

'Glass ceiling' still a reality for Hong Kong's working women

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Equal Opportunities Commission chairman York Chow. Photo: Felix Wong

Women make up more than half the working population but earn less and work harder than men, the equality watchdog says.

Equal Opportunities Commission chairman York Chow Yat-ngok said yesterday this was largely because women faced difficulties in reaching top management.

"We can see many female workers in our market are from disadvantaged backgrounds, they are new immigrants, less educated and living in poor environments like sub-divided apartments. They face a lot of hardship to get a full-time job," he said.

According to official figures from last year, women - while making up 53 per cent of the work force - accounted for just a third of managers and administrators while a majority worked in elementary

clerical work, services and sales. Their monthly median monthly wage was HK\$10,000 compared to HK\$14,000 for men.

Women's Foundation chief executive Sui-Mei Thompson said woman leaders were significantly under-represented in decision-making and management across the industries and professions.

"For example, women make up only 19 per cent of Hong Kong's legislative and district councils, 10 per cent of senior positions at the Bar and 14 per cent of the senior positions in academia," she said.

Thompson said the reasons were complex, many having to do with persistent discrimination and traditional attitudes about women, men and their leadership aptitude. She also blamed recruitment practices that relied "more on the old boys' network than more inclusive and transparent best practices".

The foundation, a non profit-making organisation, is rolling out its fifth annual mentoring programme to help aspiring women leaders to challenge the status quo and take control of their careers.

The programme, which includes one-on-one meetings and group seminars, will stop accepting candidates at the end of this month. It will pair 50 senior female mentors with 50 successful applicants.

The foundation is looking for mentees with at least five years' work experience and mentors with more than 10 years in a senior or leadership position.