establish a reasonable portrayal of the elderly women who have fared better in life. That is not to say they do not exist and that they do not exist, but rather that in this research, it has not been possible to analyse data that might have built up a comprehensive picture of them.

What we owe our elderly

The picture emerging from this analysis reflects a significant proportion of women being marginalised as they approach what should be their golden years. And it begs the question, how have these women become a burden on society in a place like Hong Kong, which has long promoted its hard-working people as its biggest asset? This is a chronic social problem that requires immediate attention before it is too late.

Hong Kong owes the elderly its support

Hong Kong owes the elderly its support and should work towards improving current conditions through implementing programmes that embrace both financial support, such as pensions and asset accumulation, and non-financial support, such as the development of transferable skills and a recognised retirement age for example. For those still fit and able to work, can old-economy skills be used for new-economy objectives? For
those beyond the stage of being able to create financial security through employment, topics that have not been dealt with in this report, like healthcare and hospital/home care for the elderly, need to be considered in a way that includes encouraging family support so that fewer elderly are left living alone.

At the same time, research into the longer-term needs and expectations of the next generation of the elderly, who will be better educated and have higher living standards and expectations, needs to be conducted to ensure that services for the elderly are maintained.
Snapshot of women today aged 40-59 years

Notes:

• Age band: all information is for women aged 40-59 years old unless stated (where information is for other age groups of 40-49 years and 50-59 years it is explained).

• Summary statistics below are derived from detailed analysis and more complete statistics of women aged 40-59 years presented in Section 3.

When education and opportunities diverge

Although they are presented here as a combination, the differences in educational attainment and monthly employment earnings among women falling within the age band of 50-59 years and 40-49 years confirm the observations made of women aged ≥60 years. Women aged 50-59 years have lower educational attainment levels and lower monthly earnings levels than women aged 40-49 years, suggesting that poverty and ultimately social exclusion are more pronounced for older people in Hong Kong today.

Women in their early 40s today are just young enough to have benefited from the MacLehose compulsory education reforms of the 1970s (six years free, universal, compulsory schooling in 1971, raised to nine years in 1978). However, for women in their 50s, these benefits were not yet in place.

Most likely characteristics of a 40-59-year-old woman today:

• Chinese
• Married in mid-20s, had first child in mid- to late-20s
• Living in three or four person household, in private permanent housing in the New Territories, with spouse and/or children
• Upper secondary and/or postsecondary education if 40-49 years, lower or upper secondary if 50-59 years (but very mixed educational attainment)
• Employed, most likely full-time, in retail, finance or care and most likely (especially if 50-59 years) in a low-level position as an elementary occupation or as a clerk earning or in a high-level position as manager (particularly if 40-49 years)
• Earning around HK$8,000 (50-59 years) to HK$10,500 (40-49 years)
• Neither arrested nor sentenced
• Not a reported drug abuser
• Did not vote in District Council elections and Legislative Council elections

Other trajectories:

• Never married or widowed/separated/divorced
• Living in subsidised home ownership housing or public rental housing
• Homemaker (more likely if 50-59 years than 40-49 years)
• Part-time worker earning low wage, <HK$6,000
• Single parent, working or receiving CSSA, possibly living in two or three person household as sole tenant of public rental property
• Politically active participating in District Council and Legislative Council elections
Women aged 40-59 years

Demographics

- 549,600 women
- 311,300 aged 40-49 years / 11.1% of female population
- 238,300 aged 50-59 years / 8.5% of female population

- 1,270,500 women (1,104,700 men)
- 686,400 aged 40-49 years / 18.2% of female population
- 584,100 aged 50-59 years / 15.5% of female population

- 1991-2011: 131.2% growth in age specific population (compared to 33.9% for total female population)
- In 2011 median age was 41.7 years

Nationality

- 92.2% Chinese

In 2011, the largest proportion of non-Chinese was Filipina at 3.5% of the total

Marriage and family

- 86.4% now married
- 10.0% widowed/divorced/separated
- 3.6% never married

- 76.0% now married
- 12.2% widowed/divorced/separated
- 11.8% never married

- 1991-2011: 109.5% growth in number of now married women, 192.1% in widowed/divorced/separated and 685.3% in never married
- Women aged 40-59 years would have married in their mid-20s (median age at first marriage in 1991 was 26.2 years) and had first child in late 20s (median age at first childbirth in 1991 was 28.1 years)

Age-specific fertility rate for women aged 40-44 years was 4.5 births\textsuperscript{35} 

Age-specific fertility rate for women aged 40-44 years was 12.7 births

- 8,727 single female parents aged 40-49 years, 37.8 per cent of all female single parents\textsuperscript{36}
- 3,748 single female parents aged 50-59 years

- 32,984 single female parents aged 40-49 years (7,077 men), 51.5 per cent of all female single parents
- 7,908 single female parents aged 50-59 years (5,181 men)

1991-2011: High growth in number of single female parents aged 40-59 years, but still a small proportion of total women aged 40-59 years, 2.3% in 1991 up to 3.2% in 2011
## Household and living arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>19-29 year women</th>
<th>30-39 year women</th>
<th>40-49 year women</th>
<th>50-59 year women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>48.3% in private permanent housing</td>
<td>48.3% in private permanent housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>51.7% in private permanent housing</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proportion of women aged 40-49 years were living in 3-4 person households in 2011, whereas in 1991 they had been more evenly spread over 3, 4, 5 and 6+ person households.

## Educational attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>19-29 year women</th>
<th>30-39 year women</th>
<th>40-49 year women</th>
<th>50-59 year women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>51.0% no or primary only schooling, 18.1% lower secondary, 22.6% upper secondary, 8.4% postsecondary</td>
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<td>51.0% no or primary only schooling, 18.1% lower secondary, 22.6% upper secondary, 8.4% postsecondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>12.6% no or primary only schooling, 18.4% lower secondary, 46.1% upper secondary, 22.9% postsecondary</td>
<td>12.6% no or primary only schooling, 18.4% lower secondary, 46.1% upper secondary, 22.9% postsecondary</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Employment and earnings

1991
- 40-49 years women: 162,800 economically active
- 50-59 years women: 78,300 economically active

1991-2011: More women became economically active than inactive

1991-2011: decline of 32.0 percentage points in proportion in manufacturing, significant increases in finance, retail and transport/communications (not just finance as with women ≥60 years)

1993
- 16.4% managers, administrators, professionals, associate professionals
- 14.1% clerks
- 12.0% service and shop sales
- 2.3% craft workers
- 14.7% plant/machine operators
- 39.7% elementary occupations

1993-2011: increase in higher level and decrease in lower level occupations but men fare better

2011
- 40-49 years women: 478,900 economically active
- 50-59 years women: 300,300 economically active

• 3.6% working women in manufacturing
• 16.0% in import/export and 19.8% in retail
• 32.6% in care
• 20.5% in finance
• 5.5% transport/communications

35.6% working women in manufacturing
• 26.0% in retail
• 30.0% in care
• 4.0% in finance
• 2.2% transport/communications

3.6% working women in manufacturing
• 16.0% in import/export and 19.8% in retail
• 32.6% in care
• 20.5% in finance
• 5.5% transport/communications

1991-2011: difference between men and women’s earnings widened (for 40-49 years difference was HK$3,000 in 1991 and HK$5,000 in 2011, for 50-59 years difference was HK$2,500 in 1991 and HK$5,000 in 2011) but inflation-adjusted earnings increased steadily, unlike for younger age groups whose earnings were closer together but flat over time

1991-2011: median nominal monthly earnings HK$4,000; median inflation-adjusted earnings HK$6,130
50-59 years median monthly earnings HK$3,500; median inflation-adjusted earnings HK$5,364

1991-2011: median nominal monthly earnings HK$10,500 (HK$15,500 men)
40-59 years median monthly earnings HK$8,000 (HK$13,000 men)

1991-2011: median nominal monthly earnings HK$6,130 (HK$9,500 men)
40-59 years median monthly earnings HK$5,364 (HK$9,000 men)

1991-2011: median nominal monthly earnings HK$7,000 (HK$11,000 men)
40-59 years median monthly earnings HK$5,000 (HK$8,000 men)

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1991-2011: median nominal monthly earnings HK$10,000 (HK$15,000 men)
40-59 years median monthly earnings HK$5,000 (HK$8,000 men)

1991-2011: median nominal monthly earnings HK$11,000 (HK$16,000 men)
40-59 years median monthly earnings HK$5,000 (HK$8,000 men)

1991-2011: median nominal monthly earnings HK$12,000 (HK$17,000 men)
40-59 years median monthly earnings HK$5,000 (HK$8,000 men)

1991-2011: median nominal monthly earnings HK$13,000 (HK$18,000 men)
40-59 years median monthly earnings HK$5,000 (HK$8,000 men)
The Changing Faces of Hong Kong

Crime

- 880 arrests
- 73 sentences
- 136 cases of drug abuse

- 3,750 arrests (8,147 men)
- 1,419 sentences (3,546 men)
- 371 cases of drug abuse (3,013 men)

1991-2011: significant increases in arrests and sentences far outstrip population growth and growth in cases of drug abuse was highest of all age groups except for women/girls <20 years

Political participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>District Council</th>
<th>Legislative Council</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Voters: 19.9%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
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<td>Voters: 30.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voters in District Council elections as proportion of total female population
41-60 years: 19.9%

Voters in Legislative Council elections as proportion of total female population
41-60 years: 36.0%

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</table>

Voters in District Council elections as proportion of total female population
41-60 years: 21.7% (men 23.9%)

Voters in Legislative Council elections as proportion of total female population
41-60 years: 30.3% (men 32.9%)

Generally higher voter turnouts as a proportion of total population than for women overall in District and Legislative council elections but lower than men
women in their late 40s and 50s would have dropped out of school early, for reasons such as this lady whose story is translated from a book recorded and published in 1998, and still relevant to this age group today:

“Terry told us very clearly that she had to give up her studies after graduating from primary school because her family had a preference for sons. ‘Females had very little opportunity to study. In my case, I got a place [at school]. If I was a boy my family would support me to study in secondary school. I’m the youngest child, the 6th child, and thus no one thought about that (I could not study in secondary school). It’s because of the preference for sons. If I was a boy I’d have the opportunity to study. My family could support that... my elder brother was not assigned a place but my family still supported him to study in private school. He even had to repeat.’”

