

Public Attitudes towards LGBT+ Legal Rights in Hong Kong 2019/20



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SEXUALITIES
RESEARCH
PROGRAMME

Opposition towards LGBT+ legal rights in Hong Kong is now at a historical low

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has often been claimed that the Hong Kong society is 'not ready' for legal protection for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender plus (LGBT+) people because of various cultural and social reasons. However, the cultural and social climate related to LGBT+ issues in Hong Kong is constantly changing. This is especially the case as public presence of LGBT+ people and related issues has been rising locally, regionally as well as globally.

This study aims to provide a latest update on public opinion towards LGBT+ legal rights in Hong Kong at the turn of the decade. There are two outstanding features. First, this study includes questions that were asked in previous studies so that public opinion on LGBT+ issues in Hong Kong can be compared across time. Second, this study explores how 'framing' (using different wordings to refer to LGBT+ rights) is associated with public opinion towards LGBT+ legal rights.

The Sexualities Research Programme of the Chinese University of Hong Kong commissioned the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey at the School of Journalism and Communication, the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct a territory-wide representative telephone survey from 16th September to 25th September, 2019. A random sample of 1,058 people who are Chinese-speaking and aged 18 or above was successfully contacted.

It was found that 40 percent of the respondents said that they knew someone who is homosexual in everyday life. 35 percent of the respondents said they were accepting of homosexuals/ tongzhi, and 43 percent said they stayed neutral.

60 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed that, overall, there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong. 27 percent stayed neutral. Only 12 percent of the respondents said they very much disagreed/ disagreed with that. 49 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed that a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner; 28 percent stayed neutral. Only 23 percent said they disagreed/ very much disagreed with

that. Among the respondents aged 18 to 34, the support for legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong and the right for a homosexual/ tongzhi to marry their partner is at about 80 percent.

When a more relatable language to explain LGBT+ legal rights is used, public support for LGBT+ rights in Hong Kong increased. 45 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed with the implementation of a sexual orientation ordinance in Hong Kong. This is in comparison with the 60 percent of the respondents who said there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong. 44 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed with the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in Hong Kong. This is in comparison with the 49 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed that a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner.

In addition, it was found that there is increasing public support for businesses that are LGBT+ inclusive. There is also increasing public awareness and support for transgender rights. The study also debunks the myths that age, religion and family values translate into wholesale rejection of protection of LGBT+ legal rights. It was also found that those who viewed the development in Taiwan regarding same-sex marriage more positively were also more supportive of LGBT+ legal rights in Hong Kong.

This study finds that opposition towards LGBT+ legal rights in Hong Kong is now at a historical low. Based on empirical evidence, this study concludes that the Government/ politicians/ policy makers stand on no empirical ground to make the argument that Hong Kong is not ready to implement laws and policies that address equal rights for LGBT+ people in Hong Kong.

The remainder of this policy brief will describe the research methodology and findings, as well as explore the implications of the findings in greater detail.

METHODOLOGY

The Sexualities Research Programme of the Chinese University of Hong Kong commissioned the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey at the School of Journalism and Communication, the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct a territory-wide representative telephone survey from 16th September to 25th September, 2019. A random sample of 1,058 people who are Chinese-speaking and aged 18 or above was successfully contacted. Data collected from the survey was weighted according to gender, age and educational level to align with the distribution of the Hong Kong population as stated by the latest Hong Kong Census. The overall response rate for the survey was 42 percent, with a sampling error of $\pm 3.0\%$ at 95% confidence level. This study follows the procedures of 'Survey and Behavioral Research Ethics' of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and has received approval from the committee before conducting the research.

One outstanding feature of this study is that it includes questions that were asked in previous studies so that public opinion on LGBT+ issues in Hong Kong can be compared across time. This is a list of major studies that findings from this current study are compared with:

CUHK-SRP 2019/20 refers to this current study.

CUHK-SRP 2016 refers to:
Suen, Y.T., Wong, M.Y., Chan, R.C.H., & Yeung, G.K.W. (2016). *Study on Hong Kong Public and LGB People's Attitudes towards LGB-friendly Business Organizations*. Hong Kong: Sexualities Research Programme, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

EOC-CUHK 2016 refers to:
Suen, Y.T., Wong, A.W.C., Barrow, A., Wong, M.Y., Mak, W.W.S., Choi, P.K., Lam, C.M., & Lau, T.F. (2016). *Study on legislation against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status*. Hong Kong: Gender Research Centre, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Commissioned by Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission.

