

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

Survey on Public Attitudes towards Homosexuals

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the commissioning of a survey on public attitudes towards homosexuals.

BACKGROUND

1995 Survey on Sexual Orientation

2. A telephone survey was conducted in 1995 to gauge the public's perception of different forms of sexual orientation, their acceptance of homosexuals/bisexuals in different contexts and situations, and their views on the measures the Government should adopt in addressing the problem of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation in Hong Kong. The survey had a sample size of 1 500. The survey found that public acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality was on the low side. A low level of acceptance was found in areas such as same-sex marriage, adoption of children by homosexual/bisexual couples, use of reproductive technology by homosexuals, and contacts with homosexuals/bisexuals in private settings. Public education and publicity were considered to be the most effective means in tackling the problem of discrimination.

3. The Government subsequently conducted a public consultation exercise on sexual orientation in 1996. The public generally considered that it would be premature to adopt a legislative approach in the area of sexual orientation. On the other hand, there was general support for non-legislative measures to enhance equal opportunities for persons of different sexual orientation. The Government therefore decided to pursue non-legislative measures to enhance public understanding and acceptance of different forms of sexual orientation.

Public Education

4. We started an Equal Opportunities (Sexual Orientation) Funding Scheme in 1998. The Scheme is an annual programme to support worthwhile community projects that promote equal opportunities on the ground of different sexual orientation, and has an annual budget of around \$500,000. So far, we have approved a total of 75 applications under the Scheme and the approved funds amounted to \$3.5 million. Projects approved under the Scheme included drama performance and webpage to promote equal opportunities, counselling hotline, production of publications, and organisation of exhibitions and workshops.

5. We issued a Code of Practice Against Discrimination in Employment on the Ground of Sexual Orientation in 1998 to facilitate self-regulation on the part of employers and employees in eliminating discriminatory practices in employment. So far, 30 000 copies of the Code have been distributed. We have also prepared leaflets, comic books and stationeries with messages promoting equal opportunities for people with different sexual orientations for distribution by schools and non-governmental bodies (NGOs).

Overseas development

6. On the international scene, there has been growing public acceptance of same-sex relationships and same-sex marriage. A number of overseas jurisdictions have legislation on same-sex marriage and civil partnership. The Netherlands and Belgium, and some provinces of Canada now allow same-sex marriage. A number of countries, including Denmark, France, Germany, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, have passed legislation which enables two persons of the same sex to form a “civil partnership”, thus giving formal recognition to their relationship. The United Kingdom has recently enacted the Civil Partnership Act 2004 which allows same-sex couples to form a civil partnership.

7. Of the jurisdictions that have anti-discrimination legislation on the ground of sexual orientation, some have legislation addressing sexual orientation discrimination at the state/provincial level (including the US and

Australia) while others have such legislation at the federal/national level (including Canada and New Zealand). Others have legislation addressing such discrimination on employment matters. For instance, the United Kingdom has enacted the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 which outlaw discrimination in employment and vocational training on the ground of sexual orientation with effect from December 2003.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

8. Social values change as the society develops. It has been ten years since we last conducted a survey on sexual orientation. We consider it high time to conduct another survey on public attitudes towards sexual orientation. In this connection, we have embarked on a series of discussions with various concern groups (including the sexual minorities, NGOs and religious groups) to understand their concerns and identify issues which need to be addressed.

THE SURVEY

9. We plan to conduct a telephone survey on public attitudes towards homosexuals to:

- (i) assess public awareness of different sexual orientations, including homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality;
- (ii) assess public attitudes towards homosexuals;
- (iii) assess public acceptance of homosexuals in different contexts and situations;
- (iv) assess public attitudes towards the rights of homosexuals; and
- (v) find out what can be done to address the problem of discrimination faced by homosexuals.

10. We have commissioned a research firm to conduct the survey. The survey, with a sample size of 2 000, will cover as target population all persons aged 18-64 in Hong Kong. We intend to consult the various concern groups on the design of the questionnaire of the survey. A small advisory group will be formed to advise on the questionnaire design before finalizing the questionnaire for data collection.

11. Preparatory work for the survey is in hand. We are now working on the questionnaire for the survey. Our present plan is to conduct the survey in the second quarter of 2005 and announce the survey results in the latter half of 2005.

FURTHER SURVEY

12. Arising from two recent suicides of transsexuals, transgender groups in Hong Kong have pointed out that transgenders have experienced social discrimination and urged the Government to include transgenders in the study. In this connection, we intend to conduct a separate survey on public attitudes towards transgenders at a later stage. This survey will proceed after the survey on public attitudes towards homosexuals has been completed.

ADVICE SOUGHT

13. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Home Affairs Bureau
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