

Press release

Do as I say, not how I act: Young men and gender equality

Hong Kong, June 18, 2021: The Women's Foundation (TWF), Hong Kong's leading NGO dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls, released the first of its kind research to understand the pressures young men face on their path to masculine success and how they perceive gender roles, women's rising status and attitudes towards changing gender relations. The results show that while this generation is not afraid to embrace their feminine side, over 75% of those surveyed have conservative views on gender equality including women's roles at home and women's sexual autonomy.

Launched to coincide with Father's Day, commissioned researchers, Dr Anita Chan from The Education University of Hong Kong and Dr Adam Cheung from the Hong Kong Baptist University, conducted a study based on the views of 1,768 male university students from 11 universities. The study was conducted through a series of self-administered surveys, supplemented by focus group interviews with 48 participants.

From the findings, the researchers were able to categorise the young men into four types: Macho, Restrained, Paternalistic and Liberal, and could rank results from the most conservative to the least conservative:

- **Macho (22%):** The **most conservative** group, agreeing the most strongly with traditional women's roles. They agree strongly with rape myths (examples below), are the most negative towards *Kong Nui* stereotypes and have the most negative attitudes towards feminism and the women's movement. They are the only group who believe the #MeToo movement has had a negative effect on men.
- **Restrained (5%): Conservative**, strongly agree with traditional women's roles, strongly believe in rape myths and have negative attitudes towards feminism and the women's movement.
- **Paternalistic (49%): Conservative** but to a lesser degree. They strongly identify with wanting to protect others, and have a preference that their ideal romantic partner conforms to traditional women's roles such as prioritising motherhood over their own careers. They generally have positive attitudes towards feminism, the #MeToo movement and the women's movement.
- **Liberal (24%):** The **least conservative** group – they don't believe women should conform to traditional roles and don't think that feminism, the #MeToo movement and the women's movement have had negative effects on men.

Altogether, **over 75%** of the men surveyed have conservative views towards gender roles and negative perceptions of changing gender relations to varying degrees. Although many young men self-identify with traditionally feminine traits and support gender equality as a concept, they still hold many double standards when it comes to women including their domesticity, appearance, sexual autonomy and career ambitions (elaborated on in the key findings below).

Key findings include:

- **Life satisfaction matters for gender equality:** Those who have conservative views towards women and are negative towards changing gender relations are **less satisfied with life** than men who are more progressive and positive.
- **Pressure to fulfil expectations of the 'Ideal Man':** An 'ideal man' consists of someone who is wealthy, morally upstanding, has a flourishing career and happy family as well as acts as the **primary earner and protector**.
- **Specific factors influence conservative values:** Young men with certain backgrounds harbour more conservative view towards women, particularly those **active in sports** and who **engage in online forum discussions**. Other factors include not having female siblings, being non-locally born, having attended a co-ed secondary school or having a non-social science / humanities background.
- **Young men are embracing their feminine side:** Among the top five traits young men self-identified with – helpful, independent, understanding, showing emotion and being aware of other people's feelings - only **one trait** was conventionally masculine indicating a **shift in men's gender identity**.
- **Rape myths are common:** Young men **don't condone** violence against women. But they do **believe in many damaging rape myths** including that sexual violence is not a serious issue in Hong Kong, beautiful women are more likely to be sexual assaulted and perpetrators are rare, aggressive men who are identifiable in every day interactions.
- **Ideal partner should be feminine and take on traditional roles at home:** While supportive of women having equal opportunities at work, young men prefer their own partner **not have higher educational qualifications or career achievements** than them. They also prefer she shoulder the **majority of childrearing and housework**, and possess **traditional feminine** traits like being gentle and helpful.
- **Women having a sexual history is understandable, just not preferred:** While young men believe sex is important in a relationship, many still prefer their ideal partner be a **virgin** and / or **not talk about her sexual history**.
- **#MeToo movement positive for sexual assault victims but not always inclusive for men:** While the majority of young men believe the #MeToo movement has had a positive impact for sexual assault victims and awareness-raising, some young men feel **left out** of, and **wrongly framed** by the movement – that it **overlooks** male victims of sexual assault and may **wrongly accuse innocent men** of sexual assault or harassment.
- **Pro-feminism, anti-feminist:** Many young men **support** the idea of feminism and the women's movement but some think the majority of feminists are radical and **confer special privileges on women** at the **expense of men**.

“Gender equality is critical to Hong Kong’s future,” says Fiona Nott, TWF’s CEO. “But we can’t achieve gender equality without engaging everyone. Concerningly, our young men seem unclear on how gender equality benefits them and our society as a whole. We urgently need to address this. We hope findings from this research will spur targeted action in our schools, homes and broader society.”

“This research is an important first step in understanding young men’s views on gender relations in Hong Kong,” noted Dr Anita Chan, Associate Head & Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, The Education University of Hong Kong. “Because of the prevalence of conservative gender ideologies among this new generation, we encourage schools to focus on an inclusive approach to gender education – one that is concrete, relevant and incorporates diverse perspectives. We also hope further research will be conducted into many of the questions raised by this research, particularly around social media use and its potential impacts on how men perceive gender relations.”

The research will be distributed to relevant government bodies, education and social service organisations as well as other key stakeholders for their consideration. TWF will also be drawing on the findings to inform the design of a boys’ gender education programme that effectively helps to cultivate gender equal mindsets and behaviours over the long-term.

To read the full report, visit:

https://twfhk.org/sites/default/files/u6598/masculinities_research_full.pdf

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Photo



(From left to right): **Fiona Nott**, CEO, The Women's Foundation; **Rita Ching**, Principal Adviser, The Women's Foundation; **Dr Anita Chan**, Associate Head & Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, The Education University of Hong Kong; **Dr Adam Cheung**, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Hong Kong Baptist University; **Tony Law**, University Student

About The Women's Foundation

The Women's Foundation is a Hong Kong registered not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Hong Kong. TWF is focused on challenging gender stereotypes, increasing the number of women in decision-making and leadership roles, and empowering women in poverty through ground-breaking research, innovative and impactful community programmes, and education and advocacy. Follow TWF on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

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