HKU-CCPL 2018 refers to:
Lau, H., Lau, C., Loper, K., & Suen, Y.T. (2018). *Support in Hong Kong for Same-sex Couples' Rights Grew Over Four Years (2013-2017) Over Half of People in Hong Kong Now Support Same-Sex Marriage*. Hong Kong: Centre for Comparative and Public Law, The Faculty of Law, University of Hong Kong.

HKU-CCPL 2017 refers to:
Loper, K., Lau, H., Lau, C., & Suen, Y.T. (2017). *Public Attitudes Towards Transgender People and Antidiscrimination*. Hong Kong: Centre for Comparative and Public Law, The Faculty of Law, University of Hong Kong.

MVA 2006 refers to:
MVA Hong Kong Limited. (2006). *Survey on Public Attitudes towards Homosexuals*. Commissioned by Home Affairs Bureau, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

FINDINGS

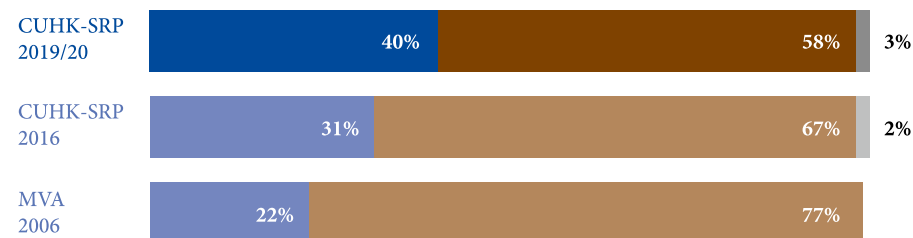
Contact with and acceptance of homosexuals



There is increasing contact with homosexuals in Hong Kong society.

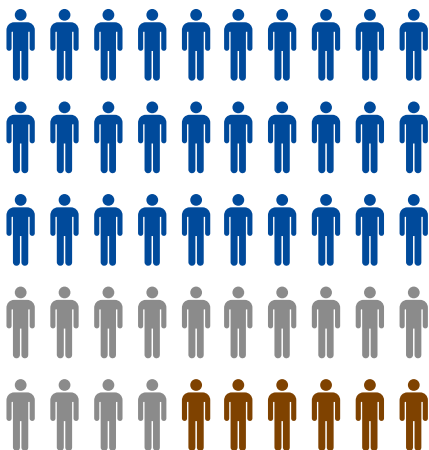
40 percent of the respondents said that they knew someone who is homosexual in everyday life. Among them, 35 percent said they were frequently in touch with someone who is homosexual. 35 percent of the respondents said they were accepting of homosexuals/ tongzhi, 43 percent said they stayed neutral, and 21 percent said they were unaccepting of them.

contact with homosexuals (comparison with previous studies)





60 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed that, overall, there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong, and only 12 percent said they very much disagreed/ disagreed (as compared to 35 percent in 2016).



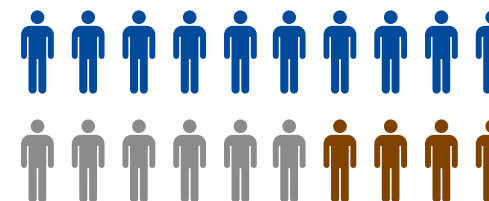
60 percent of the respondents (as compared to 56 percent in 2016 according to the EOC-CUHK study) said they very much agreed/ agreed that, overall, there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong. 27 percent said they stayed neutral and only 12 percent said they disagreed/ very much disagreed (as compared to 35 percent in 2016 according to the EOC-CUHK study).

Compared to a HKU-CCPL study in which 21 percent and 14 percent of the respondents said that they disagreed or completely disagreed that Hong Kong should have a law that protects people from being discriminated because of their sexual orientation in 2013 and 2017 respectively, opposition towards legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations is declining and at a historical low.



49 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed that a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner, and only 23 percent said they very much disagreed/ disagreed.

28 percent stayed neutral.



