

# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong Survey

## Assessing the Impact of the Economic Downturn



# 2009

A Summary of Research Findings

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## Acknowledgements

Community Business is grateful to the Community Business Leadership Team and its Work-Life Balance Survey Taskforce for their continued support of this research which has been conducted on an annual basis since 2006. In particular Community Business would like to thank the sponsors of this 2009 Survey for their financial support including: Baker & McKenzie, Cisco, Coca-Cola, Crown Worldwide Group, KPMG, Microsoft Hong Kong Limited, MTR Corporation, The Prudential Assurance Company Limited, Standard Chartered Bank (Hong Kong) Limited, Thomson Reuters and Time Technology.

Community Business would also like to acknowledge the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong for their continued partnership in this research - for providing strategic advice on the methodology (ensuring consistency of approach whilst also reflecting the changing economic environment), as well as for conducting the Survey itself.

Thank you to Sandy Chan for assisting in the design and the production of this Summary Report and to Kate Vernon for reviewing and editing.

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Impact of the Economic Downturn

The current economic downturn poses some challenging questions with respect to work-life balance. When companies are struggling to survive and remain profitable is work-life balance still relevant? Given other priorities in the workplace is taking steps to ensure the wellbeing of staff still important? It is precisely these types of questions that, "The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong Survey 2009," (2009 Survey) has sought to examine, directing questions at employees in Hong Kong to understand what impact, if any, the economic downturn is having on their perceptions and experiences of work-life balance.

The results of the 2009 Survey indicate overwhelmingly that work-life balance continues to be relevant to employees in Hong Kong and they present a compelling business case for why companies should take the issue seriously. In response to a direct question, the majority of Hong Kong employees (67.7%) say it is important for their employers to address work-life balance during the current economic crisis. Further, findings show that there is no significant change in employees' expectations with regard to work-life balance. For instance, Hong Kong employees' ideal work-life ratio remains the same in 2009 as in 2008 at 62:38 – indicating that regardless of the current economic conditions, employees are not willing to sacrifice their personal time for work. In addition, about 30% of employees would consider leaving their current employer for a better work-life balance – another illustration that even in the current climate of market uncertainty, work-life balance remains a priority for employees. This view is most prevalent (47.8%) amongst younger workers (age 15 to 29).

### Working Hours

As this study has shown consistently over the past four years, employees in Hong Kong work long hours and spend little time on their personal lives. According to the 2009 Survey, employees are working essentially the same number of hours this year as last year (48.4 hours per week in 2009 versus 48.8 in 2008). This is 21% higher than the 40 hours recommended by the International Labour Organisation. The fact that Hong Kong has a challenge with long working hours is backed by other research that shows that employees in Hong Kong work more hours than those in all other cities in Asia except Seoul.<sup>1</sup> The long work week for Hong Kong employees leaves them little time for their personal lives, with most spending less than two hours per day on personal activities.

### Work-Life Balance Ratios and Measures

Work-life balance ratios, both ideal (62:38 in 2009 and 2008) and actual (83:17 in 2009 and 84:16 in 2008), have shown little or no change - and in fact have remained quite consistent each year that we have conducted the Survey. The discrepancy between the two ratios remains wide. At the same time, the extent to which employees feel they have attained their ideal work-life balance has remained static at 5.7, whilst employees continue to give their employers a score of only 4.7 out of 10 for their efforts in promoting work-life balance. These findings, which also have been consistent over the history of the Survey, point to the fact that employers sadly seem to have made little progress and need to do more to address the challenge of poor work-life balance in their organisations.

### Demographical Observations

Each year we highlight variations in findings according to different variables such as gender, industry and income. This year we have also analysed the findings by age. This has revealed some interesting trends.

<sup>1</sup> Prices and Earnings – A comparison for purchasing power around the globe 2009 Edition (UBS August 2009).



## The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

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Younger employees, including Generations X and Y<sup>2</sup>, seem more concerned about work-life balance than older employees. For instance, 70.7% of workers age 15 to 29 and 74.3% of employees age 30 to 39 say it is important for their employer to address work-life balance during the current economic downturn, compared to 54.4% of employees age 60 or above. These younger employees also report working fewer hours each week than those age 40 and above. As previously mentioned, nearly half of respondents age 29 and younger (47.8%) would consider leaving their current employers for better work-life balance – well above the overall average (30.1%).

Consistent with findings from previous years, those with lower incomes struggle the most to achieve work-life balance. Employees earning \$10,000 or less a month work the longest hours (50.1 hours per week) and spend significantly less time on personal activities (9.1 hours per week versus 11.8 hours for workers earning HK\$50,001 or above). It is perhaps not surprising then that lower income employees also give their employers the lower scores in terms of their efforts to promote work-life balance.

