

Engaging Men as Gender Equality Allies: Understanding the Barriers and Taking Action

Hong Kong survey around attitudes
towards gender equality conducted in
partnership with IPSOS

April 2021



About The Women's Foundation

The vision of The Women's Foundation is a Hong Kong in which women and girls have the opportunities, support and resources to thrive and achieve their true potential.

TWF was established in 2004 and is a leading non-profit organisation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Hong Kong through ground-breaking research, impactful programmes, education and advocacy to drive a positive and measurable change.

Creating positive, sustainable change and building a gender equal Hong Kong involves bringing everyone together. This work must include a diverse range of voices from the entire community from all genders and all sexual identities.

As part of this mission, we launched our Male Allies initiative in 2018 to form a group of male business leaders who are fluent in the language of gender equality, able to continuously learn and talk about gender issues, and can create real change in their spheres of influence.

Why Does Gender Equality Matter?

Gender equality benefits every sector and sphere of society

- Economically, investing greater amounts in areas where women particularly need support yields economic benefits that are **6-8 times higher** than the social spending needed.¹
- In policy-making, empowering women so that they have a voice in the decision-making process makes policies more **reflective** of everyone's interests.²
- At a family level, when both parents have equal control over family resources, spending patterns tend to **benefit children**.³



The Business Case for Gender Equality

From profits to retention levels, from fulfilling ESG obligations to practicing good governance; gender equality is an imperative for business

Greater gender diversity leads to higher profitability, smarter decision-making, better value creation, increased employee retention and satisfaction, higher market value, and improved innovation.

Gender is a **core component** of all Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) initiatives. A strong focus on addressing gender diversity and equality will **enhance** and **advance** overall DE&I initiatives **across** an organisation.

Now more than ever, there is increased **attention** and **expectations** by the community, investors and stakeholders on the **‘S’** within ESG reporting. When corporations **lead** in social responsibility and strong governance, they can enhance their competitive advantage. And **gender diversity** is a hallmark of good **governance**.

Research Rationale

Despite the benefits of gender equality, many companies are far from achieving gender parity across their organisations

Although women and men enter the workforce in roughly equal numbers, women represent only:

- **36% of managers** ⁴
- **2% of CEOs in HSI-listed companies** ⁵
- **13.7% of board directors in HSI-listed companies** ⁶

Women experience negative bias from employers for being working mothers and face familial pressure to take up the majority of caregiving responsibilities and household duties. Pervasive gender stereotypes and unconscious and structural bias all contribute to women being vastly under-represented in leadership positions, over-represented in part-time work, or having to face negative bias, discrimination or harassment.

To accelerate change, we need both women and men to understand the issues and work together as allies in changing organisational norms and structures that perpetuate gender gaps.

As a first step, we need to understand perceptions of gender equality and identify the barriers limiting individual's – particularly men's – support for actions to close the gender gap.

Survey Objectives

TWF, in partnership with IPSOS, conducted a 500 person bilingual survey among working adults across gender, position, age bands and industries in Hong Kong to better understand the following*:

- Attitudes towards gender equality at work and at home
- Men's and women's perceptions on men championing gender equality at work
- Barriers to supporting gender equality efforts and taking action

*A detailed breakdown of survey respondents can be found in the appendix

Findings Focus: Men's attitudes, engagement and beliefs

While the survey examines both men and women's attitudes towards gender equality, our key findings focus on men's beliefs, engagement and attitudes towards gender equality

Why the focus on men?

Men comprise the majority representatives of boardrooms, c-suites and senior roles across the city. Without the avid support of men, who generally comprise the **most influential and powerful stakeholder group** in most organisations, significant progress toward ending gender inequality is unlikely.

This does not mean women or those who don't identify with any gender do not play a critical role in closing the gender gap. Instead, **identifying challenges and barriers** specific to men's relationship with gender equality will **help contribute to the ecosystem** of individuals who feel equipped, knowledgeable and ready to take action to advance gender equality and to **create a more inclusive workplace, home and city.**

Key Findings

Belief in gender equality

The majority of respondents believe in the basic tenets of gender equality and in having equal opportunities at work

64% 65%



I believe in equal opportunities for men and women – that women should be treated equally to men in all areas based on competency instead of gender.