In 2011 there were significant differences in the education levels of women in their 40s (12.6 per cent with primary or no education, 12.9 per cent with postsecondary), and those in their 50s (35.3 per cent with primary or no education, and 11.5 per cent with postsecondary). Those in their 40s and early 50s would also have been able to benefit from the financial assistance scheme introduced in 1969 which ensured that no qualified student was denied the opportunity of tertiary education because of a lack of means. However, it has been argued that improved educational attainment has not brought about a “fundamental shift in women’s subsequent life changes”.

Nonetheless, for these age groups, the differences in educational attainment levels are reflected in employment data. In particular, during the 1990s, women in their 40s at that time experienced a significant increase in their employment rate. This would have been due to an amalgamation of the 1970s education reforms and the gathering momentum of the equal opportunities movement and global women’s movement. In addition, the influx of domestic helpers into Hong Kong supported many of these women with young children entering the workplace.

The labour force participation rate for this age group has increased substantially for now married women, whilst remaining quite static for never married women. In 2011, the labour force participation rate for now married women aged 50-59 years was 47.6 per cent, an increase from 33.4 per cent in 1991; and for 40-49 years women was 65.4 per cent, up from 50.1 per cent in 1991. However, at 49 per cent in 2011 (up from 47 per cent in 2001), Hong Kong’s overall female labour force participation rate is still lower than other developed places such as Canada and New Zealand at 62 per cent, Australia at 59 per cent, the US at 58 per cent and the UK at 56 per cent.

Although growth in labour force participation is similar for both women in their 40s and 50s since 1991, actual levels of labour force participation and earnings are higher for women in their 40s. A total of 23.6 per cent of working women aged 50-59 years were earning <HK$ 6,000 per month in 2011 and a further 22.2 per cent were earning in the next bracket up, HK$6,000-HK$7,900 per month. The top level of ≥HK$20,000 per month reflected 20.0 per cent of working women aged 50-59 years, and the remainder were scattered between HK$8,000 and HK$19,900. However, for working women aged 40-49 years, 21.7 per cent were earning the...
lowest monthly wage of <HK$6,000, 28.5 per cent were earning the top monthly wage of ≥HK$20,000, while the remainder were quite evenly spread in between.

Women aged 50-59 years had a higher proportion in the bottom end of the earnings spectrum and a lower proportion in the top end than women aged 40-49 years. Also, the 50-59 and 40-49 years age groups had the largest pay gap between men and women in 2011—for 50-59 years, women’s median nominal monthly earnings were HK$8,000 compared to HK$13,000 for men of the same age bracket and for women aged 40-49 years median monthly earnings were HK$10,500 compared to HK$15,500 for men. However, women in these two age groups had the biggest increases in nominal monthly employment earnings over the two decades and, like women ≥60 years, on an inflation-adjusted basis their earnings have risen steadily whilst younger women’s earnings have remained flat.

A divided society

Nonetheless, the polarity in these earnings patterns between top and bottom illustrates the “ghettoization” of women in Hong Kong today. Some have managed to raise their occupation level and earnings in today’s global city, but others have been unable to upgrade their skills to compete in the globalised economy and are trapped at the bottom of the earnings spectrum. There are greater proportions of this latter group in the older age groups.

The change in proportions of women working in different industry sectors also points to this trend of ghettoization. Between 1991 and 2011, the proportion of working women aged 40-59 years in manufacturing declined from 35.6 per cent to 3.6 per cent as the sector began to lose out to other Asian countries, and the proportion of those in finance increased from 4.0 per cent to 20.5 per cent. Whilst some of these women, most likely from the younger cohorts, would have been able to transfer their experience and capabilities to the new economy sectors, many, particularly those in the older age groups who lack the educational foundations of those who are younger, would have found themselves left in low-level, unskilled jobs. The results of a research project published in 1995 found women who had worked in or were still working in the manufacturing industry were eventually forced out, requiring them to move around several different low-level jobs as they struggled to secure full-time employment.

The career trajectories of middle-aged women lag behind their male counterparts

High achievements for middle-aged men

When comparing men and women in terms of earnings and occupational status, the career trajectories of women lag behind their male counterparts. For example, 33.8 per cent of working men aged 50-59 years and 43.5 per cent of men aged 40-49 years were in the top ≥HK$20,000 earnings per month category in 2011 and only 4.8 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively were in the bottom earnings category of <HK$6,000 per month, with the remainder spread in fairly even proportions throughout the spectrum. In terms of occupational status, 42.6 per cent of working men aged 40-59 years were managers and administrators, associate professionals and professionals in 2011, whereas only 29.4 per cent of working women aged 40-59 held comparable positions. Only 13.0 per cent
of men aged 40-59 years were in the low level elementary occupations, whereas there were 29.1 per cent of women aged 40-59 years holding such positions. Recent analysis that organised occupational categories in a different way to census data shows that women of all ages are more likely to work in teaching, nursing and social work, particularly in the non-profit sector, whilst men have moved towards professional and managerial jobs over the last 20 years.\textsuperscript{43}

Nonetheless, 29.1 per cent in elementary occupations was an improvement for women on 1991 when 40.4 per cent of women aged 40-59 years were in elementary occupations and 16.5 per cent were managers and professionals and is often cited as an indicator for women’s improved status in Hong Kong—a phenomenon usually referred to as the “rise of the women economic elites” which has been linked to improved educational opportunities and economic development.\textsuperscript{44} However, the gender gap remains stark.

However, even for those women skilled enough to make it to the top, they still remain underrepresented. This is in part due to the fact that as more women enter the labour force and progress further along in their careers, opportunities become more limited. This was clear in the Mastercard Worldwide Index of Women’s Advancement for 2011, an effort to measure the socio-economic equality of women. While Hong Kong scored highly for regular employment opportunities, it did not fare well when it came to top-level opportunities such as business ownership and business and government leadership roles for women.\textsuperscript{45}

This is evident in all sectors—recent surveys show only 9.0 per cent of board members of Hang Seng Index companies are women,\textsuperscript{46} only two per cent of Chief Executive Officers of Hong Kong companies are women,\textsuperscript{47} and only 35 per cent of senior management positions of companies in Hong Kong are held by women.\textsuperscript{48} Direct comparisons cannot be made between the surveys, but the point is clear.\textsuperscript{49} In response to this stark gender disparity, the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Ltd launched a public consultation in early September 2012 and proposed a change to its Corporate Governance Code requiring companies to have a “comply or explain” provision on board diversity. In addition, the Securities and Investment Institute launched a programme with The Women’s Foundation to prepare senior female executives for directorships.

Similar gender discrepancies are also present in the education and academia professions. Women, for example, constitute almost 80 per cent of primary school teachers but only 58 per cent of their heads, and at secondary level women constitute 57 per cent of the teachers, but only 33 per cent of the heads.\textsuperscript{50} When it comes to Hong Kong’s tertiary education institutions, women only occupy 14 per cent of the senior academic positions and there currently is no female vice-chancellor.\textsuperscript{51} However, the Third Report of the HKSAR on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), made available for public inspection in May 2012, found that there has been a slight increase in females taking up professor and reader grades in the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded tertiary institutions from 11 per cent in 2005/06 to 13 per cent in 2009/10.\textsuperscript{52}

The public sector is also confronted with gender disparities. There were only 11 women on the 60 member Legislative Council during the 2008-2012 term, and seven women out of 29 members on the Executive Council.
There were only five female members of the newly formed Executive Council announced on 1st July 2012. The powerful Town Planning Board only had six women out of 25 board members and Urban Renewal only had two women out of 18 board members in early 2012. Recent analysis into the number of women in the political system in Hong Kong explains the lack of women elected to Functional Constituency seats (four out of 30 in 2000, 2004 and 2008, down to zero in 2012) by the fact that Functional Constituency votes are predominantly composed of highly educated managers and professionals and this elite is skewed towards men.

Hong Kong falls well below the CEDAW targets of 50 per cent in political representation by 2005, and the Third Report of the HKSAR on CEDAW mentioned in its section on “Nurturing leaders” that “some commentators considered that women still faced challenges and difficulties in participating in decision-making and other public affairs”. The Women’s Foundation has long been advocating more leadership from women, not just on boards in business but in academia, philanthropy and religion.

**Low expectations for middle-aged women**

In 2011, the Women’s Commission published research on attitudes towards women in the workforce which found that over 70 per cent of people surveyed thought men stood a better chance of promotion than women who were of similar age, abilities and skills. Despite these perceptions of the current situation for women in Hong Kong, 66.3 per cent of respondents thought that an increase in the number of successful women would be a successful phenomenon. Part of this problematic mind-set can be attributed to how women are socialized to “expect less” than males in general. Thus, rather than seeing gender discrimination as a social ill that can be changed, there is a societal tendency to appropriate blame to women themselves for their lack of accomplishments.

Middle-age can be a particularly vulnerable time for women—especially those who have traditionally been housewives. Many married, middle-aged women that never made it into the workplace at all, or never made it back in after having children, feeling constrained by their duties at home and lacking experience and confidence. The Women’s Foundation summarised in a report in 2006 that “…housewives, many of whom are in mid-life, are a troubled group. For example, they have the second highest rate of suicide; they have the highest aspirations for continued education but the least attainment; and those who work suffer stress from work and family conflicts.”

A research piece published in 2007 explored how middle-aged, married women position themselves in Hong Kong society. The research involved interviews with middle-aged housewives, who could be classified as *sinai*, a term which was historically one of respect to describe a teacher’s wife but has more recently become a term of disrespect for middle-aged housewives who are considered ordinary, boring, and not sexually attractive. It concluded that these women need to learn to become “flexible housewives” once they enter mid-life by “decentring” their roles as mothers rather than holding onto their identities as mothers, particularly once their children have grown up or they have divorced.

One interviewee explained how important continuing education was to her: “In my mother’s generation, many women were illiterate. I only have..."
primary education, but I don’t feel that I am uneducated. I am taking evening courses to finish my secondary school education. I don’t think I am a si-nai at all.” Another explained how important it was to her to have her own job (a topic which will be covered in more detail in the following section on women aged 30-39 years): “My husband used to see me as a simple-minded, good-for-nothing si-nai before I joined the Housewives Alliance. I teach women computer skills. He is more respectful now.”