### Barriers to Achieving Work-Life Balance

About 88% of Hong Kong employees face challenges in achieving work-life balance. This year, financial security has overtaken long working hours as the most difficult work-life balance challenge employees face and was also the highest ranking challenge in 2007. This finding may indicate the higher level of importance employees place on achieving economic security and the belief that it runs counter to attaining work-life balance during these challenging economic times. Long working hours and increased workload due to company downsizing rank as the second and third key challenges for workers in Hong Kong, closely followed by leader's attitude, which continues to be an issue that Hong Kong employees struggle with.

### The Impact of Poor Work-Life Balance on Employees and Businesses

Poor work-life balance continues to take a toll on employees and businesses, both directly and indirectly. Three-quarters of employees suffer from problems related to health and family due to poor work-life balance. More than half of the respondents (53.4%) report prolonged fatigue, sleepiness and extreme tiredness, whilst 40.8% cite not having time for their partner and family and 31.0% report suffering from insomnia and poor diet. Interestingly, problems resulting from poor work-life balance are most prevalent amongst the youngest employees (age 15 to 29) with almost 83% citing related issues. In the current economic environment, we might expect employees to say that their work productivity and quality has declined due to heavy workloads. Certainly high-levels of stress and fatigue are likely to lead to poorer performance and higher absentee rates. Companies should be looking at such metrics as an indicator of the negative impact that poor work-life balance could be having on the productivity of their business.

### Initiatives Employers Can Provide to Address Work-Life Balance

Once again, employees cite a 5-day work week and more paid annual leave as the top two most important work arrangements that will help them achieve a better work-life balance. This illustrates that despite the current economic climate, more personal time is still a high priority for employees. In addition, this suggests that employers can go a long way to addressing work-life balance by implementing a 5-day work week.

Flexible working and options to work from home rank marginally higher this year than career breaks/unpaid leave. It is possible that employees view career breaks and unpaid leave as unrealistic options at a time when they are more concerned about financial well-being and job security. Employees' preferences vary by their income and age. Those from the two highest income groups prefer more paid annual leave and the option to work from home, whilst respondents from lower or middle income groups prefer a 5-day work week.

<sup>2</sup> Generation X generally refers to individuals born between the early-to-mid 1960s and 1979. Generation Y generally refers to those born between 1980 and the late 1990s.



### Conclusion

The findings of the 2009 Survey continue to present a compelling business case as to why companies should take the issue of work-life balance seriously – even in an economic downturn. Employees continue to value work-life balance and companies should need little reminder that ultimately it is their people – their passion and commitment – who will determine whether the business succeeds or fails. Focusing on the work-life balance of staff – ensuring that employees are healthy, productive and engaged – is clearly more important than ever.

Finally, in looking at the overall findings and comparing the results from previous years it is interesting, if not somewhat disheartening, to observe that several of the key work-life balance ratios and measures have remained largely unchanged since the first time we conducted the Survey in 2006. As Community Business and its member companies continue to champion the issue of work-life balance, we urge the wider business community in Hong Kong to recognise the negative impacts poor work-life balance is having on both their employees and on their business and to take positive steps to address these issues.

## 2. FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong Survey 2009 has revealed the following significant findings:

### A. Working and Living Patterns

#### 1. Employees in Hong Kong continue to work long hours

- The average number of hours worked per week is 48.4 hours. This is a statistically insignificant decrease from 48.8 hours in 2008.
- Our research shows a downward trend in the number of hours worked since 2006, however, the year on year decline is statistically insignificant for most years.
- Employees still work 21% more than the recommended number of hours as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which states workers should work no more than 40 hours per week with occasional paid overtime of up to 12 hours per week.

#### 2. Employees spend less than two hours per day on their personal life

- 70.6% of employees spend less than 2 hours per day on personal or private activities in 2009. This is consistent with findings from 2008 and 2007.
- 7.8% of employees do not spend any time on their personal life at all.

#### 3. Despite the current economic downturn, employees' expectations of work-life balance have not changed and are far from what they consider ideal

- The preferred work-life ratio of employees is 62:38 and has not changed since last year, reflecting that employees' expectations of their work-life balance has not been affected by the current economic climate.
- The actual work-life ratio is 83:17 in 2009 compared to 84:16 in 2008.



## B. Satisfaction with Work and Life

4. **Employers are not seen by employees to have made progress in promoting work-life balance since 2006**
  - Employees give their employers a score of 4.7 out of 10 in 2009 for efforts and resources spent on promoting work-life balance. This is the same score as in 2006 and 2007.
5. **More than two-thirds of employees in Hong Kong believe it is important for their employers to address work-life balance during the current economic climate**
  - For the first time, respondents were asked if it is important for their employers to address the issue of work-life balance during the current economic climate. 67.7% believe that it is.

