

## Gender Imbalance in the Legal Profession of Hong Kong

### 香港法律界男女不均

In the Issue of August 2018 of Hong Kong Lawyer (香港律師會會刊), our first lady President of the Law Society of Hong Kong Miss Melissa Pang (彭韻僖會長) said the following:

“For the legal profession, a striking diversity deficiency is gender imbalance. The proportion of women varies at different stages of the career path in a law firm. Women made up about 59% of trainee solicitors, 60% of assistant solicitors, 36% of consultants and 28% of partners (as of 20 July 2018). While more than half of the new entrants to the profession are female, only about one quarter at the senior level are female.

It has been argued that it is a conscious choice on the part of the women lawyers that they do not progress to leadership positions. However, is it indeed a conscious choice on their part or is it the result of an unconscious bias embedded in a firm’s process of decision making on matters like allocation of work and job promotion that lead to the loss of women talent at the top? That is a question for the decision makers to reflect on.

Whatever the cause, the hard fact is that a substantial proportion of female solicitors are dropping out along the way. If this trend of talent loss continues, the profession will have difficulty sustaining its growth in the long term, having regard to the trend that the majority of the new entrants are likely to be female in the foreseeable future.

A diverse workforce needs to be supported by an inclusive work environment. Inclusion allows staff to feel respected and valued and they are likely to stay with the employer longer leading to improved staff retention. This in turn saves costs in recruiting and training replacement staff, maintains productivity, and minimizes disruption to clients.”

Miss Pang’s observations are interesting. We wonder if gender imbalance is also an issue for other professions such as doctors and accountants?

香港律师会彭韵僖会长说：「在法律界，一个显著的缺陷是性别失衡。女性占律师行人员的比例在不同事业阶段各有不同。实习律师的女性比例约为 59%、助理律师为 60%、顾问为 36%、合伙人为 28% (截至 2018 年 7 月 20 日)。虽然有超过一半的行业新晋是女性，但高层职位中女性只占约四分之一。

有人认为，女性律师自己选择不晋升领导岗位。这真的是他们的选择，还是由于律师行在工作分配和职业晋升等决策过程中不自觉地带有偏见，导致女性人才流失？这是决策者需要思考的问题。

不论原因为何，现实是有一大部分女性律师中途退出。若这种人才流失的趋势持续下去，考虑在可预见的未来，新入行者大多数是女性的趋势，行业长远来说将难以持续发展。

多元化的劳动力需要包容的工作环境来支持。包容令员工感到受尊重和重视，因而留任更长时间，从而提高员工的留职率。这相应节省了招聘和培训替代人员的成本，保持生产力，尽量减少对客户干扰。」

会长的意见惊醒大家，大家也想知道性别失衡是否也在其他专业例如医生和会计师等，相同面对？

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