A new set of values about marriage and family

The opposite of this, also relevant to this age band, is the middle-aged women who never married and/or never had children. The proportion of women aged 40-59 years old who never married increased from a small 3.6 per cent of the total in 1991 to 11.8 per cent in 2011. Hong Kong’s shengnu (surplus women typically around 40 years old) are believed to be approximately the same in number as much larger Beijing’s. Research suggests that attitudes towards marriage are rapidly changing. A 2008 survey found support for marriage was weakest amongst respondents aged 40-49 years.

The same survey also found that respondents aged 40 years and over reported greater acceptance towards divorce than younger respondents and that divorce is less of a stigma in society today with 64 per cent of all respondents accepting marriage with a divorced person. There was an increase in the proportion of widowed/divorced/separated women aged 40-59 years, up from 10.0 per cent in 1991 to 12.2 per cent in 2011, although this was largely due to population growth. Divorce has become more acceptable in society with the total number of divorces increasing from 6,295 in 1991 to 19,597 in 2011, although the rate of increase has slowed in the last five years.

These different family structures, changing values, increased opportunities in the work-place, amongst other things, are often cited as reasons for the low fertility rate of Hong Kong’s women. Delayed childbirth is another reason, with the average age at first childbirth at 30.0 years in 2011 compared to 28.1 years in 1991. The delaying trend means that the age-specific fertility rate has risen for women in their 40s, although it remains low at 12.7 per 1,000 women aged 40-44 years in 2011 due to the natural breeding cycle of women.

These women still having their children in their 40s today are some of those who contributed to the decline in crude birth rate from the late 1980s to the early 2000s before it started to tick up again in 2003. They emerged into young adulthood to the campaign by the Family Planning Association in the 1970s and 1980s that “兩個夠哂數 (Two is enough)”. A 2008 survey on attitudes found that over 66 per cent of all survey respondents thought that “child bearing is important in marriage”. However, despite this large proportion, of respondents overall, there was the least support for this statement amongst respondents aged 40-49 years.

Single parents

The 40s is also the age group with the largest number and proportion of single parents. Of all women who were single parents in 2011, 51.5 per cent were in their 40s, compared to 30.7 per cent in their 30s—the next largest group—and 12.3 per cent in their 50s. This still represented
The Changing Faces of Hong Kong

In 2011 there were 81,705 men and women who were single parents, the largest figure ever recorded. Of these, 64,040 or 78.4 per cent were women. Surprisingly, only 55.1 per cent of single female parents were working in 2011 and the number claiming CSSA rose consistently from 21,758 in 1991 to 50,320 in 2011, and for men from 14,847 in 1991 to 29,664 in 2011.

One of the factors deterring single parents from working may be the limited child care options available. Hong Kong does not have the high quality, affordable and varied child care options available in some other developed places that cater to long or irregular working hours. This is, in part, attributed to the high number of domestic helpers working in Hong Kong who are hired to fulfil this need. However, for many of the single parent households highlighted here, employing a live-in foreign domestic helper is beyond their financial means. The Third Report of the HKSAR on CEDAW states: “To support parents who cannot take care of their children because of work, the Government has also put in place various kinds of child care services, and has been striving to increase the flexibility of the services”. (The constraints of child care and other family duties on women today will be covered in the discussion on women aged 30-39 years, the prime child-bearing and rearing decade in Hong Kong).

However, with regard to single parents who are particularly constrained in this area, a recent newspaper report asserted that faced with high child care costs, single parents with basic education and skills can be forced to leave the workforce and rely on welfare. The report further explained that the government set up four centres to serve low-income single parents in 2001, but these were closed after three years. Their services were transferred to the city’s 62 integrated family services centres, which provide overall support to individuals and families in need. However, Jessie Yu Sau-chu, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Single Parents Association, has pointed out that these centres are spread too thin to be of much help and the demand for government facilities far outweighs supply.

Single female parents also appear to represent a higher majority, 53.0 per cent of all ages, living in public rental housing in 2011, than of women overall. In 2011, of the total female population aged 40-59 years, 28.6 per cent were living in public rental housing and 51.7 per cent were living in private permanent housing. Notably, single male parents appear to fare better in terms of housing than single female parents with a higher proportion of men than women in private permanent housing and a higher proportion registered as owner-occupiers than women.

The practical impacts of new family structures

House sizes and structures for this 40-59 years age group of women as a whole have also experienced significant change which has been largely linked to declining fertility rates from the 1980s to early 2000s, as well as overall decreases in marriage. The majority of women in this age band live in three and four person households, resonating with the findings of the 2008 survey on family values which indicated that the nuclear family is the family structure that had the most support amongst all respondents.
Like women over 60 years of age, these women aged 40-59 years have benefited from the home ownership scheme with the proportion living in subsidised housing increasing significantly since 1991. However this age group has also experienced a rise in the proportion of women living in private permanent housing. Unlike the older generation, the rise in the proportion of women aged 40-49 years living in this type of housing is notably lower than for women aged 30-39 years. Unlike women and men ≥60 years, there is a divergence in the proportions of men and women in the different geographical locations. In 2011, men aged 40-59 years had similar proportions in the New Territories and Kowloon at 38.6 per cent and 37.8 per cent respectively, whereas women had their majority in the New Territories at 53.0 per cent and a much lower proportion in Kowloon at 28.8 per cent. For women this represented a significant increase in the New Territories over the 20 years and a decline in Kowloon. For men, however, the reverse was true with a geographic shift reflecting a significant decrease in the New Territories and an increase in Kowloon.

Expanding expectations and support

The geographical locations where men live, compared to women, reflect their overall better lot in life at this age. Their occupational status is better and their earnings are higher. But the changing values that are expanding options for women also create a new set of challenges for men. A 2012 research project on the impacts of gender stereotyping on men commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) concluded that: “men do not receive any protection and support in dealing with their stress derived from social, financial and traditional gender ideologies.”

Whilst the Women’s Foundation has long argued that “women’s issues cannot be the sole province of women”, there is also a long way to go yet before we can say that equal protection and support exists for both women and men. This wide age band illustrates just how divided women’s socio-economic profiles can be and how varied the challenges are in Hong Kong today. Whilst a proportion of women at the upper end of this age bracket in their 50s have lower educational attainment and lower earnings, thus placing them at similar risk as women aged ≥65 years today, a proportion of women at the lower end of the age bracket stand to gain some overall advancements and life improvements. However, along with these benefits, this particular segment of middle-aged women are also confronted with higher expectations for themselves and their families’ lives which need paying for and often require them to negotiate heavy work demands within the complexities of changing family values and household structures. This dynamic is becoming more and more complex for the younger age groups growing up today.
Snapshot of women today aged 30-39 years

Notes:
• Age band: all information is for women aged 30-39 years old unless stated (where information could not be found for women aged 30-39 years, it is presented for other relevant age groups).
• Summary statistics below are derived from detailed analysis and more complete statistics of women aged 30-39 years presented in Section 4.

Statistics and real-life experience may diverge

Women aged 30-39 years today were the prime age to benefit from the 1970s educational reforms and the global trend of massification of higher education in the 1990s. In 1996/7, just around when these women were at the age to be entering higher education, women outnumbered men at UGC-funded universities for the first time.

However, high attendance levels did not necessarily translate into full gender equality. A study of over 3,000 students commissioned by the EOC in 2001, when these women in their 30s today would have been students, showed that both male and female students perceived a clear differential in appropriate jobs for men and women (they thought nursing and teaching were suitable for women) and that they thought the man should be positioned as the major breadwinner in the family and that the woman should manage the house and be the primary care-giver of young children.72

Whilst their higher levels of educational attainment have helped them achieve higher occupational levels and earnings than women of other age groups, women in this cohort still lagged behind their male counterparts.

Most likely characteristics of a 30-39-year-old woman today:
• Chinese
• Married; got married at around 28 years with first child at around 29 years
• Living in three or four person household in private permanent housing in New Territories, with spouse and/or children
• Upper secondary or postsecondary education, high likelihood of degree
• Employed, most likely full-time in care or import/export/retail at any occupational level
• Earning around HK$14,500 per month
• Neither arrested nor sentenced
• Not a reported drug abuser
• Did not vote in District Council elections or Legislative Council elections

Other trajectories:
• Foreign domestic helper from Indonesia or Philippines
• Recently entered on one-way permit from Mainland China
• Unmarried, no children
• Living in subsidised home ownership housing or public rental housing
• Single parent, working or receiving CSSA, possibly living in two or three person household as sole tenant of public rental property
Women aged 30-39 years

Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>559,000 women</td>
<td>652,300 women (460,300 men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.9% of total female population</td>
<td>17.3% of total female population (13.9% male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,855 one-way permit holders from Mainland China</td>
<td>10,373 one-way permit holders from Mainland China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1996-2011: female population aged 30-39 years declined 4.7%, if domestic helpers are excluded, decline was even greater at 15.5%

Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85.7% Chinese</td>
<td>79.0% Chinese (94.5% men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2011, the largest proportion of non-Chinese was Indonesians at 9.6% of the total, followed by Filipinas at 7.5% of the total

Marriage and family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>81.1% now married</td>
<td>66.9% now married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5% widowed/divorced/separated</td>
<td>4.0% widowed/divorced/separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.4% never married</td>
<td>29.1% never married</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: 2.35% decline in number of now married women, 87.1% increase in widowed/divorced/separated and 109.9% in never married

• Median age at first marriage in 2011 was 28.9 years (31.2 years for men) and at first childbirth was 30.0 years

Age-specific fertility rate for women aged 30-34 years was 81.2 births, for aged 35-39 years was 30.4 births

Age-specific fertility rate for women aged 30-34 years was 86.7 births, for aged 35-39 years was 59.1 births

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8,836 single female parents aged 30-39 years, 33.3 per cent of all female single parents</td>
<td>19,661 single female parents aged 30-39 years (3,441 men), 30.7 per cent of all female single parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: High growth in number of single female parents aged 30-39 years, but a small proportion of total women aged 30-39 years at 3.0% in 2011
### Household and living arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 19.3% in 3 person and 32.0% per cent in 4 person and 20.6% in 5 person households</td>
<td>• 23.6% in 3 person and 27.2% per cent in 4 person households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 15.7% in 6+ person households</td>
<td>• 8.3% in 6+ person and 16.8% in 5 person households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2.1% in single person and 10.2% in 2 person households</td>
<td>• 4.7% in single person and 19.5% in 2 person households</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Decline in large households and increase in smaller households, but increasingly diversified and more so than older age groups
- In 2011, 11.7% of women aged 35-44 years were living with their parents (20.4% men)