## C. Problems with Current Work-Life Balance and Desired Solutions

6. **Employees in Hong Kong have made no progress in achieving their ideal work-life balance over the last four years**
  - Employees rate the degree to which they have achieved their ideal work-life balance as 5.7 out of 10 in 2009. This is the same as the findings last year and in 2006.
7. **Poor work-life balance continues to negatively impact employees' productivity, family life and health**
  - More than three-quarters (76.1%) of respondents say they encounter various problems as a result of poor work-life balance.
  - Over half of the respondents (53.4%) claim they suffer from prolonged fatigue, sleepiness and extreme tiredness.
  - The second and third top problems faced by employees are not having time with their partner and family (40.8%) and insomnia and poor diet as a result of work pressures (31.0%).
8. **The need for financial security has overtaken long working hours as the most difficult work-life balance challenge this year**
  - Employees say the greatest obstacle they face in achieving work-life balance is the need to ensure financial security (13.8%). This has over taken long working hours (12.1%) which was the key obstacle in 2008.
  - Increased workload due to company downsizing (a new option introduced this year) ranks as the third most difficult work-life balance challenge (11.5%).
9. **Hong Kong employees continue to identify a 5-day work week and more paid annual leave as the ways to best help them achieve a better work-life balance**
  - The largest percentage of employees (26.9%) say that a 5-day work week would most assist them with work-life balance followed by more paid annual leave (18.8%). This is consistent with findings over the past three years.
  - Flexible working time (10.8%) and options to work from home (9.4%) surpass career breaks/unpaid leave (8.9%) and rank as the third and fourth most desirable work arrangements in 2009.
10. **Three out of ten of employees in Hong Kong would consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance**
  - Despite the current economic climate, three out of ten employees (30.1%) would still consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance – a marginal decrease compared to 2008 (32.6%).



### 3. BACKGROUND

Community Business and its member companies have championed the issue of work-life balance in Hong Kong since 2005. This annual study on the state of work-life balance in Hong Kong is the initiative of the Community Business Leadership Team (CBLT), a unique group of business leaders representing different business sectors in Hong Kong who are committed to advancing the development of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Hong Kong. Published since 2006, the study is now in its fourth year and has become the leading reference on the work-life balance of employees in Hong Kong. The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong Survey 2009 was conducted by the Public Opinion Programme (POP) at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). Designed as a tracking survey, the 2009 Survey adopted the same methodology and similar sample size as the 2008 Survey. The questions used in this year's Survey were modified slightly from those used in 2008.

The main purpose of the Survey is to provide the corporate sector with the necessary data to assist it with its work-life balance policies and initiatives. It is also designed to raise awareness of the importance of work-life balance and the direct impact on business and employees. With the global financial crisis caused by the credit crunch in late 2008, 2009 is a challenging time for businesses. Given this context, the 2009 Survey has also sought to examine how the economic downturn has impacted employees' experience of and attitude towards work-life balance.

Using a consistent methodology year on year, this Survey strives to assess the extent to which the overall state of work-life balance is improving in Hong Kong by determining the following:

- Employees' working and living patterns
- Employees' satisfaction with work and life
- Problems employees face in achieving a healthy work-life balance and their desired solutions to overcome such challenges

This report summarises important findings from the 2009 Survey, seeks to highlight significant differences from the 2008 Survey and identifies trends from the studies conducted in 2006 to 2009.

This report presents the view of Community Business. The views expressed in this report do not represent those of Community Business members, CBLT members, sponsors of this report or the POP.



## 4. METHODOLOGY

The 2009 Survey was commissioned by Community Business and undertaken by the POP. It is a tracking survey developed from the full studies conducted in 2006 and 2007. The random selection of respondents, as well as the overall sample size are representative of the working population in Hong Kong and allows us to make inferences about the Hong Kong working population as a whole.

### Target Population

The target population was defined as full-time workers of all levels in Hong Kong of age 15 or above who speak Cantonese, English or Mandarin. A full-time worker was defined as an employee who works at least 5 days a week or who has a total working time of not less than 40 hours per week.

### Sample Size

The sample size of 2009 Survey was 1,013 respondents (in 2006, 2007 and 2008 it was 1,519, 1,014 and 1,011 respondents respectively).

### Telephone Interviews

Using a computer-assisted technique, more than 1,000 random telephone interviews were conducted between 20 to 31 July 2009.

