



**Press Release**

For immediate release on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021

**Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Sexualities Research Programme**

**Excluded lives:**

**The largest-scale survey on the social and legal marginalization of transgender people in Hong Kong so far**

In the lead-up to the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (upcoming on 17th May 2021), the latest survey of 234 transgender people in Hong Kong between 2019 and 2020, the largest survey on the population in Hong Kong so far, has been released on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

The survey conducted by the Sexualities Research Programme of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in collaboration with the Transgender Resource Center, found that:

Rejection, victimisation and discrimination were the rule rather than the exception in many transgender people's lives in Hong Kong. 76% of the respondents reported facing rejection in different dimensions of social life in their lifetime. 62% of the respondents reported having experienced different forms of victimisation in their lifetime. 51.1% of the respondents reported facing discrimination in at least one of the following four domains in the previous year: Employment (34.8%), education (34.8%), provision of goods and services (36.9%) and disposal and management of premises (26.2%).

Transgender people in Hong Kong reported great difficulties in using a toilet which matches their self-identified gender, or even simply accessing toilets in public spaces. Worse still, when using the toilet, transgender people in Hong Kong were subjected to verbal assault, physical violence, or even sexual contact against their wishes.

A substantial proportion of the respondents had not undergone, were not sure or did not want to undergo gender-affirming medical interventions because of a variety of reasons, which means they were excluded from being eligible for a change of the sex entry on the identity card sex entry based on the current regulations set out by the Hong Kong government. Only 5.6% of the respondents had changed the on their identity card, and another 6% said they were in the process of doing so. 75% agreed that the government should recognise non-binary gender options.

All of such social and legal marginalisation took a toll on the transgender people's mental health in Hong Kong. 42.8% of the respondents showed moderate-to-severe levels of depressive symptoms, and 34.7% showed moderate-to-severe levels of anxiety symptoms. Besides, 31.2% of the respondents reported non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour in the past 12 months. There were 76.9% of them contemplated suicide, 25.6% made a suicide plan, and 12.8% attempted suicide in their lifetime. However, transgender people displayed agency and



one-third of them took action to resist when facing transgender-related discrimination/cisgenderism.

### **Background and research methodology**

A web-based survey examining the lived experiences of transgender people in Hong Kong – the 2019/20 Hong Kong Transgender Survey (HKTS) – was designed and conducted in collaboration with Transgender Resource Center, the largest group working with and for transgender people in Hong Kong. The study was designed with a careful review of existing research literature, with additional feedback from the leaders of Transgender Resource Center and pilot interviewees. Data collection was conducted from May 2019 to June 2020. Participants were recruited through online postings distributed to transgender-related listservs, service organisations, and by transgender community leaders. Participants were included if they reported (1) being 16 years of age or above, (2) having a gender identity and/or expression that is different from those typically associated with their sex assigned at birth, (3) living in Hong Kong, and (4) being able to understand Chinese. After providing informed consent, participants completed the online survey hosted by Qualtrics. They received HK\$50 as a compensation for their time and effort. The study protocol and materials were approved by the Survey and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

### **Quotes**

#### **Principal Investigator:**

**Professor SUEN Yiu Tung, Assistant Professor, Gender Studies Programme and Founding Director, Sexualities Research Programme, The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

‘Rejection, victimisation and discrimination against transgender people are deeply rooted in public misunderstanding and stereotypes against transgender people in society. Despite research showing that public attitudes towards transgender people in Hong Kong are turning more positive in Hong Kong, a lot remains to be done to enhance public understanding of transgender people. Education and awareness-raising are urgently needed.

51.1% of the respondents reported facing discrimination in at least one of the following four domains in the previous year: Employment, education, provision of goods and services, and disposal and management of premises. This adds to previous research which shows that transgender people face substantial discrimination in Hong Kong, and legislation against discrimination on the grounds of gender identity is urgently needed.

41.5% of the respondents reported having experienced different forms of negative treatment when they went through the customs in the previous year. As Hong Kong often claims to be an international world city, the mobility of transgender people into and out of Hong Kong is a topic that needs to be addressed. This shows the wider need for training for service providers in public and private sectors.

The research findings also revealed that transgender people faced substantial issues when they used the toilet. Access to accessible toilets and gender-neutral toilets needs to be enhanced.



A substantial proportion of the respondents had not undergone, were not sure or did not want to undergo gender-affirming medical interventions because of a variety of reasons, which means they were excluded from being eligible for a change of the sex entry on the identity card based on the current regulations imposed by the Hong Kong government. The legal gender recognition debate needs to consider transgender people's concerns and self-determination. The findings suggest that an overwhelming majority of transgender people in Hong Kong are excluded from being eligible for a change of the sex entry on the identity card based on the current regulations adopted by the Hong Kong government, which fundamentally affect their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The level of mental health issues that the respondents reported shows that mental health support for transgender people is urgently needed.

