

Make Hong Kong more family-friendly says women's survey

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Su-Mei Thompson: themes

New research shows that Hong Kong requires better policies to make the city a more family-friendly place to live and raise children.

These findings are just one of many in a series of three big reports launched by the Civic Exchange and commissioned by the Women's Foundation, with financial support from Goldman Sachs.

"The Changing Faces of Hong Kong: A Cohort Analysis of Women, 1991-2011", by Louisa Mitchell, analyses, in 250 pages, census data to profile typical women in different age ranges, comparing their situation today with 20 years ago.

A second report by Professor Michael DeGolyer of the Hong Kong Transition Project is titled "Women in the Community and national context 1994-2010", and mines the public opinion data that HKTP has collected since 1994 to reveal changes in attitudes and behaviour of Hong Kong people in areas such as feeling towards national day, issues of concern and political and civic participation. The third report, by Carina Lai, provides a graphical summary of the reports.

Su-mei Thompson, the chief executive of the Women's Foundation, said the aim of the research was to identify themes with a view to informing government policy makers. While many of the reports' findings are unsurprising, some are. So although it is no surprise that learn that women are having fewer children and having them later, it is surprising to learn there has been a six-fold increase in crime among elderly women between 1991 and 2011, against a three-fold increase among men.

DeGolyer said that the age profile in Hong Kong society is lengthening, with the older population being supported by an increasingly narrow base. "Fewer and fewer people are having to carry more

and more people for longer. This is a crucial thing to realise if you want to understand why Hong Kong verges on the edge of unrest at times. It's not going to get better," he said.

Another point was that women were under-represented in functional constituencies, which control the legislative council. This matters, since "it may lead to unconscious biases in Hong Kong's decision-making process," DeGolyer said, adding that poll data show that women are more concerned than men about social and environmental issues. "Democracy aside - the decision-making process needs to be made equitable," he said.

The reports can be found on the Civic Exchange website.

Living dangerously

A few more reasons why the dangers of smoking should be taken seriously: tobacco kills nearly six million people each year, of whom more than 5 million are users and ex-users and more than 600 000 are non-smokers exposed to second-hand smoke. Unless urgent action is taken, the annual death toll could rise to more than eight million by 2030, according to the World Health Organisation.

Smoking kills more people each year than shark deaths, hypothermia, murder, suicide, drowning, death on the roads (1.3 million), industrial accidents, prescription and illegal drugs, tuberculosis (1.4 million) and HIV/Aids (1.7 million) combined, and more than twice as many as alcohol. There is no other consumer product or risk factor that remotely resembles this degree of risk. According to the American Cancer Organisation about half of all Americans who keep smoking will die because of the habit.

Bigger bonuses in Hong Kong

Bonuses are a source of no little interest to the financial community. So we were interested to see from the eFinancialCareers Annual Bonus Survey that 39 per cent of finance professionals in Hong Kong received a bigger bonus in 2012 than they did in 2011, while 22 per cent saw their bonuses fall and 26 per cent received the same amount as they did the year before.

Indeed, the financial community did better in Hong Kong than their counterparts in Australia and Singapore. Only 28 per cent in Australia got a bigger bonus last year than in 2011, while 40 per cent saw a fall and 24 per cent remained the same.

In Singapore 31 per cent saw an increase in their bonus while 33 per cent got less, and 23 per cent remained the same. Across the board, bonuses were higher in Hong Kong, with the average bonus in Hong Kong, Australia and Singapore at 19 per cent, 10 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.