### Questionnaire

As in 2008, the 2009 Survey included 10 questions. A Work-Life Balance Survey Taskforce made up of members of the CBLT and staff from Community Business was set up to review and agree the survey questions. Professional advice was also sought from POP to ensure that selected questions were appropriate and allowed valid comparisons to be made year on year. The Taskforce selected 9 questions from the previous studies and modified the questions to reflect the impact of the current economic downturn on employees' work-life balance and their attitudes, where appropriate. One new question was also added to this year's survey. The 2009 Survey also included 8 questions relating to demographics. The full list of questions is available in Appendix I.

### Summary of Research Findings

In this report we examine the responses for each of the 10 questions asked in the 2009 Survey. For each question we highlight the mean response for 2009 and 2008 and identify trends, if any, observed from the data from 2006 to 2009. For 2009, where statistically significant differences have arisen due to gender , industry , income level  and age  these are highlighted. When this arises, this component is then reviewed for significant variations since 2008 and if trends are observed since 2006, these are mentioned. We also highlight any consistent significant variables that can be observed since 2006.

Statistically significant variations have been identified by the researchers at the POP. A difference is said to be significant when the chi-square value (p-value) is smaller than 0.05 and 0.01. Therefore in some cases, to the lay observer it may appear from our graphs that there is a significant variation. However, our text may not make reference to this. Readers should be guided by the words in the text which state clearly when a statistically significant variation has occurred. It should be noted that where we use the words "more employees" or "less employees" we are referring to more or less in terms of percentages when compared to the results of the 2008 survey.

It is also important to note that comparisons between the 2008 and 2009 Survey can generally be made. Comparisons should however be treated with some degree of caution due to changes in methodology and wording of questions. The full report of the 2009 Survey findings written by the POP is available at [www.communitybusiness.org](http://www.communitybusiness.org). The full report of the 2006 to 2008 Surveys can also be found on this website.