### Educational attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 34.5% no or primary only schooling</td>
<td>• 5.6% no or primary only schooling (1.8% men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 20.8% lower secondary</td>
<td>• 14.0% lower secondary (14.5% men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 33.8% upper secondary</td>
<td>• 44.8% upper secondary (39.7% men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 9.9% postsecondary</td>
<td>• 35.7% postsecondary (44.0% men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 1991-2011: educational attainment has improved but men fare better with lower proportions with no or primary only education and higher proportions at postsecondary level
### Employment and earnings

#### 30-39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 55.6% of women aged 30-39 employed</td>
<td>• 75.2% of women aged 30-39 employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 47.8% labour force participation for now married women</td>
<td>• 69.3% labour force participation rate for now married women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **1991**
  - 31.1% working women in manufacturing
  - 24.6% in retail
  - 29.8% in care
  - 9.4% in finance
  - 3.4% transport/communications

- **2011**
  - 1.6% working women in manufacturing
  - 16.4% in import/export and 15.4% in retail
  - 42.5% in care
  - 16.6% in finance
  - 6.2% transport/communications

Women aged 30-39 years have the largest proportion of all age groups in care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 22.5% managers, administrators, professionals, associate professionals</td>
<td>• 36.7% managers, administrators, professionals, associate professionals (51.6% men)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 33.1% clerks</td>
<td>• 20.7% clerks (8.4% men)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 12.1% service and shop sales</td>
<td>• 16.2% service and shop sales (14.0% men)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2.2% craft workers</td>
<td>• 0.3% craft workers (11.6% men)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 11.4% plant/machine operators</td>
<td>• 0.2% plant/machine operators (5.7% men)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 18.4% elementary occupations</td>
<td>• 25.8% elementary occupations (8.5% men)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1993-2011: shift in occupations is not as pronounced as for older age groups and men still fare better

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-39 years median nominal monthly earnings HK$5,000; median inflation-adjusted earnings HK$7,663</td>
<td>30-39 years median nominal monthly earnings HK$11,000, ex-domestic helpers HK$14,500 (HK$15,000 men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: women closed the earnings gap with men (HK$2,000 difference in 1991, HK$500 if domestic helpers are excluded in 2011), and had highest median monthly earnings of all age groups, but earnings declined over the last decade in real terms
Crime

- 1,501 arrests
- 185 sentences
- 366 cases of drug abuse

1991-2011: lower rate of increase in arrests and sentences and cases of drug abuse than older age groups, but within context of declining population

Political participation

1991

- Voters in District Council elections as proportion of total female population 31-40 years: 13.7%
- Voters in Legislative Council elections as proportion of total female population 31-40 years: 28.3%

1998

- Consistently second lowest voter turnout as a proportion of age specific population to women aged 21-30 years and increasingly lower than men over the years
- Generally lower proportions of voters to population in Legislative Council elections than overall women and consistently lower than men

2008

- Voters in District Council elections as proportion of total female population 31-40 years: 10.8% (men 15.5%)
- Voters in Legislative Council elections as proportion of total female population 31-40 years: 18.3% (men 32.9%)
In addition, research shows that women are often required to try harder and make considerable sacrifices at home to attain these achievements. So whilst statistics are encouraging, real-life experiences are far more confusing for many of today’s 30-something women.

**Men still fare better**

Working women in their 30s are more broadly spread across the levels of occupational status and across the earnings spectrum than any other age group. In 2011, 36.7 per cent of working women in this age band were in the occupational status categories of managers and administrators, professionals or associate professionals. However, working men aged 30-39 years had a much higher proportion of 51.6 per cent in these top-level occupations and this gap between men and women has not changed significantly over the last 20 years. Recent analysis comparing the proportion of male and female managers and professionals shows that the gap has closed slightly more for those born in mainland China than those born in Hong Kong.73

And whilst working women aged 30-39 years are spread quite evenly across the earnings spectrum in 2011, a quarter of women were represented at the top end and just over a quarter at the bottom end, mirroring the polarity of earnings that was evident in women in the 40-49 years age band. These women also had their highest proportion, 28.2 per cent, in the lowest monthly earnings bracket of <HK$6,000 in 2011, although it should be noted that this proportion is largely driven by the number of domestic helpers that comprise this age cohort. The biggest gain between 1991 and 2011 was in the ≥HK$20,000 monthly earnings bracket, increasing from 4.2 per cent to 27.1 per cent. Men notably had a greater 38.3 per cent in the top earnings category.

Although women aged 30-39 years had the highest median nominal monthly earnings of women of all age groups at HK$11,000 in 2011, it was still well below the male median monthly earnings of HK$15,000. However, if domestic helpers are excluded from the median monthly earnings for 30-39-year-old women, it rises from HK$11,000 to HK$14,500 in 2011, which was much closer to men. Nonetheless, for both men and women, when earnings are adjusted for inflation, they have actually declined over the last decade, and for women, when domestic helpers are excluded, they have remained flat.

**Hong Kong lacks family-friendly employment practices**

Hong Kong is a particularly challenging place for women to work with long working hours and a lack of flexible, family-friendly working policies. Maternity leave, for example, is short compared to other developed places at ten weeks in Hong Kong. While there have been repeated calls for this to be lengthened, the Third Report of the HKSAR on CEDAW states that the current provisions have been formulated “following extensive consultations” and does not make any statements of intention regarding change. The recent government proposals for a mere five days of paternity leave have caused considerable debate.74

But there is evidence that companies are beginning to recognize the need for including family-friendly working practices. A Women’s Commission survey published in 2002 found that 72 per cent of establishments had not adopted any gender-related employment practices. Among those that had, “flexible
working hours/practices” were the most common practice adopted. A 2006 study by the EOC found that only 10.2 per cent of 137 respondent employers had in place a formal policy or guidance for family-friendly policies.

However, a 2011 workplace survey found that of the 1,009 respondents polled, 45.7 per cent said they worked a five day week, up from 32.4 per cent in 2007; 28.3 enjoyed flexitime, up from 22.4 per cent in 2006, and 22.9 per cent had the option of working from home, up from 14.1 per cent in 2006. The Third Report of the HKSAR on CEDAW commented on a large number of initiatives in Hong Kong to try to improve Family-Friendly Employment Practices, but states that it is the employer’s decision as to what policies they adopt and how they adopt them.

Women try harder and sacrifice more

Even if more flexible working practices are slowly being introduced, research shows that Hong Kong women are less likely than their male counterparts to make use of them. The 2011 Women’s Commission survey found that although around 71.0 per cent of people felt that employers or supervisors were willing to allow their staff to take time off to handle family matters, and although about 69.1 per cent agreed that employers would allow staff to work flexitime upon mutual agreement, “the majority” considered that such situations do not regularly happen or happen occasionally.

Nonetheless, more and more women are now entering the labour force and staying on after they marry. The labour force rate for now married women in their 30s increased from 47.8 per cent in 1991 to 69.3 in 2011. This is lower than the rate for never married women, which hovered around 94 per cent for the same period, but a significant improvement over the 20 years. This difference between never married and ever married women in the labour force is considered to reflect the tendency of married women exit the labour force after marriage, as expressed in the drop in labour force participation after age 25-29 years which coincides with the median age for first marriage, currently 28.9 years. The labour force participation rate for women aged 25-29 years was 87.5 in 2011, dropping to 80.1 for 30-34 years and 73.5 for 35-39 years.

Research indicates that women who have attained higher-level jobs and higher earnings frequently sacrifice some aspect of family life in order to pay for their increasingly expensive lifestyles. A 2011 Women’s Commission survey found that 57.1 per cent of respondents thought that women have to sacrifice more than men in order to achieve career success. In Chinese culture, as in many other cultures, women have a conundrum. They want to look after their family—a survey of approximately 2,000 people commissioned by the Women’s Commission in 2011 found that among married/cohabiting women with children, 76.8 per cent said their major reason for not returning to work after giving birth was having to look after other family members, 59.3 per cent said it was because they have to do housework and 43.1 per cent said they prefer to spend more time with their children.

However, Chinese culture also places a strong value on work as means of contributing to the family. Research comparing levels of work-family and family-work conflict in Hong Kong, China and the US, found that Hong
Kong employees report much higher levels of work-family conflict than those in China and the US, and higher than family-work conflict, which is considered consistent with the strong value Chinese people in Hong Kong place on work as a means of contributing to family welfare.85

Perhaps the strong work ethic coupled with the time- and energy-consuming job of child rearing means that women of this age band have little time for political participation. They were in their impressionable late teens and 20s during the 1990s when the international women’s movement was gaining pace as a global civil society. Yet despite being young, educated and able to join the ranks in Hong Kong who pressured the government to adopt the Bill of Rights Ordinance in 1991, to repeal the ban on female inheritance of land in the New Territories in 1994, to enact the Sex Discrimination Ordinance in 1995 and to publicly recognise a right to gender equality in CEDAW in 1996, women aged 30-39 years have some of the lowest voter turnout of all age groups in recent District Council elections and Legislative Council elections.

The complex web of modern and traditional values

A 2011 survey commissioned by the Women’s Commission found that although traditional views persist, with 50.4 per cent of people saying they felt that women should focus more on family than work, 82.2 per cent of respondents agreed that having a job was the best way for a woman to be independent and 80.4 per cent of males and 83.7 per cent of females think that both women and men should contribute to the household income.86 This illustrates the overarching challenge for women today.