46 percent of the respondents (as compared to 40 percent in 2016 according to the CUHK-SRP study) said they very much agreed/ agreed that a same-sex couple registered overseas should be able to adopt children in Hong Kong. 28 percent stayed neutral, and only 25 percent said they disagreed/ very much disagreed.



52 percent of the respondents (as compared to 39 percent in 2016 according to the CUHK-SRP study) said they very much agreed/ agreed that a same-sex couple in a long-term stable relationship should be able to apply for public housing as a family unit in Hong Kong. 24 percent stayed neutral, and only 24 percent said they disagreed/ very much disagreed.



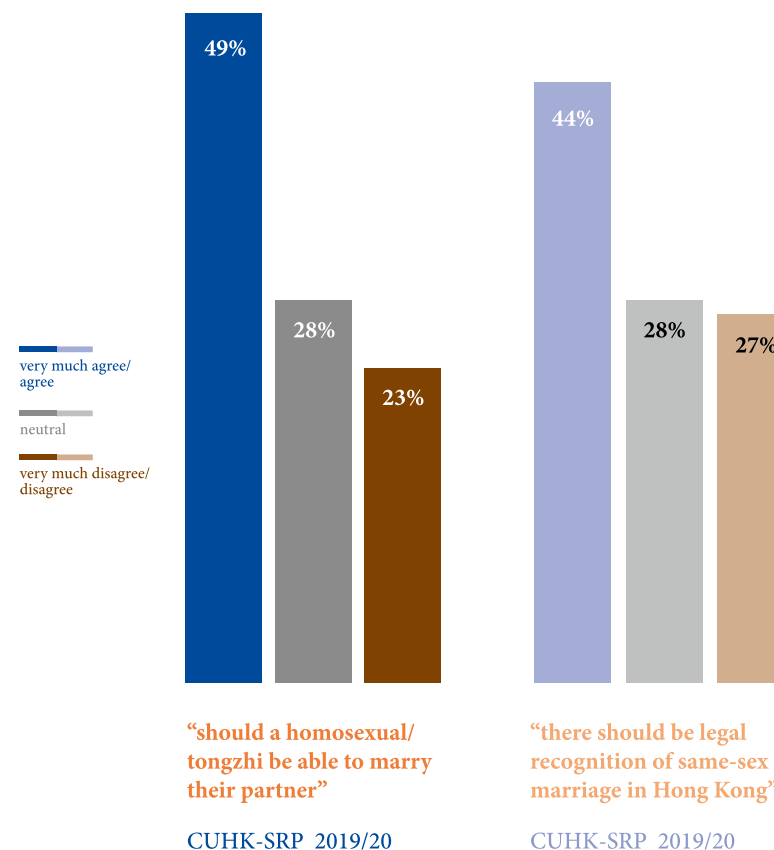


When a more relatable language to explain LGBT+ legal rights is used, public support for LGBT+ rights in Hong Kong increased.

45 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed with the implementation of a sexual orientation ordinance in Hong Kong, 35 percent stayed neutral, and only 17 percent said they disagreed/ very much disagreed. This is in comparison with the 60 percent of the respondents who said there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong.

44 percent of the respondents (as compared to 25 percent in 2016 according to the CUHK-SRP study) said they very much agreed/ agreed with the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in Hong Kong, 28 percent stayed neutral, and only 27 percent said they disagreed/ very much disagreed. This is in comparison with the 49 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed that a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner.

Demonstration of the effect of how 'framing' the question using natural language affects sentiment:



There is increasing public support for businesses that are LGBT+ inclusive.

37 percent of the respondents said that they would have a more positive impression of a business organization if it provides benefits to same-sex partners, whereas 51 percent said it does not change their impression of the organization. 32 percent of the respondents said they would have a more positive impression of a business organization if it provides sponsorship for gay parade, whereas 48 percent said it would not affect their impression of the organization.