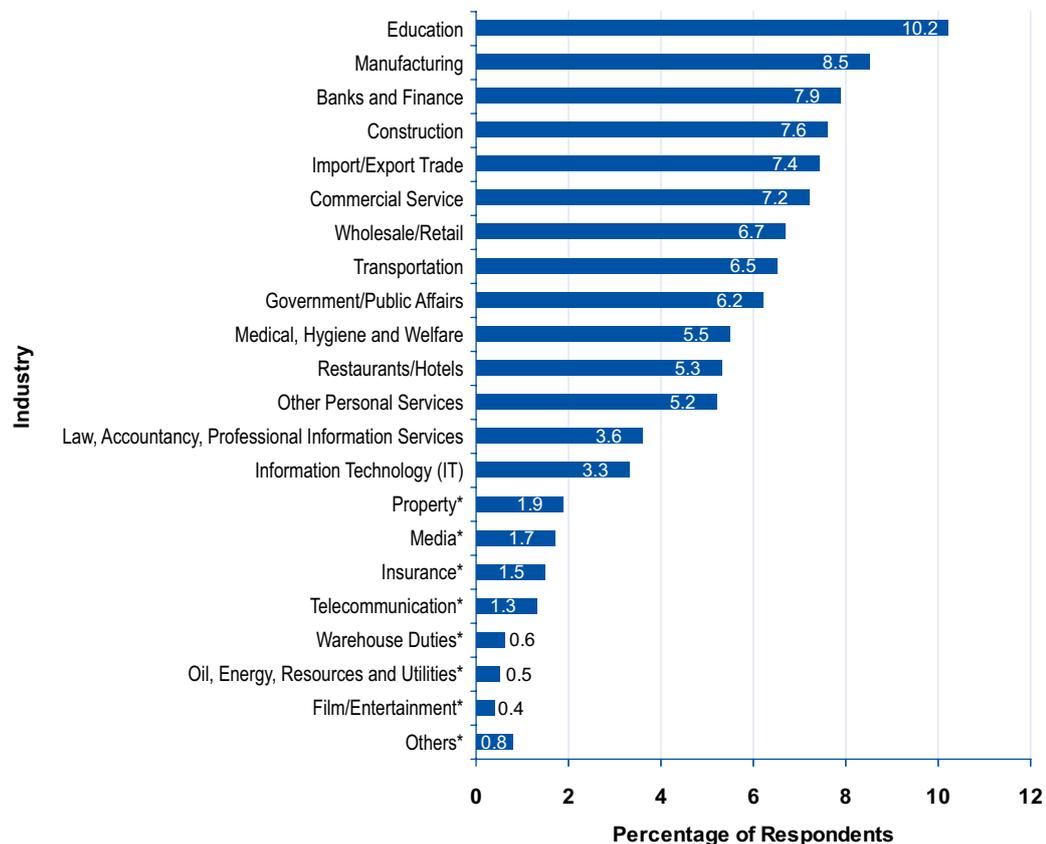
## 5. DEMOGRAPHICS

In this 2009 Survey, respondents were asked a number of demographic questions, including questions relating to their: gender, age, income, education attainment, position, industry and district of residence. For the purpose of this summary report, we focus on four demographic variables only: gender, industry, income level and age. Given the growing discussion on the various demands and priorities in the workplace of different generations and a particular interest in the characteristics of Generation Y, we have added age as the fourth variable to see whether this has a statistically significant impact on employees' work-life balance.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses from different industries in Hong Kong. The category Other Personal Services refers to personal services provided by individuals generally paid on an hourly basis such as private tutors and freelance workers. Similar to previous surveys, the 2009 Survey does not include domestic helpers. The category Others in 2009 Survey refers to Security Work, Leaflet Distribution and Environment. As this Others category only includes a total of 8 people from a wide range of industries, it does not represent a single industry per se. We have therefore chosen to ignore this group in our analysis.

Items marked with an asterisk (\*) in Figure 1 represent a sub-sample size with means there were less than 30 respondents from this industry. Statistically speaking, the smaller the sample size, the larger the sampling error. Findings for these industries are therefore for indication only. These industries include: Property, Media, Insurance, Telecommunication, Warehouse Duties, Oil, Energy, Resources and Utilities, Film/Entertainment and Others.

Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Industry (2009)

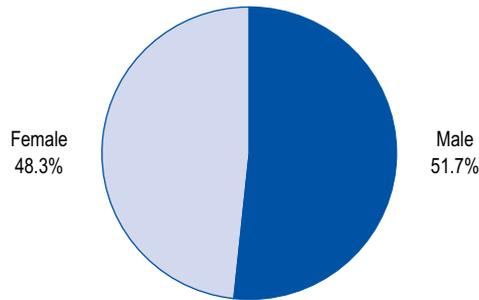




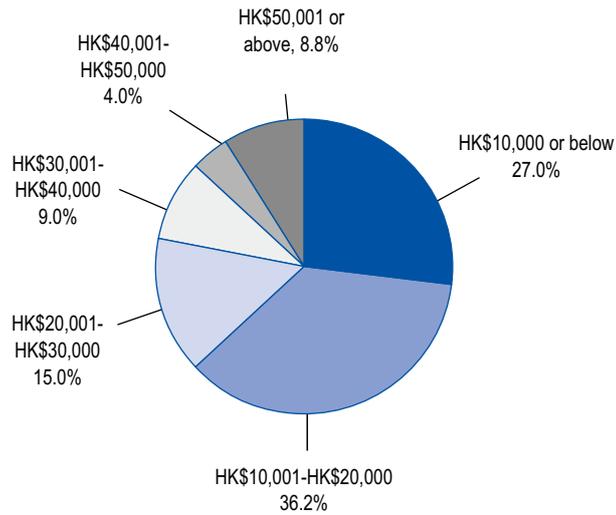
# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

Figures 2, 3 and 4 show the distribution of respondents by gender, income level and age.

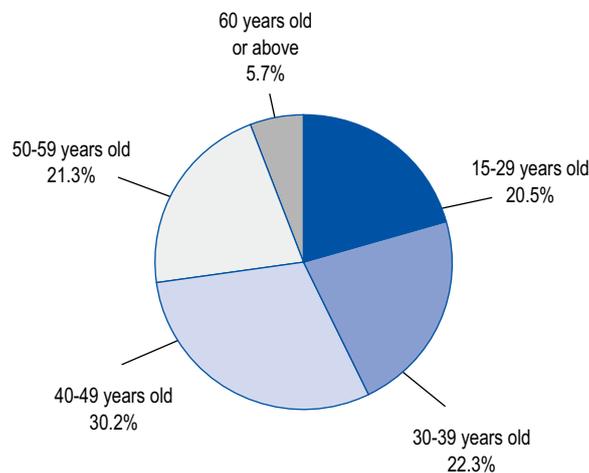
**Figure 2. Distribution of Respondents by Gender (2009)**



**Figure 3. Distribution of Respondents by Monthly Income (Including Bonus) (2009)**



**Figure 4. Distribution of Respondents by Age Group (2009)**





## 6. OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

In reviewing the findings of the 2009 Survey, we identify the following:

- The overall mean response for 2009 and where applicable, a comparison with the 2008 findings, whether or not statistically significant. In addition, where there is an upward or downward trend since 2006 this is highlighted.
- Statistically significant variations by gender , industry , income level  and age  for 2009. When this arises, this component is then reviewed for significant variations since 2008. In addition, where there is an upward or downward trend since 2006 this is highlighted. We also highlight any consistent significant variables that have been observed since 2006.