37.3% of the respondents often/always took action to resist when they encountered transgender-related discrimination/cisgenderism. This shows the agency of transgender people, and that there is the potential to further mutual support among transgender people.'

**Transgender community members:  
Joanne LEUNG, Transgender Resource Center**

'Transgender Resource Center has been serving the transgender community for 13 years. The root of the suffering of transgender people is societal and public misunderstanding. Such misunderstanding of transgender people results in great difficulties for them to be seen and understood. This research provides empirical evidence for the society to understand the plight of transgender people, in different aspects such as immigration, usage of toilet, as well as views towards gender-affirming medical interventions. These are aspects in which transgender people face a lot of troubles in everyday life. Being transsexual and crossdressing still remain taboo in contemporary society, but this does not mean they just 'abandon themselves', as what society might have imagined. For transgender people, no matter how difficult the path they travel is, they do not have other options.

Misunderstanding generates fear. And both the society and transgender people suffer as a result. I hope that as the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia is approaching, we are work together to break down barriers, and create a more friendly and harmonious environment to live in.'

**Liam MAK, Quarks**

'Quarks focuses on working with transgender youth. Transgender youth's lives are subjected to a whole host of constraints in schools. They cannot use the toilet of their self-identified gender, and sex education is seriously in lack in most schools. Many transgender youth are thus subjected to a lot of hurtful actions by their classmates who lack gender-relevant concepts and who may do harm unintentionally. In their families, many transgender youth,



especially those who are not financially independent, are terrified about coming out to their parents. Many transgender people also face difficulties in using the changing room or toilet in the gym or their workplace. Some of them are even banished from the gym, or forced to use a toilet that doesn't match their self-identified gender.

Under such intensive pressure in different domains, transgender people face tremendous difficulties in life, and this seriously impacts their mental health. In my work with Quarks, I have personally been in touch with 4 transgender youth who have tried committing suicide, and contemplating suicide is a common phenomenon among the transgender youth I work with. Mental health of transgender people is in urgent need of attention.'

**Lawyers:**

**Aaron CHAN, Pro Bono Associate, Asia, DLA Piper Hong Kong**

'"Treat others how you want to be treated." It should be a rule of thumb for handling transgender issues. Whenever I represent a transgender person, I can feel that all they want is acceptance, recognition and equal treatment. There is no basis for us to make their journey more difficult.'

**Mark DALY, Principal, Daly & Associates**

'There is no reason why people should have to face discrimination or suffering because of their gender identity or their sexual orientation. There is no reason why any person should have to suffer because of a lack of tolerance, understanding or bigotry. Transgender and genderqueer people deserve to be respected, to be able to live their lives as their truest, most authentic selves.

We should be celebrating diversity – be it diversity of opinions, of ethnicities, of sexualities, or of gender identities. We should be celebrating people, instead of finding ways to ostracise them.

Trans rights are human rights. Plain and simple.'

**Michael VIDLER, Senior Partner, Vidler & Co. Solicitors**

'A major challenge in LGBTI rights litigation is often the need to ground a claim with strong empirical evidence. This report which is based on the largest scale survey on social and legal marginalisation of transgender people in Hong Kong, provides such empirical evidence and will be of great value for ongoing and future litigation to advance transgender rights in Hong Kong.'

**Eaton Hotel Hong Kong**

**Katherine LO, Founder and President of Eaton Hotel Hong Kong**

'My vision with creating Eaton Workshop is to use hospitality as a way to create a better world, by reimagining our physical and digital spaces as a true community center - a place where you can be your true self. A hotel space becomes a home for those who don't belong,



who are at the margins, for those who dream of a better world. With inclusivity as one of our core values, I know how powerful it is to find one's community and belonging, especially when not feeling accepted by or at home in the mainstream. The sociocultural influences and progressive ideals that form the basis of Eaton's founding mission leads to our work to support and recognize trans experiences and stories through our spaces and programming. Eaton HK is honored to be a part of this historic moment in CUHK Sexualities Research Programme's study of transgender communities in Hong Kong.'



### **About this research**

Suen, Y.T., Chan, R.C.H., and Wong, E.M.Y. (2021). *Excluded lives: The largest scale survey on the social and legal marginalisation of transgender people in Hong Kong so far*. Hong Kong: Sexualities Research Programme, Chinese University of Hong Kong

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Eliz Miu Yin Wong is a PhD candidate in Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

### **About Sexualities Research Programme**

Sexualities Research Programme (SRP) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong 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.

Should you wish to request for the full report, or should you have any enquiries, please contact Prof. Suen at [suenyiutung@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:suenyiutung@cuhk.edu.hk) or Eliz Wong at the Sexualities Research Programme at (852) 65756357 (WhatsApp/phone).

In case of any inconsistency between the English version and the Chinese version, the English version shall prevail.