39 percent of the respondents said they would have a more positive view of a business organization if it openly **supports** sexual orientation antidiscrimination ordinance, whereas 35 percent said it would not affect their impression of the organization. However, if a business organization openly **opposes** sexual orientation antidiscrimination ordinance, 54 percent of the respondents said they would have a more negative view of it, and only less than 10 percent said they would feel positive about it.



if a business organization provides benefits to same-sex partners:

| | CUHK-SRP 2019/20 | CUHK-SRP 2016 |
|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| very positive | — 21% | — 13% |
| positive | — 16% | — 15% |
| neutral | — 51% | — 54% |
| negative | — 5% | — 10% |
| very negative | — 6% | — 7% |



if a business organization sponsors gay parade:

| | CUHK-SRP 2019/20 | CUHK-SRP 2016 |
|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| very positive | — 15% | — 9% |
| positive | — 17% | — 13% |
| neutral | — 48% | — 50% |
| negative | — 9% | — 15% |
| very negative | — 9% | — 12% |



if a business organization openly **supports** sexual orientation antidiscrimination ordinance:

| | CUHK-SRP 2019/20 | CUHK-SRP 2016 |
|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| very positive | — 21% | — 14% |
| positive | — 18% | — 18% |
| neutral | — 35% | — 39% |
| negative | — 14% | — 17% |
| very negative | — 10% | — 13% |



if a business organization openly **opposes** sexual orientation antidiscrimination ordinance:

| | CUHK-SRP 2019/20 | CUHK-SRP 2016 |
|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| very positive | 4% | — 6% |
| positive | 6% | — 9% |
| neutral | 35% | — 34% |
| negative | 32% | — 31% |
| very negative | 22% | — 18% |

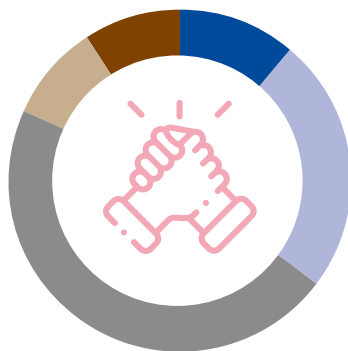
There is increasing public awareness and support for transgender rights.

74 percent of the respondents said they had heard of the term 'transgender'. This figure is higher than the 66 percent of the respondents who had said they had in a HKU-CCPL study in 2017.

35 percent of the respondents said they were accepting of transgender people, 46 percent stayed neutral, and 18 percent said they were unaccepting. The unacceptance of transgender people is dropping in Hong Kong, as the figure is lower than the 20 percent said they were not at all accepting of transgender people in a HKU-CCPL study in 2017.

attitudes towards transgender people:

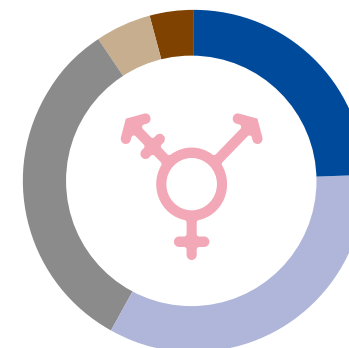
| | |
|------------------|-------|
| very accepting | — 11% |
| accepting | — 24% |
| neutral | — 46% |
| unaccepting | — 9% |
| very unaccepting | — 9% |



58 percent of the respondents said they very much agreed/ agreed that transgender people should be able to freely express their gender; 32 percent said they stayed neutral, and 9 percent said they disagreed/ very much disagreed. The last figure is lower than the 13 percent in a HKU-CCPL study in 2017 who disagreed that people should be free to express their gender identity.

transgender people should be able to freely express their gender:

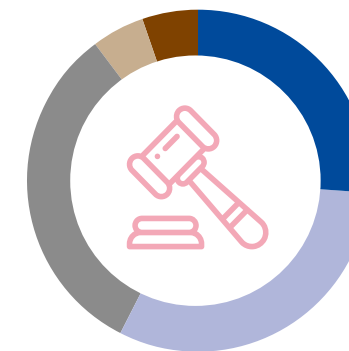
| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| very much agree | — 25% |
| agree | — 34% |
| neutral | — 32% |
| disagree | — 5% |
| very much disagree | — 4% |



57 percent of the respondents very much agreed/ agreed that, overall, there should be legal protection against discrimination for transgender people in Hong Kong. 32 percent stayed neutral, and only 10 percent said they disagreed/ very much disagreed. The last figure is lower than the 14 percent in a HKU-CCPL study in 2017 who disagreed that Hong Kong should have a law that protects people from being discriminated against because they are transgender.

there should be legal protection against discrimination for transgender people in Hong Kong:

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| very much agree | — 26% |
| agree | — 31% |
| neutral | — 32% |
| disagree | — 5% |
| very much disagree | — 5% |