The findings are presented in the following sections:

- A. Working and Living Patterns
- B. Satisfaction with Work and Life
- C. Problems with Current Work-Life Balance and Desired Solutions

Graphs for significant demographic variables are provided in Appendix II with key findings illustrated in this section.

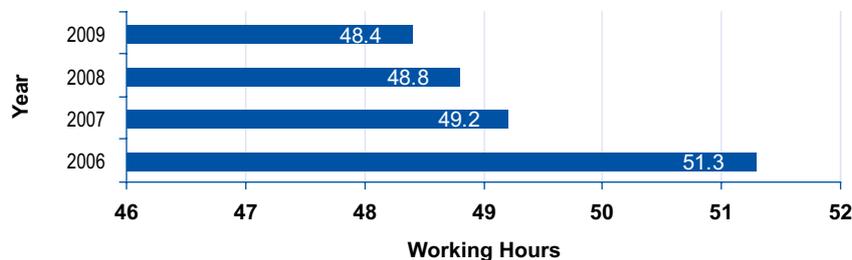
### A. Working and Living Patterns

#### Finding 1: Employees in Hong Kong continue to work long hours

Employees were asked how many hours they actually work on average each week. Figure 5 shows that in 2009 respondents work an average of 48.4 hours per week – down slightly from 48.8 hours in 2008. Whilst the overall downward trend in number of working hours since 2006 should be viewed as positive, from a statistical perspective the year on year decline is insignificant – with the exception of 2007.

It should be noted that the number of hours worked by Hong Kong employees in 2009 exceeds the standard set by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) by 21%. The ILO recommends that workers should work no more than 40 hours per week with occasional paid overtime, paid at a premium of up to 12 hours per week.

Figure 5. Actual Working Hours Per Week (2006 to 2009)





Significant Demographic Variables: Table 1

Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to 2007 and 2008, men work longer hours (49.5 hours) than women (47.2 hours) in 2009.</li> <li>• The number of hours women work has remained consistent since 2007.</li> </ul>	See Graph 1.1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2009, employees from Restaurants/Hotels (56.4 hours), Property (52.2 hours) and Other Personal Services (51.8 hours) work the longest number of hours.</li> <li>• Employees from Insurance (41.6 hours), Oil, Energy, Resources and Utilities (44.2 hours) and Education (45.3 hours) work the shorter number of hours.</li> <li>• A significant decrease is observed in the actual working hours in Medical, Hygiene and Welfare from 48.8 hours in 2008 to 45.7 hours in 2009. On the other hand, respondents from Restaurant/Hotels report working significantly longer in 2009 (56.4 hours) than in 2008 (50.7 hours).</li> <li>• On average, workers in the Insurance industry have worked fewer hours over the past four years in comparison to other industries included in the survey.</li> </ul>	See Graph 1.2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees from the lowest income group (HK\$10,000 or below) work the longest hours (50.1 hours) compared to other income groups, which range from 47 to 48 hours.</li> </ul>	See Graph 1.3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of hours worked per week increases steadily by age, from 47.4 hours for those age 15 to 29, to 50.5 hours for those age 60 or above.</li> </ul>	See Graph 1.4

**Finding 2: Employees spend less than two hours per day on their personal life**

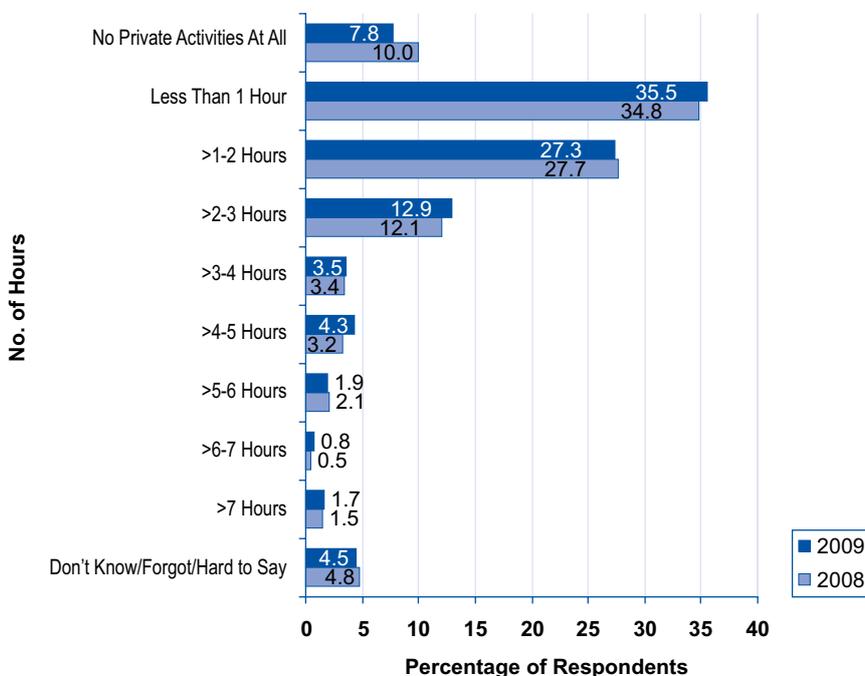
Figure 6 shows a significant proportion of the working population spends less than 2 hours per day on their personal life in 2009 (70.6%), which is a finding consistent with previous years. While fewer employees say that they do not spend any time on private activities each day in 2009 (7.8%, compared to 10.0% in 2008), this change is statistically insignificant.



# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey



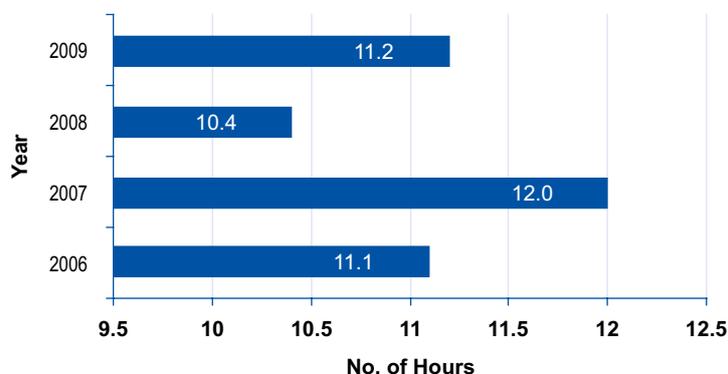
Figure 6. Time Spent on Personal Activities Per Day (2008 and 2009)



\*Average time spent on personal activities per day is 1.6 hours in 2009 and 1.5 hours in 2008.

According to the 2009 results, employees spend slightly more time on their personal and private activities each week than last year. However, this is a statistically insignificant increase. As shown in Figure 7, workers spend an average of 11.2 hours per week on their personal and private activities in 2009 as compared to 10.4 hours in 2008. These results represent little change from 2006.

Figure 7. Time Spent on Personal Activities Per Week (2006 to 2009)





Significant Demographic Variables: Table 2

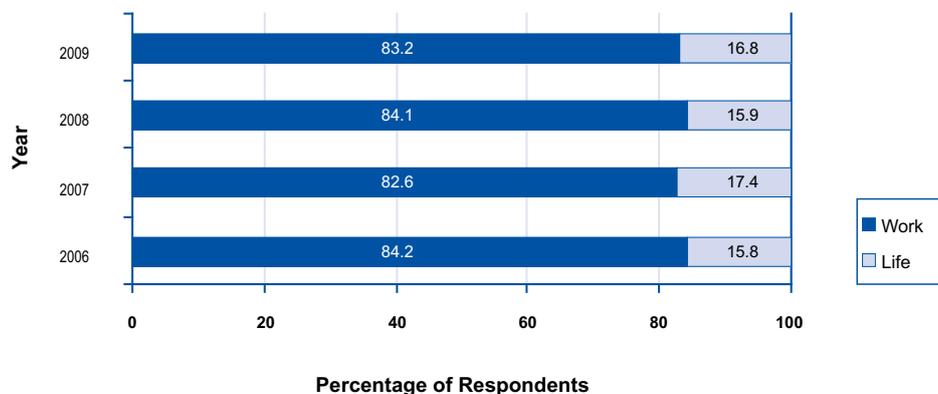
Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent with the key findings in Finding 1, respondents from the lowest income group spend the least amount of time on their personal or private activities (9.1 hours per week).</li> </ul>	See Graph 2.1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The youngest generation, age 15 to 29 spends the most time on personal or private activities (13.2 hours per week). This is a consistent trend over the four years.</li> </ul>	See Graph 2.2

**Finding 3: Despite the current economic downturn, employees' expectations of work-life balance have not changed and are far from what they consider ideal**

Respondents were asked about their ideal split between work and personal life, which we call the preferred work-life ratio. The preferred work-life ratio for 2009 is 62:38 which is the same as in 2008. The fact that the ratio is the same in 2009 and 2008 indicates that employees' expectations of work-life balance have not changed over the past year, despite the financial crisis.

Figure 8 shows that the actual work-life ratio is 83:17 in 2009 (compared to 84:16 in 2008), meaning that employees are spending nearly 5 times as many hours working as they are on their personal life. This ratio has remained somewhat consistent since 2006 and continues to highlight that there is a significant gap between employees' ideal work-life balance and the reality.