46% 52%

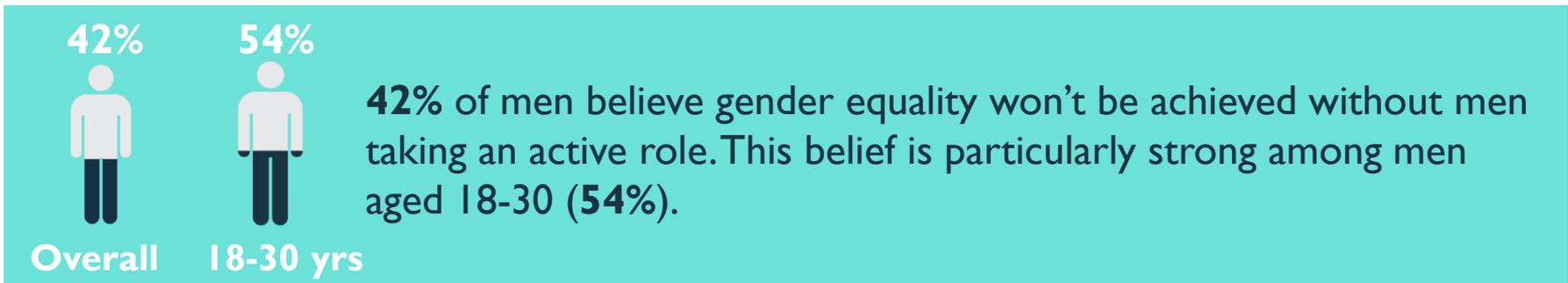


I am someone who advocates and supports equal opportunities for women.

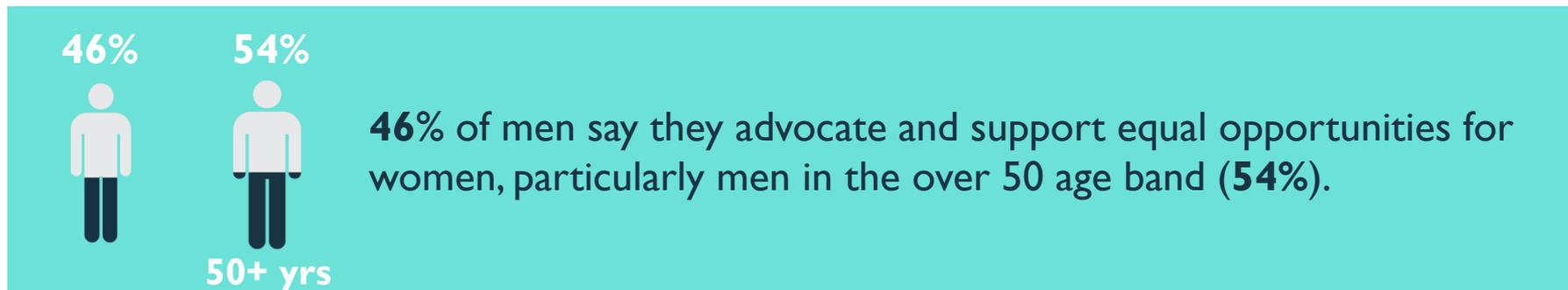
Acknowledging agency

Many men recognise their key role in progressing gender equality

A strong percentage of men understand they are integral to the achievement of gender equality



Many men believe they are doing something about it



Significant numbers not taking action to close the gender gap

While the majority of men believe themselves to be supportive of gender equality and are taking steps to change the status quo, there remains a significant number not taking any concrete action towards gender equality



Why?

Key barriers to men taking action for gender equality

The survey findings point to four main barriers men face in taking action for gender equality



Apathy

The fact that they are indifferent to achieving gender equality



Relevance

The belief that gender equality is not relevant to them



Zero sum mentality

The belief that if gender equality is achieved, they will lose status, privilege or other benefits they currently enjoy



Family values

The belief that their home life and the quality of their family will suffer if gender equality is achieved

Many men are indifferent to achieving gender equality

 **52%** of men say gender equality is not a priority for them.

 **26%** of men say they have no time to advocate for gender equality.

These findings could be attributed to men not being aware of a compelling reason for becoming actively involved in gender equality efforts. Alternatively, some may be unaware of how this would benefit them and therefore do not feel compelled to make the time to engage in actions to close the gender gap.

Many men don't understand how gender equality relates to them



38% of men believe gender equality is a women's issue and men need to stay out of the way.

This finding could be attributed to men not understanding how gender equality relates to them. Research shows that many men see gender equality as a 'women's issue' and don't see a compelling reason for becoming involved or what they might gain from doing so. Men may also not feel welcome joining what they feel is a women-dominated space where they may be criticised for missteps.

Zero-Sum Mentality

Many men feel they are already disadvantaged by their gender in the workplace and the benefits of gender equality disproportionately go to women



1 in 4 men feel they face more inequality and discrimination at work than women.



24% of men believe gender equality puts men at a disadvantage (this belief is held more strongly amongst men with higher education or who are single).



47% of men believe women benefit the most from achieving gender equality.

Support for gender equality can be impacted by concerns around the loss of status, privilege and the pervasive belief that women have far more to gain from gender equality than men.

Gender equality will adversely impact family life

There is a belief in supporting gender equality in principle at work but many believe women should still take the lead at home



36% of men who support gender equality in the workplace believe women should still take on more caring responsibilities than men.