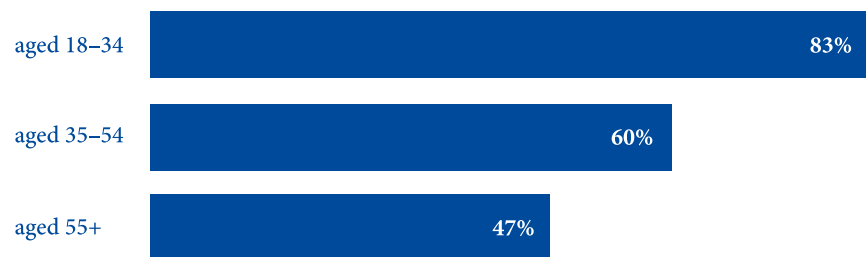


Age, religion and family values do not translate into wholesale rejection of protection of LGBT+ legal rights.



(1) Legal protection against discrimination

support for legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong:



Those who did not have a religion were more supportive (66 percent) of legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong than those who had a religion (49 percent).

support for legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong:



Among those who said they very much agreed/ agreed with the statement 'obedience is part of filial piety', 53 percent said they still very much agreed/ agreed that there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong. 31 percent stayed neutral.



Among those who said they very much agreed/ agreed with the statement 'marriage is important', 56 percent said they still very much agreed/ agreed that there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong. 29 percent stayed neutral.

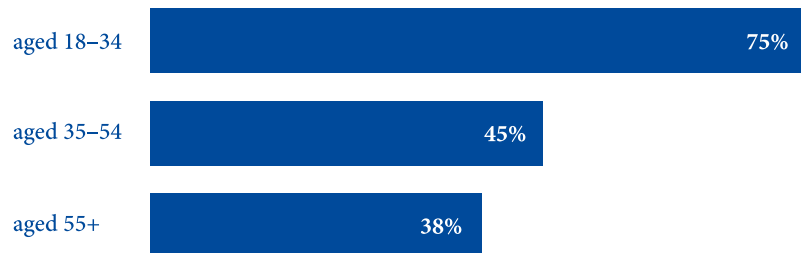




(2) The right for a homosexual/ tongzhi to marry their partner

The respondents aged between 18 and 34 were most supportive (75 percent) of the right for a homosexual/ tongzhi to marry their partner in Hong Kong, but the support among those who were aged 55+ was still at 38 percent.

support for the right for a homosexual/ tongzhi to marry their partner in Hong Kong:



Those who did not have a religion were more supportive (55 percent) of the right for a homosexual/ tongzhi to marry their partner in Hong Kong than those who had a religion (38 percent).

support for the right for a homosexual/ tongzhi to marry their partner in Hong Kong:



Among those who said they very much agreed/ agreed with the statement 'obedience is part of filial piety', 37 percent said they still very much agreed/ agreed that a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner. 30 percent stayed neutral.



Among those who said they very much agreed/ agreed with the statement 'marriage is important', 44 percent said they still very much agreed/ agreed that a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner. 29 percent stayed neutral.





Those who viewed the development in Taiwan regarding same-sex marriage more positively were also more supportive of LGBT+ legal rights in Hong Kong.

62 percent of the respondents said they thought Taiwan has now legally recognized same-sex marriage, 9 percent said they thought Taiwan did not, whereas 29 percent said they did not know.

49 percent of the respondents said that they were positive about Taiwan's recognition of same-sex marriage, 33 percent stayed neutral, and 16 percent said they were negative about it.

attitudes towards Taiwan's recognition of same-sex marriage:

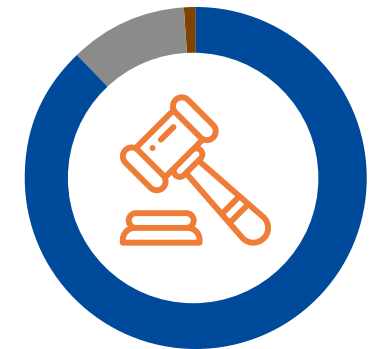
| | |
|---------------|-------|
| very positive | — 21% |
| positive | — 28% |
| neutral | — 33% |
| negative | — 7% |
| very negative | — 9% |

Among the respondents who said that they were positive about Taiwan's recognition of same-sex marriage,

88 percent said they very much agreed/ agreed that, overall, there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong.

