

Findings from the Third Survey on Chinese Women's Social Status



Yang Shen, a PhD student at the Gender Institute, discusses the Third Survey on Chinese Women's Social Status. According to the survey, the status of women has improved in the last 10 years. However, the discrepancies between urban and rural women and between men and women are still substantive. Hence, China still has a long way to go in order to achieve gender equality.

The Third Survey on Chinese Women's Social Status, jointly launched and organized by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), is a nationwide decennial survey. It follows up the first and second surveys conducted respectively in 1990 and 2000.

The aim of the survey is to review gender equality and women's development in China over the past 10 years through studying the state of women in various arenas. The study is based on data gathered from more than 30,000 women aged 18 and above throughout the country.

There are nine aspects of the survey: health, education, politics, economy, social security, marriage and family, lifestyle, legal rights, and gender awareness. The data collected provides valuable reference material for government policymaking on gender equality.

For women aged 18 to 64, the average years of schooling is 8.8 years, which represents an increase of 2.7 years compared to 2000. However, the urban and rural gap is still large. 54.3% of urban women have received a high school education, compared to 19.2% of rural women.

In terms of work, women average 574 minutes per day of work, compared to 537 minutes for men. Women average 240 minutes of leisure time per day, compared to 297 minutes for men. At the launching conference of the Third Survey on 21 October, a Hong Kong journalist asked why women work almost 40 minutes longer but rest one hour less per day compared to men. The vice president of the ACWF answered that it might be that women tend towards different occupations than men and different positions within organizations than men. Work hours would be longer for women in the service sector. Furthermore, women tend to spend more time doing housework, which leads to less leisure time.

Although women work longer than men in general, the wage gap is still deep. Women in urban households earn only 67.3% of men's wages. Women in rural households earn only 56% of men's wages (the report does not indicate if urban women are compared to urban men, or men in general). Moreover, 10% of women claim that they encountered gender discrimination in the workplace.

The urban/rural division of social benefits extends to other arenas as well. 73.3% of women in non-agricultural households have access to social securities, and 87.6% get access to health insurance. The figure is 31.1% and 95% respectively for women in agricultural households.

87% of intranational migrant women engage in paid work. However, only 61.5% are satisfied with their work and life. 15.7% of them have now found life partners outside their hometown. The main problems migrant women workers encounter include "being looked down upon" (14.7%) and "salary default or deduction" (14.2%). These numbers suggest that some basic demands such as the timely payment of wages are still waiting to be satisfied.

In the domestic sphere, 85.2% of Chinese women are satisfied with their status in the household. More than 70% of women participate in decisions such as house-buying and investment.

However, 24.7% of women have encountered domestic violence, including verbal abuse, assaults, restriction of personal freedom, economic control, forced sex, and other forms of domestic violence during their marriages.

It is also notable that 61.6% of men and 54.8% of women agree with the traditional saying that “Men should be socially based, women should be family-oriented”. The figure has increased by 7.7% and 4.4% respectively, compared to the Second Survey in 2000, which suggests that traditional genders role are still prevailing in contemporary China.

There are positive sides as well as negative sides for women's status and gender equality. In general, women have been more economically independent and have more choices. However, it is noteworthy that the discrepancies between urban and rural women are still vast; the overt discrimination between men and women in the workplace is still common; the disparity of income by gender is still considerable; and the domestic violence rate is striking. As a Chinese student from a relatively democratic family and studying in the UK, I cannot imagine some serious situations such as high rate of domestic violence and income/work hours gap. It is difficult to reach a simple conclusion on women's status for the complicated and dynamic situation. What is clear is that it is still a long way to go in order to achieve gender equality.

Yang is a second-year PhD student at the LSE. Her current research topic is New-generation Migrant Workers in the Catering Sector in Shanghai. Her research interests cover gender and migration, contemporary China Studies, and poverty reduction. She has organised a volunteering group for children in rural Guizhou Province for four years. She is now a columnist for the newspaper UKChinese.

November 3rd, 2011 | [Development, Society](#) | [4 Comments](#)

⤴

