

**Public Attitudes towards Gays and Lesbians
and towards Sexual Orientation Anti-discrimination Legislation**

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Executive Summary

There is mounting discussion about introducing legislation in Hong Kong to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in the private sector. The Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission launched a Discrimination Law Review in July 2014 and has commissioned a study on the feasibility of legislating against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status.¹ To inform this conversation, this briefing paper presents public opinion data from a 2013 telephone survey. We report public attitudes towards gays and lesbians and towards proposed anti-discrimination legislation.

Among Hong Kong people, 60% either completely or somewhat agreed that Hong Kong should enact legislation to protect people against sexual orientation discrimination; 20% were neutral; and 20% either completely or somewhat disagreed with such legislation. These figures are consistent with findings from a 2012 poll commissioned by Legislative Councillor Cyd Ho and conducted by the University of Hong Kong's Public Opinion Programme. That study found that 64% of the public supported legislation to protect against sexual orientation discrimination.²

In addition, we found that a majority of Hong Kong people hold generally favorable attitudes towards gays and lesbians. For example, only a minority of people said that their acceptance of an individual is affected by the individual's sexual orientation (16%), and a minority said that gays and lesbians are immoral (28%). In contrast, an overwhelming majority of people said that parents should love their children regardless of their children's sexual orientation (83% completely agreed, 9% somewhat agreed). Additional measures of general attitude are reported below.

Survey Background

In 2013, we commissioned the Social Sciences Research Centre (SSRC) at the University of Hong Kong to conduct a telephone survey of a representative sample of Hong Kong residents. The surveys were completed in June 2013. Reflecting language patterns in Hong Kong, 98% of interviews were conducted in Cantonese and 2% were conducted in English. The cooperation rate was 78% and the overall response rate was 15%. Statistical weights adjust for the non-response that is common in telephone surveys. We have previously reported the survey responses to questions concerning same-sex couples' relational rights.³ This report shifts focus and specifically examines the responses to the survey questions concerning antidiscrimination legislation and general attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Our analysis is based on a random sample of 410 people aged 18 and over who live in Hong Kong.⁴

Survey Questions and Findings

Table 1. Support for Anti-Discrimination Legislation

Do you agree or disagree that Hong Kong should have a law that protects people from being discriminated against because of their sexual orientation?

請問你同唔同意香港應該有法例保護因性傾向而被歧視嘅市民？

Completely Agree 完全同意	44%
Somewhat Agree 有啲同意	16%
Neutral 中立	20%
Somewhat Disagree 有啲唔同意	3%
Completely Disagree 完全唔同意	17%

(Report continued on the following page.)

Table 2. Attitudes towards Gays and Lesbians**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*

請你以完全同意，有啲同意，中立，有啲唔同意，完全唔同意來表示你對以下句子嘅同意程度。

A. A person's sexual orientation does not affect whether I accept that person

我接受唔接受一個人，唔係基於佢嘅性傾向

Completely Agree 完全同意	48%
Somewhat Agree 有啲同意	19%
Neutral 中立	17%
Somewhat Disagree 有啲唔同意	4%
Completely Disagree 完全唔同意	12%

B. It does not matter to me whether my friends are gay/lesbian or straight

我嘅朋友同性戀定係異性戀對我沒有影響

Completely Agree 完全同意	66%
Somewhat Agree 有啲同意	12%
Neutral 中立	10%
Somewhat Disagree 有啲唔同意	5%
Completely Disagree 完全唔同意	7%

C. Parents should love their children regardless of whether their children are gay/lesbian or straight

無論佢哋嘅子女係同性戀定係異性戀，父母都應該愛佢哋嘅子女

Completely Agree 完全同意	83%
Somewhat Agree 有啲同意	9%
Neutral 中立	4%
Somewhat Disagree 有啲唔同意	1%
Completely Disagree 完全唔同意	2%

D. Gays/lesbians make me nervous

同性戀者會令我緊張

Completely Agree 完全同意	11%
Somewhat Agree 有啲同意	14%
Neutral 中立	15%
Somewhat Disagree 有啲唔同意	11%
Completely Disagree 完全唔同意	48%

E. Gays/lesbians are immoral

同性戀者係唔道德嘅

Completely Agree 完全同意	22%
Somewhat Agree 有啲同意	6%
Neutral 中立	18%
Somewhat Disagree 有啲唔同意	13%
Completely Disagree 完全唔同意	42%

F. Gays/lesbians should be avoided whenever possible

盡可能都會避開同性戀者

Completely Agree 完全同意	15%
Somewhat Agree 有啲同意	9%
Neutral 中立	12%
Somewhat Disagree 有啲唔同意	14%
Completely Disagree 完全唔同意	51%

Note: percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

* The survey randomly assigned two different terms for gays/lesbians (“同性戀者” versus “同志” in Cantonese, and “gays/lesbians” versus “homosexuals” in English). The variation in terms did not produce a meaningful difference in results, so we combined the results.

Conclusion

Without survey data, public opinion can be difficult to ascertain because individuals who hold the majority viewpoint can be relatively quiet while holders of the minority viewpoint can be relatively outspoken. By providing survey data, this paper seeks to facilitate the government's understanding of public opinion.

This briefing paper brackets the normative question of whether antidiscrimination law reform should be contingent on public opinion. To be sure, there is an argument that antidiscrimination protections should not be contingent on majority support. To the extent, however, that the government of Hong Kong insists on considering public opinion, this paper provides a factual basis for understanding the public's views.

Our survey found that a majority of Hong Kong people hold generally favorable views of gays and lesbians, and a majority support enacting legislation to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation. Only 20% of the public said that they disagree with such legislation.

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¹ Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission, "Discrimination Law Review for Public Consultation," July 2014, p. 7, available at <http://www.eocdlr.org.hk/en/document-00-foreword.html?f=s&c=white>.

² Robert Chung Ting-Yiu, Karie Pang Ka-Lai & Winne Lee Wing-Yi, "Survey on Hong Kong Public's Attitudes Towards Rights of People of Different Sexual Orientations," 7 November 2012, p. 7, available at http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/report/LGBT_CydHo/content/resources/report.pdf.

³ Kelley Loper, Holning Lau & Charles Lau, "Research Shows a Majority of People in Hong Kong Support Gay and Lesbian Couples' Rights, Not Necessarily Marriage" (briefing paper released by the Centre for Comparative and Public Law, University of Hong Kong), January 2014, available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2374875>.

⁴ We also conducted a larger study to examine the way that contact with gays and lesbians shapes people's attitudes towards gay people and gay rights. That study was based on a sample of 850 people. We published our findings in the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. See Holning Lau, Charles Lau & Kelley Loper, "Public Opinion in Hong Kong about Gays and Lesbians: The Impact of Interpersonal and Imagined Contact," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Autumn 2014, Vol. 26 (3), pp. 301-322, doi:10.1093/ijpor/edu016.