(among respondents who were positive about Taiwan's recognition of same-sex marriage)
there should be legal protection against discrimination for people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong:

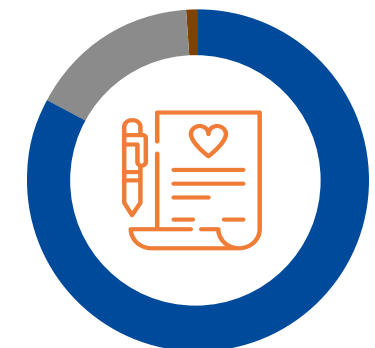
| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| very much agree/ agree | — 88% |
| neutral | — 11% |
| very much disagree/ disagree | — 1% |



Among the respondents who said that they were positive about Taiwan's recognition of same-sex marriage, 83 percent said they very much agreed/ agreed that a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner.

(among respondents who were positive about Taiwan's recognition of same-sex marriage)
a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner in Hong Kong:

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| very much agree/ agree | — 83% |
| neutral | — 16% |
| very much disagree/ disagree | — 1% |



Opposition towards LGBT+ legal rights in Hong Kong is now at a historical low. The Government/ politicians/ policy makers stand on no empirical ground to make the argument that Hong Kong is not ready to implement laws and policies that address equal rights for LGBT+ people in Hong Kong.

It is not our belief that public opinion shall be the lead indicator as to whether social minority shall be granted human rights protection, but as long as the Government/ politicians/ policy makers continue to make claims about social climate and public attitudes on LGBT+ legal rights, it is our belief that this Study provides data against unsubstantiated claims.

There are many reasons to explain the declining opposition to LGBT+ legal rights. First, it can be attributed to the increasing contact with LGBT+ people and issues. In this survey, it was found that contact with homosexuals in Hong Kong has been on the rise, and that an increasing number of people have heard of the term 'transgender'.

Second, and interrelatedly, the legal cases that relate to LGBT+ rights in the past few years locally, regionally, and internationally have also contributed to changing views of LGBT+ rights in Hong Kong.

This study also found, perhaps surprisingly, that opposition towards transgender related rights, was especially low in Hong Kong. This could be explained by an exponential increase in discussion on transgender issues in society in the recent decade, such as the W case, debates over legal gender recognition, as well as a number of movies related to transgender experiences.

This study also debunks the myths that certain groups in society are necessarily against LGBT+ rights in Hong Kong. For example, the respondents aged between 18 and 34 were most supportive (75 percent) of the right for a homosexual/ tongzhi to marry their partner in Hong Kong, but the support among those who were aged 55+ was still at 32 percent. 33 percent stayed neutral. 38 percent of the respondents who had a religion were supportive of the right for a homosexual/ tongzhi to marry their partner in Hong Kong. 30 percent stayed neutral. Among those who said they very much agreed/ agreed with the statement

'obedience is part of filial piety', 37 percent said they still very much agreed/ agreed that a homosexual/ tongzhi should be able to marry their partner. 30 percent stayed neutral. Age, religion and family values do not translate into wholesale rejection of protection of LGBT+ legal rights.

This study also found a 'framing effect' on public support for LGBT+ legal rights: when a more relatable language to explain LGBT+ legal rights is used, public support for LGBT+ rights in Hong Kong increased.

As compared to the previous study, an increasing number of the respondents said they would have a more positive impression of a business organization if it takes positive actions or stances on LGBT+ legal rights. In recent years, an increasing number of business organizations and, in particular, multinational corporations have stood up for LGBT+ legal rights publicly in Hong Kong. Perhaps this Study gives them reassurance that their actions are not met with as much disapproval as they might have feared. Instead, they may be making an impression on a general public in Hong Kong, among which opposition towards LGBT+ legal rights is declining.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Dr. Suen is the first author, and the other authors are equal authors.

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STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE AND OBJECTIVITY

The Sexualities Research Programme is committed to the highest standards of independent inquiry, academic excellence and rigour. Research findings and conclusions are never altered to accommodate other interests, including those of funders, other organizations, or government bodies and officials.

TO CITE THIS REPORT

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*Note that in all the tables in this policy paper, the percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding-off and a small percentage of respondents who refused to answer the questions.



Sexualities Research Programme is the first research programme in Hong Kong dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexuality issues, with a particular focus on sexual orientation, gender identity, law and social policy.

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