The same survey found that although more than half of respondents thought that male patriarchy did not exist within a family context today, women remain largely responsible for most household duties such as child care, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, preparing meals, and taking care of the elderly, disabled or chronically ill family members. Whilst women in Hong Kong have made advances in the workplace they have not made the same advances in their private lives. It is sometimes said that the employment of domestic helpers often causes husbands to almost completely withdraw from domestic work.87 The idea of a stay-at-home dad is anathema in Hong Kong. They are such a rare breed here that they were recently referred to as “alien beings” in one newspaper.88

Despite this, 48.4 per cent of people surveyed considered that men should take up a larger share of household duties than they do now and 51.2 per cent of women surveyed agreed that men should take on more child care responsibility than they do currently, although notably only 43.0 per cent of men agreed with this statement.89 However, a 2012 research project on the impacts of gender stereotyping on men commissioned by the EOC found that men are “increasingly aware of the importance to share family responsibilities such as household chores and child care”.90

It is often said that raising the status of women in the workplace translates to raising their status at home, and improving the quality of one part of life leads to enrichment in the other.91 In a research study published in 2007 which involved 45 middle-aged women in interviews and focus groups, the following example illustrated how important work was Ah Wah, a “sales manager” in a pyramid selling scheme: “I never envy other women. They
are wasting their time and the money that their mothers have invested in their education. Women should not take their families too seriously. If you have a job, men will care more about you for fear that you will run away one day.\textsuperscript{92}

**The power of modern women**

Census data on family structures indicates that there have been increases in overall female heads of households aged 30-64 years in recent years.\textsuperscript{93} Although this may not affect the division of responsibilities in terms of practicalities such as child care and housework, it does affect decision-making, particularly spending. A survey in 2008 by market research company Synovate of around 2,000 women in Hong Kong, China, Singapore and Malaysia found that 81 per cent of women said they can afford to pay for what they want without asking for money from their partners and 87 per cent said they have equal say on big ticket items such as cars and property.\textsuperscript{94} The Mastercard Worldwide Consumer Purchasing Priorities Index surveys show that the percentage of households where women make the decisions on household spending in Asia has increased from 32 per cent in 1999 to 64 per cent in 2010.\textsuperscript{95}

These research conclusions resonate with a Hong Kong survey published in 2011 by HSBC showing that in Hong Kong, 36 per cent of women, compared to 33 per cent of men, said they are more likely to be in charge of household budgeting.\textsuperscript{96} However, when it came to retirement savings, 38 per cent of Hong Kong men said they take sole responsibility for planning compared to 28 per cent of women.\textsuperscript{97} The Mastercard Worldwide Consumer Purchasing Priorities Index surveys also found that women ranked high in Asia for “investment” and “basic money management” but low on financial literacy and low on financial planning.\textsuperscript{98} Nonetheless, a 2011 survey of approximately 2,000 people commissioned by the Women’s Commission found that 43.6 per cent of respondents indicated that they had savings with their spouse/cohabitant and equal rights to using that money.

The aforementioned survey by Synovate also shows that Hong Kong women are apparently more restrained than their Asian counterparts. The survey found that Hong Kong women only spend 11 per cent of their monthly personal income on shopping, preferring to allocate bigger proportions to savings and investments. In contrast, women from Mainland China spend over half their income on shopping (although the actual monetary amount is approximately the same at around HK$1,325).\textsuperscript{99}

**The fertility crisis**

One of the consequences of higher levels of educational attainment and career options for women is the current very low fertility rate for Hong Kong women. In 2011, the fertility rate was 1.2 per cent\textsuperscript{100}, below the intergenerational replacement rate of 2.1 and one of the lowest in the world according to UN\textsuperscript{101} and World Bank studies.\textsuperscript{102} However, the age-specific fertility rate for women in their 30s has risen in the last decade from 61.7 in 2001 (down from 81.2 in 1991) to 86.7 in 2012 as the median age at first childbirth has moved out from the 20s to the 30s, hitting 30.0 years in 2011.
Recent surveys show that young people in Hong Kong today do not want to have children for a range of reasons. The Family Planning Association’s Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) Survey found the heavy financial burden, the age of first time parents, the heavy responsibility of child rearing and the balancing of work schedules as the principal reasons. A survey on family values conducted by The University of Hong Kong found that long working hours, the fact that Hong Kong is not a family-friendly city, the demanding nature of the education system and the expense of raising children as key deterrents to having children. A large study of primary and secondary school children in Hong Kong in 2001 revealed that neither boys nor girls were interested or motivated to have or look after children.

A study commissioned by the South China Morning Post newspaper in 2012 found that financial considerations (despite the survey being of people on a high household income of at least HK$40,000 per month) were the greatest concern, as well as the emotional burden of raising a child. Other concerns were poor education, lack of space and housing and chronic pollution. This shift in social conditions as well as expectations appears to be far removed from days when a woman who failed to give birth was considered to be failing in her filial piety duties.

It has been argued that raising children is a private matter and should remain outside the realm of Government to avoid negative public reactions. Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen experienced such repercussions first hand in 2005, when he was quoted saying: “Couples, particularly the younger ones, should at least give birth to three kids to help alleviate the ageing population.” This comment was met with considerable disagreement and great debate, with a growing public sentiment that the Government should focus its efforts on developing a consolidated population policy and on making Hong Kong a better place to raise a family rather than involving itself with women’s childbirth choices.

In 2011, there were 6,110 Type I babies born in Hong Kong (these are babies which have a mother from Mainland China and a father from Hong Kong with permanent resident status) and 35,736 Type II babies born (those born to women from Mainland China and men who are not Hong Kong permanent residents).

The Chief Executive implemented a “zero delivery quota” for Type II babies in 2012. Some critics believe that banning Mainland couples from arranging births in Hong Kong was missing the point as well as an opportunity for addressing the problems associated with our ageing population. Careful policies, coupled with the door swinging the other way to allow Hong Kong’s elderly to grow old in Guangdong with access to medical care on a par with Hong Kong’s, would go a long way to addressing our current population problems. In 2001, academics criticised Hong Kong as “staggering in a desert of population policy.” Many would say that ten years on that situation has not changed.

But this is a complicated and controversial policy area. There are proposals on the table, and have been for some time, for increased financial incentives for families. However, critics argue that it is not just about money. The opportunity cost of having children both in terms of finances and success at work, coupled with the continued imbalance of the share of child care and domestic work is enough to discourage women from childbirth. They say a financial incentive attached to the number of children does little to address the declining birth rate.
Illustrative of further conflict in the lives and minds of women in this age band, and contrary to the current reports about the increasing number of women and men who do not want to have children, a survey commissioned by the Women’s Commission in 2011 found that 44.7 per cent of females and 37.9 per cent of males agreed that life without a child was empty. Although only one piece of evidence, this response indicates that indeed, Hong Kong people would be willing to have more children if Hong Kong was a more children-friendly place, with appropriate support for raising children, improved housing, improved education, more family-friendly working practices, better air quality and so on—all areas that the government can address.

The constraints and the unknowns of young female migrants

For middle class families, the solution to the work-family conflict is linked to the foreign domestic helper and around 10 per cent of households employ such a person. The population of 30-39 years women declined by 4.6 per cent between 1996 and 2011, but if the large number of foreign domestic helpers is excluded, the decline is 15.5 per cent between 1996 (the date from which such data on domestic helpers is available) and 2011. In 1996, foreign domestic helpers represented 8.9 per cent of women aged 30-39 years and by 2010 they represented 19.3 per cent. The largest proportions of overseas women in the 30-39 years age group were Indonesian, Filipina and Indian (previously the third largest group was from Thailand).

The ethnic composition of Hong Kong’s population of women aged 30-39 years had the largest proportion of non-Chinese women in 2011 at 21.0 per cent, with that of women aged 20-29 years close behind at 18.2 per cent. Although the majority of these women were from Indonesia and the Philippines and the majority are working as foreign domestic helpers, there have been increases in Indian, British, Australian, American and “Other” nationalities over the last 20 years.

There are also more women in their 30s entering from Mainland China on one-way permits than any other age group—34.4 per cent of all women entering from Mainland China on one-way permits in 2011 were in their 30s. However, this represented only 1.6 per cent of all women in Hong Kong aged 30-39 years in 2011. The statistics show that this cohort of women from Mainland China tends to possess lower levels of educational attainment than their Hong Kong counterparts who now predominantly complete secondary school and go onto post-secondary education in large proportions but recent research shows that they are catching up. Educational attainment levels of 30-39-year-old women in Hong Kong have improved over recent years, with 28.8 per cent completing postsecondary degrees in 2011. For the last fifteen years, the gender ratio at Hong Kong’s publicly-funded universities has changed to favour women.

It is not the case that all new entrants are poorly educated. Women from the Philippines working as domestic helpers in particular often have university degrees. A review of research on recent immigrants by the Women’s Foundation in 2006 found that: “...[new-arrival women] are about as well educated and do wish to support themselves by working. On the other hand, new-arrival women are subjected to discrimination, and typically find only low paid work with poor working conditions. They have difficulty adjusting to Hong Kong, a region where they cannot even read the...
A 2006 report on poverty by Oxfam Hong Kong found that poverty had increased among all low-income groups from 1997 to 2003 due to the economic downturn. This report also indicated that women, ethnic minorities, and new immigrants had suffered the greatest hardship due to discrimination and social exclusion. Academic research carried out in the early 2000s showed that recent immigrant women tend to have weak labour force attachment compared to local women, particularly for women in their 30s when domestic responsibilities (child bearing and rearing) would be a constraint. It is also difficult for immigrant women to compete for a job with local women who have generally higher educational attainment and more local work experience. Consequently, they tend to fill the low-skilled jobs such as “service workers and shop sales workers”, are employed in “elementary occupations” and earn less than local people.

The reality is that little is known about immigrant women and how their lives evolve, particularly non-Chinese women. A newspaper article at the end of 2011 summarised the situation as follows: “A major problem in evaluating the situation of ethnic minority women in Hong Kong is the lack of available data. Tracing social indicators such as labour force participation, incidents of sexual harassment or abuse, and take up of available health services would provide important insight.”

What little we can see in the ethnicities of women in their 20s and 30s illustrates permeable global boundaries allowing more women to come into Hong Kong from other countries and more leaving to study and seek work experience overseas. This shifting demographic brings with it changing values and different expectations that are evident in women in their 20s and 30s and today.