42% of men believe families will suffer if women are less able to devote time to caring for them.

Entrenched gender stereotypes as well as cultural and societal expectations around gendered roles may influence the belief among both men and women that women should be the primary caregivers and take up a greater share of household responsibilities.

Younger generations do not have more gender equal mindsets than their older counterparts

There are misconceptions that gender equal behaviours and mindsets are more present and accepted among younger generations

Although more 18-30 year olds are aware that men are integral to achieving gender equality than other generations, they are concerned about achieving gender equality in similar or higher levels to that of older generations



43% believe gender equality is a women's issue and men need to stay out of the way.



30% believe gender equality puts men at a disadvantage.



45% believe families may suffer with women less able to care for them.

Women reinforce these barriers

Many women's perceptions align with men, potentially amplifying the impact of these barriers to taking action for gender equality



Apathy

29% of women say gender equality is not a priority for them.



Relevance

1 in 2 women believe gender equality is a women's issue and men need to stay out of the way.



Zero-sum mentality

1 in 6 women feel men face more inequality and discrimination at work than women.



Family Values

30% of women believe women should still take on more caring responsibilities than men.

Suggested Actions to Address these Barriers

Tackling these challenges requires a multi-pronged, inclusive approach

Apathy & Relevance

- Understand men's fears and concerns around gender equality, and offer alternative perspectives
- Raise awareness around the opportunities and benefits of a more gender equal society
- Host open dialogues on what men can gain from challenging gender bias and championing gender equality
- Organise conversations with men and women on the role each plays in advancing gender equality

Zero sum mentality

- Help engender a mindset of fairness among men that gender bias is wrong and equality is beneficial for everyone
- Create a safe space where men can have in-depth, critical discussions on issues around gender equality without fear of disapproval or judgement

Family Values

- Encourage the active uptake of gender-neutral parental leave or flexible work arrangements among men

Suggested Actions to Address these Barriers

- Actively make connections between gender equality at work and at home – through dialogues and communication of policies

Engaging younger men

- Ensure that efforts to engage men in championing gender equality are across the organisation, not just among senior leaders
- Demonstrate in a clear and concrete way how having a more inclusive workplace benefits younger men too
- Employ an inclusive approach when introducing policies and practices that may not be seen as relevant by a younger age group, e.g. by announcing the launch of a less relevant policy with a highly relevant one
- Spotlight diverse male role models who champion gender equality and inclusion

Holistic approach to tackle gender biases among all genders

- Nurture uncomfortable conversations and encourage accountability among men and women to bring about change
- Provide cross-gender-and-generational mentoring to better understand and support the perspectives and challenges different individuals experience
- Consider linking progress on gender equality goals to performance outcomes
- Encourage senior leaders to demonstrate inclusive leadership and role model inclusive behaviours and practices

Contact

Aline Tong

Senior Officer, Pipeline Initiatives

The Women's Foundation

maleallies@twfhk.org

+852 2581-1873



References

1. McKinsey & Co, "COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects," July 2020.
2. Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, "The Legislative Effectiveness of Women in Congress," August 2010.
3. International Monetary Fund, "Empowering Women is Smart Economics" *Finance & Development*, March 2012, Vol. 49, No. 1
4. Hays, "Locating Asia's Untapped Innovators: Getting Below the Surface of the D&I Iceberg," 2020.
5. Community Business, "Women on Boards Hong Kong" Jan 2021.
6. Ibid.
7. Catalyst, "Engaging Men in Gender Initiatives: What Change Agents Need to Know," 2009.

General Reading

- Catalyst, "Engaging Men in Gender Initiatives: What Change Agents Need to Know," 2009.
- Diversity Council Australia, "Men Make a Difference: Engaging Men on Gender Equality," 2017.

Appendix: Respondent Profiles

500 surveys were completed online from February – March 2019 with the following breakdown:

	Total (n = 500)	Male (n = 250)	Female (n = 250)
Age (%)			
18-30	40	33	47
31-49	40	40	40
Over 50	20	27	13
Education (%)			
Primary or below	1	1	0
Lower secondary	3	4	3
Upper secondary	42	35	49
Sub-degree	13	15	10
University or above	41	45	37
Marital status (%)			
Single	46	41	51
Married/Cohabited	52	56	48
Separated/Divorced	2	2	2
Widow	0	1	-

Appendix: Respondent Profiles

	Total (n = 500)	Male (n = 250)	Female (n = 250)
Working status (%)			
Full-time	94	96	92
Part-time	6	4	8
Seniority (%)			
Owner	4	6	2
Senior management	10	12	8
Middle management	36	37	35
Employee	46	41	52
Freelancer	4	5	2
Headquarter of Company(%)			
Hong Kong	64	74	54
Asia (excl. HK)	15	13	17
Outside Asia	21	14	29