

Topics related to gender in my country-An Introduction to Workplace and Domestic Violence in Hong Kong

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Once upon a time, women could only dream of being CEOs. Fortunately, in Hong Kong, the concept of women as CEO is no longer a dream. For instance, according to the *Standard Chartered Bank Women on Boards: Hang Seng Index 2012 Report*, in the business sector, 9% of the 634 directorships of companies of the Hang Seng Index 2012 are occupied by women. However, despite a higher pay check and greater prominence in the community, today, there are competent woman who are distraught and troubled. Why is this? One of the answers to this question is the existence of harassment in the workplace and in the home.

A recent published survey carried out in the course of 12 month's by the Equal Opportunities Commission and other NGOs in Hong Kong revealed that approximately 20% of interviewees have been sexually assaulted at least once in their lives. Such methods of harassment include indecent staring, sexual jokes and innuendos and unwanted caresses of clothes and body. Currently, in Hong Kong we have the Sexual Discrimination Ordinance, but there are not many employers with anti-sexual assaults laws or policies in their companies. In fact, during my internship at one of the courts, one of the judges told me that many victims of assaults in the workplace have kept their head low and pretended that the assault had never occurred in order to keep their job and feed their family. Some did not report the attacks because they feared that they would not be taken seriously and would be labeled as a mere "troublemaker," and risk jeopardizing all future opportunities of employment. Indeed, more has to be done to protect the vulnerable female victims in Hong Kong who feel that they have no one to turn to. Increased legislation is one method, education of youth is another.

In many cultures as in Hong Kong, the home is viewed as a secure place of sanctuary, a castle from the storms. Unfortunately, this does not apply to women suffering from domestic violence. As reported by the Hong Kong Police Force in 2012, there are 2,157 criminal cases of domestic violence in Hong Kong, representing a 19.1% increase from 2006. Our *Domestic Violence Ordinance, Cap 189* was amended in 2008, which has raised the awareness of domestic violence in Hong Kong. Though our laws allow for non-molestation and ouster orders against the violent spouse, this statute is not as frequently utilized as it should have been due to the great social taboo associated with women reporting violence against them, especially if they were caused by family members. Some of the women I have met confided that they felt powerless and obliged

to keep their family shame secret, because they were taught from a young age that “family shame should not be told to outsiders.” This phrase is known to almost every local primary school student, and it is so common that it has almost acquired the status of a proverb. Who then can a vulnerable female seek help from, if not from outside of the family, if her spouse is the abuser and her in-laws turn a blind eye to the abuse?

What factors make it more likely for women to be victims of violence both in the home or the workplace? According to the research of the *Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong*, factors that increase the incidence of violence in Hong Kong include cross-border marriages, unemployment, family stress, lack of resources, and pregnancy. Indeed, a 2007 survey showed that Chinese women who migrated to Hong Kong from mainland China after marrying a Hong Kong family are more vulnerable to psychological aggressions, sexual coercions, and physical assaults.

How can you reduce your risks of becoming a victim? As a lawyer-to-be, I believe that knowledge is power. To protect yourself and your loved ones, improve your knowledge about the laws against violence in your country and the bodies of authorities that you can turn to, so that you can be empowered to seek the support you need, should you come across violence in the workplace and beyond.