**Coping with change**

This is the age group appears to have benefited most in terms of economics and opportunities. They have the highest earnings, the highest-level occupations and the highest proportions in private housing. Despite these strides, this age band also lives in the broadest range of household structures—reflecting the highest proportions of never married women, no longer making children a certainty. They are coping with dramatic changes in population composition, social structures and family dynamics, many of which has yet to be fully explored and researched. The power of traditional Chinese values and the force of modernisation in a global society will reverberate throughout the years to come. Confusion and conflict are likely to remain present in the workplace, in the home and in society at large, and all of it is being passed down to the younger women of the day whose expectations regarding their achievements and their lifestyles are becoming increasingly pressurised.
Snapshot of women today aged 20-29 years

Notes:
• Age band: all information is for women aged 20-29 years old unless stated (where information could not be found for women aged 20-29 years, it is presented for other relevant age groups).
• Summary statistics below are derived from detailed analysis and more complete statistics of women aged 20-29 years presented in Section 5.

The age of complexity

This is the most highly educated age group of women, which has grown up in an era with a developed and active women’s movement and increasingly pervasive culture of equal opportunities. However, as seen with women aged 30-39 years, this does not mean that their experiences match men’s experiences. Although many of the socio-economic statistics point to broad equality between young women and men today, there are complexities in the data and attitudinal surveys that suggest a young population grappling with its changing demographics, increasingly flexible opportunities with regard to work and family, and the amalgamation of values brought on by increased globalisation.

Contradictions in education

Women now occupy a higher proportion of university places than men, with 53.0 per cent of women aged 20-29 years achieving postsecondary study in 2011 compared to 18.0 per cent in 1991. Their subject choices, whilst

Most likely characteristics of a 20-29-year-old woman today:
• Chinese
• Unmarried, no children, possibly cohabiting
• Living in a four person household with spouse/children or parents in private permanent housing in the New Territories
• Postsecondary education, most likely at university studying education, arts, health or social sciences
• Employed, most likely working full time in ‘care or import/export/retail at any occupational level
• Earning around HK$10,000 per month
• Neither arrested nor sentenced
• Not a reported drug abuser
• Did not vote in District Council elections or Legislative Council elections

Other trajectories:
• Married at median age 28.9 years
• Possibly one baby (median age for first child now 30.0 years)
• Living in a three to five person household in subsidised home ownership housing or public rental housing
• Student
• Domestic helper from Indonesia or the Philippines, unmarried, earning <HK$6,000
### Women aged 20-29 years

#### Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Women aged 20-29 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>531,000 women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.9% of total female population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,260 one-way permit holders from Mainland China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>534,400 women (451,200 men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.2% of total female population (13.7% male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7,295 one-way permit holders from Mainland China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1996-2011: female population aged 20-29 years increased by 1.2 per cent, but declined by 4.5%, if domestic helpers are excluded.

#### Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>92.0% Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>81.8% Chinese (96.1% men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2011, the largest proportion of non-Chinese was Indonesians at 11.2% of the total, followed by Filipinas at 4.2% of the total.

#### Marriage and family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Now married</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widowed/divorced/separated</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Now married</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widowed/divorced/separated</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If domestic helpers are excluded, proportions shift to 84.2% never married and 15.4% now married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Median age at first marriage in 2011 was 28.9 years (31.2 years for men).

#### Age-specific fertility rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>39.1 births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25-29 years</td>
<td>97.4 births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>20.1 births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25-29 years</td>
<td>56.6 births</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: Significant decline in age specific fertility rates as median age at first child birth moved out to 30.0 years in 2011.

#### Single female parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,276 single female parents aged 20-29 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3,103 single female parents aged 20-29 years (3,513 men), 4.8 per cent of all female single parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Household and living arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2 person</th>
<th>3 person</th>
<th>4 person</th>
<th>5 person</th>
<th>6+ person</th>
<th>Single person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 1991-2001: decline in large households and concentration in 4 person households, followed by 3 and 5 person households
- In 2011, 36.8% of women aged 25-34 years were living with their parents (*58.6% men*), the highest of all age groups and surpassed proportion living with spouse and children for the first time

### Educational attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No or primary only schooling</th>
<th>Lower secondary</th>
<th>Upper secondary</th>
<th>Postsecondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: more than half of women aged 20-29 years now have postsecondary attainment and the rest predominantly have upper secondary.
### Employment and earnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>20-29 students</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Homemakers</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Labour force participation</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2011, women aged 25-29 years have the highest labour force participation rate, but the rate of women aged 20-24 has declined as postsecondary study has increased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>20-29 students</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Homemakers</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Labour force participation</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: Women aged 20-29 years have the largest growth in the proportion in care of all age groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Managers, administrators, professionals</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Service and shop sales</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Craft workers</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Plant/machine operators</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Elementary occupations</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1993-2011: shift in occupations is not as pronounced as for older age groups and men and women are more closely aligned than older age groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Managers, administrators, professionals</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Service and shop sales</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Craft workers</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Plant/machine operators</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Elementary occupations</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20-29 years median nominal monthly earnings HK$5,000; median inflation-adjusted earnings HK$7,663

1991-2011: women and men have equal median monthly earnings if domestic helpers are excluded, but when adjusted for inflation their earnings have only increased slightly since 1991 and since 2001 they have declined in real terms.
## Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrests</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
<th>Drug Abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,322</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1,695 (5,462 men)</td>
<td>1,101 (2,167 men)</td>
<td>558 (4,449 men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: arrests and sentences have been steadily declining since the late 1990s in line with static population growth. Increase in cases of drug abuse is smaller than older age groups.

## Political participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>District Council</th>
<th>Legislative Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>31-40 years: 7.6%</td>
<td>31-40 years: 19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>21-30 years: 9.1% (men 12.8%)</td>
<td>21-30 years: 15.0% (men 19.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Consistently the lowest proportion of voters to age specific population of all age groups in District Council and Legislative Council elections and well below men
still heavily skewed to “female” subjects like education, arts and humanities, business management and health, are increasingly moving towards medicine, sciences and engineering. There has also been a recent increase in the number of women attending the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (HKIVE) where women have historically been in a minority because the training emphasised was not particularly relevant to women, focusing on male-dominated occupations such as construction and vehicle repairs. In 2010/11, women made up 42.3 per cent of the total students at HKIVE and numbers of both women and men have particularly grown at the higher technician level, compared to the lower craft and technician levels.

Despite these encouraging statistics, girls and women may still have very different experiences to boys and men when it comes to education. It was only ten years ago (when women in their 20s today would have been attending secondary school) that the EOC won its case against the Director of Education regarding preferential treatment of boys under the Secondary School Placement Allocation System. A report by the Women’s Foundation published in 2006 drew the following conclusion: “Education research... shows us that schools are incubators for sexism and gender stereotyping”.

However, the Third Report of the HKSAR on CEDAW found that the “promotion of concepts and values on gender awareness is achieved by the school curriculum, such as the subject General Studies at primary level, Liberal Studies in secondary schools as well as Moral and Civic Education in both primary and secondary schools”. In terms of higher education, it pointed out that government-funded gender studies are offered at the postgraduate level.

Contradictions in employment

The statistics around labour force participation are encouraging with women aged 25-29 years having the strongest work presence recorded at 87.5 per cent in 2011. The proportions of women in the earnings spectrum, whilst notably lower in 2011 than women aged 30-39 years in the top ≥HK$20,000 range, as would be expected since these younger women have not had time to progress up the career ladder, were more evenly spread out across the other earnings brackets than in older age bands and had a lower proportion in the bottom <HK$6,000 category than women aged 30-39 years (probably due to the lower number of domestic helpers, albeit still substantial). However, despite less pronounced polarisation than in older age groups, they also had the highest proportion of women who were unemployed in 2011 at 3.1 per cent, although for the lowest median duration.

Whilst earnings are more evenly spread across the 20-29 years population, they are also more in line with men than any other age group, as would be expected as this age band—to a large degree—is not yet affected by the distractions of marriage and family responsibilities. Median nominal monthly earnings were HK$8,800 for all women aged 20-29 years in 2011, but HK$10,000 excluding domestic helpers, on a par with men. Men and women’s (excluding domestic helpers) wages for this age group have been within around HK$500 to HK$1,000 of each other over the last 20 years.

However, whilst this seems promising, when earnings are adjusted for inflation, they have actually declined for both men and women aged 20-29 years over the last decade from HK$11,144 in today’s money in
The Changing Faces of Hong Kong

When earnings are adjusted for inflation, they have actually declined for both men and women aged 20-29 years over the last decade.

2001 to HK$10,000 in 2011. Nelson Chow Wing-sun, a professor at Hong Kong University, was quoted at the end of 2012 as saying: “[Former Chief Executive Donald] Tsang created a whole class of new poor: the young...The middle class is sliding back into poverty and we now have a new generation that is on the margin of poverty...Imagine parents working hard to put a child through university in the hope of a better future. In the end, the child earns [less than HK$20,000]...Job diversity is so narrow in Hong Kong. No wonder young people become frustrated and angry. They feel stuck...”

Despite equal levels of educational attainment and earnings excluding domestic helpers, occupational sex segregation is still evident. First, whilst there were similar numbers of men and women aged 20-29 years who were professionals and associate professionals at the top end of occupational levels in 2011, a total of 128,900 men and 118,000 women, the proportion of the total was higher for men at 39.6 per cent compared to 30.1 per cent for women. And there were noticeably more women filling positions of clerks and in elementary occupations at the bottom end than men, largely because of the high number of domestic helpers in this age group. A combined total of 188,400 women compared to 84,400 men were clerks and in elementary occupations, proportionally 48.2 per cent of women and 25.9 per cent of men (and very few men were craft workers or plant and machine operators).

Second, by sector, there were an overwhelming 41.3 per cent of women this age in public administration, social and personal services. In contrast, men had their largest proportion in transport, storage, postal and courier services, information and communications. A possible explanation for this gender difference could be the social conditioning that conforms to gender stereotyping—leading women toward predominantly caring professions (although a substantial number of these women will be domestic helpers) and shop services and orienting men toward higher-level IT roles in communications.

A negative view would be that the young women who would have worked in manufacturing, have simply been transferred to the equivalent low-level jobs in retail and in care in the new economy. The decline in the number of women in their 20s working in the manufacturing industry is significant as with other age groups. Although there were only 22.7 per cent of 20-29 years women in manufacturing in 1991, compared to the much higher 31.2 per cent of women aged ≥60 years, 35.6 per cent of women aged 40-59 years and 31.1 per cent of women aged 30-39 years, this proportion declined to 1.4 per cent by 2011 with the difference taken up by roles in public administration, social and personal services and retail, accommodation and food services.

Complicated values

Whilst opportunities have opened up and men and women start out in the world on a more level footing, there are complications all along the way. Such complications are also manifested in their values. The proportion of never married women increased considerably from 67.1 per cent in 1991 to 81.9 per cent in 2011, as the median age for marriage moved out to 28.9 years in 2011. Despite the high number of young people aged 20-29 years who remain unmarried, a survey on family values in 2008 found that young people aged 29 years or younger were more supportive of marriage...
as a “necessary step in life” and were more supportive of “child bearing [as being] important in marriage” than respondents aged 30-39 years and 40-49 years. However, in the same study, higher education was associated with lower support for marriage, and this age group is the most highly educated of all age groups.

In addition, despite their strong support for marriage, young people aged 29 years or younger were also more likely to accept cohabitation than older respondents, seeing it as either a probation period before marriage or a natural transitional period from dating to marriage. The study clearly states, however, that cohabitation does not replace marriage. Respondents of this age were also more likely than older respondents to agree that a childless couple is more ideal than a nuclear family.

Similarly, the five-yearly Youth Sexuality Study conducted by the Family Planning Association in 2006, a survey of 4,400 young people, found that 59 per cent of female respondents and 55 per cent of male respondents in the 18-27 year age group indicated that they would get married in the future and among them there was an increasing trend of cohabitation before marriage. The views found in these surveys suggest that for young people today, traditional views and some very modern views exist side by side. This was also confirmed in a survey in 2002 of approximately 400 women (not specifically in the 20-29 years age group) in Hong Kong on their values and spending, which showed that although Hong Kong is an international city with women earning enough to make their own spending decisions, 50 per cent of women still hold traditional beliefs about the family.

Contradictions in independence

This raises another conflict. Although it is true that many women in Hong Kong now have enough spending power and status at work and in the home to make their own spending and other decisions (as explained in the discussion on women aged 30-39 years), and increasingly young women may go abroad for a period to finish their education and start their careers, many young people, 36.8 per cent of women aged 25-34 years in 2011, were still living with their parents in Hong Kong. Notably, a much higher proportion of men the same age, 58.6 per cent, were living with their parents in 2011. The high proportion that lives with their parents has increased over recent years and has much to do with the high cost of housing. Across all age bands, this age group had the highest proportion of all in subsidised home ownership housing and the second highest proportion in public rental housing in 2011, as well as the highest proportion living in the New Territories.

Naturally a lower proportion of women than in other age groups live with their spouse and/or children because the median age for marriage is now 28.9 years and for childbirth is 30.0 years. But these household structures whereby such large proportions of young adults still live with their parents are in conflict with the growing independence of women today. This independence comes not only from better opportunities in the workplace and the potential to be financially independent, but also from the effects of globalisation and the increasing mobility of populations around the world.
Contradictions in social contribution

The data reflected a slowdown in crime for this age group, the opposite of the older women ≥60 years of age. Women aged 20-29 years had the slowest growth in arrests and in cases of women admitted to penal institutions of any age group of women from 1991 to 2011. In terms of official arrests, the proportional total of 0.32 per cent was actually in line with other age groups in 2011. Whilst data for men reflected a high proportion of arrests than for women at 1.35 per cent of the male population aged 20-29 years, similar to that of men aged 30-39 years, the yearly rate of growth had also slowed in recent years. The same was true of drug abuse with lower increases in cases of women aged 20-29 years officially reported compared to women aged 30-39 and 40-59 years, although this also had much to do with general population trends.

Whilst evidence suggests that members of this age band are “good citizens”, they appear to be indifferent when it comes to voting. Despite growing up in the 1990s and early 2000s, an era when the women’s movements was at its height both locally and globally, they had the lowest proportions of voters to registered electors and to total age-specific population of age group in the most recent District Council elections. They vied for bottom place with women ≥61 years in the recent Legislative Council elections in terms of proportion of voters to registered electors and in 2008 were even lower than men the same age, the only time this occurred in all age groups except for the ≥61 years age group. Even worse, their proportion of voters to total age specific population, arguably a more representative measurement of political participation since the government encourages people to register as electors whereas individuals make the decision to vote themselves, were the lowest of all by significant margins in the last four Legislative Council elections.

Addressing the complexities and contradictions

Many of these complexities and contradictions will persist and in order to manage them, more understanding is needed of young people’s values in Hong Kong’s increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse population. Only then can the appropriate policies be put in place to ensure that the experience of education matches educational attainment and that the employment experiences are not segregated for men and women, and that family responsibilities and contributions to the community are shared and prioritised.
Snapshot of women and girls today aged 15-19 years

Notes:
- Age band: data for this group was available in many different age groups which are stated throughout.
- Summary statistics below are derived from detailed analysis and more complete statistics of women and girls aged 15-19 years presented in Section 6.

The unknown

In a 2006 report, the Women’s Foundation concluded: “Girls and children in general are an area of great concern and little research”.129 As with the elderly, this remains the case today which means the concern has probably compounded over time. But whilst this research built up a clear picture that Hong Kong is an unforgiving place to grow old and policies need to be put in place to improve the socio-economic lot of the elderly in our city immediately, for young girls no such certainty has evolved. The age band analysis did not build up a clear picture of their situation and little was found in terms of research that gave insights into the values and priorities of young girls today.

What we do know is that the population of young girls has decreased by 22.2 per cent since 1991 to its 2011 level of 630,700, only 16.0 per cent of the total population of women. As the fertility rate of Hong Kong women declined through the late 1980s to early 2000s, so too has the population of young, leaving Hong Kong with a predominantly ageing

Most likely characteristics of a teenage girl today:
- Chinese
- In education
- Unmarried with no children
- Living in a four person household in private permanent housing in the New Territories, with parents and a sibling
- Neither arrested nor sentenced
- Not a reported drug abuser
- Did not vote in District Council elections and Legislative Council elections

Other trajectories:
- Employed in import/export/retail or care as a shop sales/service worker or clerk earning around HK$6,000 per month
- Living in a one-parent household (due to divorce or “astronaut” family where one parent works in Mainland China or overseas)
## Women and girls aged ≤19 years

### Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>401,200 women and girls aged 10-19 years</td>
<td>237,100 women and girls aged 10-19 years (451,200 men and boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.3% of total female population</td>
<td>9.7% of total female population (11.8% male)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: 8.6% decline in female population aged 10-19 years

### Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97.7% Chinese</td>
<td>94.8% Chinese (95.2% men and boys)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of Chinese women and girls was higher for this age group than any other except for women ≥60 years

### Marriage and family

Vast majority of 15-19 years women and girls were unmarried in 2011: 205,600 recorded as unmarried representing 99.6% of population, 476 recorded as married

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age-specific fertility rate for women aged 15-19 years was 6.5 births</td>
<td>Age-specific fertility rate for women aged 15-19 years was 2.0 births</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: Low teenage births and declining

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 single female parents aged &lt;20 years</td>
<td>71 single female parents aged &lt;20 years (24 men)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2011: Low numbers of single parents but increasing

### Household and living arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33.4% of women and girls aged 10-19 years in 6+ person households</td>
<td>10.3% of women and girls aged 10-19 years in 6+ person households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.4% in 5 person, 26.4% in 4 person households</td>
<td>22.7% in 5 person, 39.8% in 4 person, 21.9% in 3 person households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2% in 3 person, 2.3% in 2 person, 0.3% in single person households</td>
<td>5.2% in 2 person, 0.1% in single person households</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991-2001: Significant decline in large households and concentration in 4 person households
Household and living arrangements (continued)

- 41.5% of women and girls aged 0-19 years in private permanent housing
- 7.8% in subsidized home ownership housing
- 44.6% in public rental housing

- 53.5% of women and girls aged 0-19 years in private permanent housing
- 14.0% in subsidized home ownership housing
- 31.7% in public rental housing

1991-2011: biggest increase in private permanent housing and lowest proportion of in subsidized home ownership housing together with women aged 30-39 years

- 49.3% of women and girls aged 0-19 years in New Territories
- 31.1% Kowloon
- 19.6% Hong Kong Island

- 54.7% of women and girls aged 0-19 years in New Territories
- 29.1% Kowloon
- 17.5% Hong Kong Island

Educational attainment

- Vast majority in education and will complete through to post-secondary on 3+3+4 curriculum, some in UGC-funded institutions but many at private colleges and overseas
- In 2011, there were 89.6% of 15-19 year old girls in education

Employment and earnings

- 72.1% of women and girls aged 15-19 years were students
- 23.8% employed
- 7.5% official unemployment

- 89.7% of women and girls aged 15-19 years were students
- 9.3% economically active (either employed or looking for work)
- 13.6% official unemployment—the proportion of those who are economically active not currently employed (17.9% men and boys)

- Of the small proportion employed, most are in retail/import/export and care
- Most are service works and shop sales workers, some are clerks and elementary workers (men and boys are similar but more elementary workers and less clerks)
- Increasingly high official unemployment but low duration of unemployment at 71 days for 15-19 years in 2011

- 15-19 years median nominal monthly earnings HK$4,000; median inflation-adjusted earnings HK$6,130

- 15-19 years median nominal monthly earnings HK$6,000, (HK$6,500 men and boys)

1991-2011: women and men had equal median monthly earnings if domestic helpers are excluded, but when adjusted for inflation their earnings only increased slightly since 1991 and since 2001 they declined in real terms
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Crime

- 1,722 arrests women and girls ≤20 years
- 204 sentences women and girls 18-20 years
- 318 cases of drug abuse in women and girls ≤20 years

1991-2011: the only age group to post a decline in arrests but broadly in line with lack of population growth; significant rise in sentences in 1990s but declines in 2000s; increases in drug abuse cases *(the only male group to increase)*

- 1,509 arrests women and girls ≤20 years *(6,184 men and boys)*
- 146 sentences women and girls 18-20 years *(545 men and boys)*
- 601 cases of drug abuse in women and girls ≤20 years *(1,405 men and boys)*

Political participation

1991

| Voters in District Council elections as proportion of total female population |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 18-20 years: 9.4%           | 18-20 years: 13.2% |

| Voters in Legislative Council elections as proportion of total female population |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 18-20 years: 19.4%          | 18-20 years: 20.8% |

1999

- Low proportions of voters to age specific population in District and Council elections but not as low as for women aged 21-20 years and generally higher than men

2008

- Chart 6.12
- Table 6.4
- Table 6.5
population. However, in recent years the decline has stemmed and the population of 0-9 years young girls has stabilised, even increased a little in the last couple of years. But the child dependency ratio (number of persons under 15 per 1,000 people aged 15-64 years) in 2011 was 155, down from 229 in 2001, whereas the elderly dependency ratio increased from 154 to 177 in 2011.

Figures also indicate that 94.8 per cent of girls under 20 years old are Chinese, a decline from 97.7 per cent in 1991, which is attributed to the growing number of people coming into Hong Kong from overseas. The largest proportions of girls by ethnicity other than Chinese are British, Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Sri Lankan and Indian, different from older age groups which are skewed by the high numbers of foreign domestic helpers from Indonesia and the Philippines. At present, we know very little else about growing up as an ethnic minority in Hong Kong.

Nearly all young girls today are in school (89.6 per cent of 15-19 year olds in 2011) and benefit from the 12 years free education in the new 3+3+4 format. Some girls may be sent overseas to boarding school and to university, particularly to the US and the UK. Many of those then start their careers overseas in high-level jobs at banks for example. Little is known about the number and educational experience of these young girls and women but as they return, they bring their new “global” experience and values back into Hong Kong society.

A small number of young girls and women of this age are already in employment in retail, accommodation and food services and public administration, social and personal services, which probably means as waitresses and shop assistants or in care roles. In 2011, they earned a median monthly wage of HK$6,000 which is closest to women ≥60 years at HK$6,800. Whilst worryingly low, of greater concern is the fact that their real earnings have remained static over 20 years and have declined over the last ten years. Also official unemployment is high amongst this age group. Economic opportunities appear to be very narrow, despite increasing levels of educational attainment for the young of today.

Growing up in smaller families

From a family perspective, we know that children are growing up in smaller households, mainly in the New Territories. The average household size declined from 4.5 persons in 1971 to 3.4 persons in 1991 to 2.9 persons in 2011. The largest proportion of girls, 39.8 per cent, was living in a four person household with their parents in 2011. After four person households, 22.7 per cent were living in five person households and 21.9 per cent in three person households, with much lower proportions in six person and two person households of 10.3 per cent and 5.2 per cent respectively. Over the last 20 years, the proportions of two and three person households have risen and the proportions of bigger households have declined.

These figures reflect the ever-decreasing family size and the declining number of extended families. A 2008 survey on family values delivered inconclusive results with regard to attitudes on extended families. Whilst the survey showed that the majority of respondents were willing to live with their parents or with their adult children, focus groups concluded
that participants almost unanimously reject this household structure and described the picture of the nuclear family as ideal.\textsuperscript{130}

In place of the traditional extended family model, there are now more small, nuclear families, 66.3 per cent of all families in 2011. There are also trends towards more dual income families, more single parents, more childless couples, more divorces, more second marriages and therefore stepfamilies. The same 2008 survey on family values found that attitudes towards family values “have become more heterogeneous over the last three decades”.\textsuperscript{131}

There are multiple factors at work that have put pressure on traditional family structures—increasingly “Westernised” values, dilution of Chinese traditions, later marriage and delayed or no childbirth, the rise of divorce, the increasing acceptability of single parenting, the influx of domestic helpers and the increasing participation of women in the work force, to name a few—most of which are covered in previous sections. Globalisation has also had an impact.

In the 1980s and 1990s, after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 and during the run up to the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, there was a significant exodus of people from Hong Kong to countries such as Canada, Australia, the UK and the US. This “flexible citizenship” resulted in varying family forms known as “astronaut families”\textsuperscript{132} where one adult, usually the husband, worked in Hong Kong while the wife and children lived overseas.\textsuperscript{133} Whilst many of these people are said to have returned subsequently to Hong Kong, the practice of having a domestic base in one place and working in another has not disappeared, putting pressure on traditional family structures.

Social responsibility

The lack of gender-specific research on young people as reported by the 2006 Women’s Foundation report indicates a lack of real understanding of the social and economic conditions of girls and women in Hong Kong today. The official statistics show that few young girls have children in their teens—the age-specific fertility rate was 2.0 per 1,000 15-19-year-old girls in 2011. However, it has been reported that a study carried out for NGO Mother’s Choice in 2011, which counsels pregnant young women and girls, found that around 7,000 girls face “crisis pregnancies” each year and that estimate may be conservative.\textsuperscript{134}

Official statistics also show that crime is not rising. The official number of arrests has remained static over the two decades, even declined a little with the population decline. On the other hand, the officially recorded instances of drug abuse have increased over the last 20 years. The increase in drug abuse amongst girls aged ≤20 years was the largest of any age group, a rise of 89.0 per cent from 318 young women and girls officially reported as drug abusers in 1991 to 601 young women and girls in 2011, despite an overall population decline in this age group. It is not just a phenomenon of young women and girls. This was the only age group of young men and boys to show an increase in drug abuse. A 2006 report by the Women’s Foundation summarised that existing research shows that one in five young people admit to depressive symptoms, and drug and alcohol problems were rapidly rising amongst young people. The report
also found that research showed girls to be excessively concerned about body image and weight.\textsuperscript{135}

Young women are also more politically active than women in their 20s who appear to be the most apathetic group when it comes to voting. The proportion of voting women to registered electors aged 18-20 years in District Council elections increased significantly between the 1991 and 2007 elections and although it dropped in 2011, the proportion of voters to total age specific population remained quite constant. However, whilst the proportions of aged 18-20 years voting woman to registered electors tend to be above the overall, they are low as a proportion to total age-specific population. Women this age also had the highest voter turnout in all of the four most recent Legislative Council elections, significantly above the proportions for all women and for men of the same age. However, again, as a proportion of the total age specific population, women this age had low turnout, although not as low as for women in their 20s. Those proportions of total population have been higher for women than men each year. An opinion poll conducted by the Hong Kong Confederation of Youth Groups in 2000 showed that there were generally positive attitudes about volunteering in the community by young people and more young girls than boys volunteer.\textsuperscript{136}

A recent newspaper column written by a long-term cultural historian who teaches at the University of Hong Kong summarised her view of young women and girls in Hong Kong today: “Most of the women in my classes hope to achieve success at home and at work. They are loyal to and respectful of parents, deeply embedded in family networks and willing to negotiate between personal and professional demands. They’re keen to embrace some traditions while reinventing or jettisoning others. They seek partners who will share the load”.\textsuperscript{137}

Addressing the pressure of success

In summary, what we do know about these young women and girls is that they are well-educated individuals who are expecting the same career opportunities as their male counterparts. Values regarding the position of women are changing rapidly, creating dramatic opportunities and challenges. The expectations placed on young women today create extraordinary pressure to succeed in all aspects of life. Through globalisation the world is shrinking whilst opportunities are expanding, although in Hong Kong this is in the difficult current context high unemployment and declining real earnings for young people. Such complexities make it imperative that young women claim a legitimate place in society.

For these reasons, and the fact that women are still underrepresented in many aspects of employment and society, the Women’s Foundation has made repeated calls that “we are not doing enough to raise our girls to be leaders”\textsuperscript{138} and that mentors for girls and women at all stages of their education and career are critically important.\textsuperscript{139} In a world of equality, we also need to mentor the next generation of men to step forward to juggle responsibilities.\textsuperscript{140} To achieve this, research is needed that delves deeply into the generational markers that are defining this important, future segment of society.
Endnotes


3. Census and by-census data (years 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011) covers the Hong Kong Resident Population, which includes usual residents and mobile residents (usual residents are Permanent Residents who stayed in Hong Kong for at least three months during the six months before or after the census or Non-permanent Residents who were in Hong Kong at the census reference moment). General Household Survey data used in other years covers the land-based non-institutional population of Hong Kong and therefore excludes residents of institutions and person living on board vessels, which means that it covers approximately 99 per cent of the Hong Kong Resident Population. This may account for some differences in data across years.

4. The terms used for industries of employment are abbreviations of the categorisations of industries provided by the Census and Statistics Department of the HKSAR Government, which are explained in detail in Section 2.

5. Elementary occupations are those that mainly use handheld tools and often some physical effort to carry out simple and routine tasks. These include cleaners; security guards; building caretakers; messengers; delivery workers; couriers; dishwashers; freight handlers; lift operators; labourers/general workers; hand packers; and card/pamphlet distributors. For definitions of all occupations, see the notes to the analysis on occupations in Section 2.

6. According to the Government Census and Statistics Department, a retired person is a person who has worked previously but is not currently working because of old age, and a homemaker is a person who looks after the home without pay.


8. The Touch Base Policy refers to the policy implemented from November 1974 to October 1980 on illegal immigrants from Mainland China whereby those who were arrested were repatriated but those who “reached base”, that is gained a home with relatives or otherwise found proper accommodation, were permitted to stay.

9. The Gini coefficient is a scale from 0-1 on which higher scores indicate greater income inequality. Based on income data in 2011, Hong Kong had a Gini coefficient of 0.537, Singapore 0.482 and the US 0.469. In 2006 Hong Kong’s Gini coefficient was 0.533 30 years ago in 1981, it was 0.451.


15. Janet W. Sallaff published a highly acclaimed book called *Working Daughters of Hong Kong* in 1981, a study of 28 working daughters who were women in low income families, from which this term “working daughters” was coined.


22. The International Labour Organisation defines the working poor as those people who work but do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the poverty threshold. While there is no official poverty line or threshold in Hong Kong, studies generally consider a household to be living in poverty if its monthly income is below 50 per cent of the median income of households of the same size.


35. According to the Government Census and Statistics Department, the age-specific fertility rate (AFR) refers to the number of live births occurring to women in a given age group during a given calendar year per 1,000 female population (excluding foreign domestic helpers) at mid-year in that age group.

36. According to the Government Census and Statistics Department, single parents are defined as mothers or fathers who are widowed, divorced or separated, and living with child(ren) under the age of 18 in the same household.


70. Gender Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2012), *Exploratory Study on Gender Stereotyping and Its Impacts on Male Gender*. commissioned by the


119. For further analysis on this see DeGolyer, M. for Civic Exchange (2012), The Changing Faces of Hong Kong: Women in the Community and National Context, 1994-2010, Hong Kong.


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