Figure 8. Actual Work-Life Ratio (2006 to 2009)





Significant Demographic Variables: Table 3

Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The actual work-life ratio in 2009 is best for employees working in Government/Public Affairs (79:21), Medical, Hygiene and Welfare (79:21) and Insurance (80:20), but still far from the ideal work-life ratio of 62:38. The work-life ratio for employees is worse in Film/Entertainment (94:6), Warehouse Duties (90:10) and Restaurant/Hotels (89:11).</li> <li>When compared to 2008, the actual work-life ratio of Medical, Hygiene and Welfare (79:21), Transportation (82:18) and Wholesale/Retail (84:16) have significantly improved. However, the ratio for respondents working Film/Entertainment has worsened (94:6).</li> </ul>	See Graphs 3.1a and 3.1b
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar to 2008, higher income groups have a more balanced work-life ratio than low income groups (HK\$40,001 - HK\$50,000 (79:21) and HK\$50,001 or above (81:19)). While still far from the ideal work-life ratio, this is significantly better than those who earn HK\$10,000 or below (86:14).</li> </ul>	See Graphs 3.2a and 3.2b
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The youngest age group (15 to 29) has a more balanced work-life ratio (80:20) than any other age group. This contrasts significantly with those over 60 whose ratio is 88:12. These findings are consistent with what has been found over the past four years.</li> </ul>	See Graph 3.3

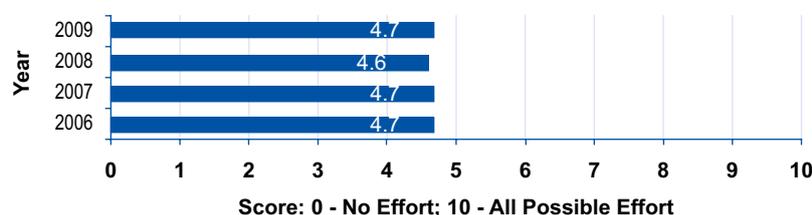
## B. Satisfaction with Work and Life

### Finding 4: Employers are not seen by employees to have made progress in promoting work-life balance since 2006

Employees were asked how much they think their employer has contributed in terms of effort and resources to promote work-life balance. The range of scores is from 0 to 10 with 0 representing no effort being made, 10 being all possible effort being made and 5 being neutral.

Although Figure 9 shows that while there is a slight increase in the score from 4.6 in 2008 to 4.7 in 2009, this increase is statistically insignificant and remains below the neutral score of 5. More importantly the score remains consistent with the results in 2006 and 2007 which points to the fact that employers are not seen to be making progress in this area. Clearly companies need to do more to convince employees that they are taking the issue of work-life balance seriously.

Figure 9. Effort and Resources Spent to Promote Work-Life Balance (2006 to 2009)





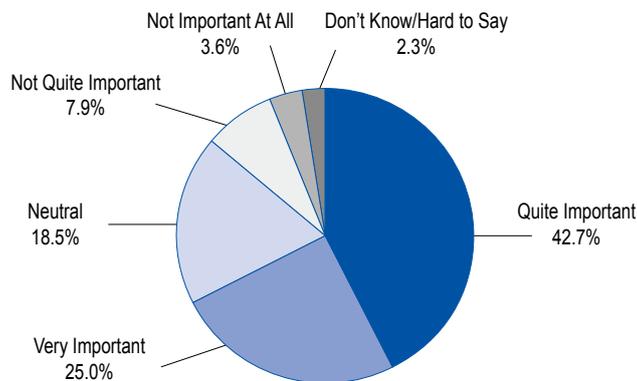
Significant Demographic Variables: Table 4

Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees from lower income groups give lower scores to their employers than those from higher income groups. This indicates a direct link between effort and resources spent by companies on promoting work-life balance and employees' actual work-life balance (See Findings 1 and 2).</li> </ul>	See Graph 4.1

**Finding 5: More than two-thirds of Hong Kong employees believe it is important for their employers to address work-life balance during the current economic crisis**

In recognition of the challenges posed by the current economic downturn, this year respondents were asked how important it is for their workplace or boss to address the issue of work-life balance in the current economic climate. Interestingly over two-thirds (67.7%) say that is 'very' or 'quite important' highlighting that employee interest in work-life balance remains high (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Importance of Employers to Address Work-Life Balance (2009)



One might assume that during a period of economic recession, employees would be willing to accept a lesser degree of control and/or place less importance on achieving personal work-life balance. For example, workers may be so concerned about keeping their job and demonstrating their contribution to the organisation that they recognise the need to work harder than in previous years. Indeed concerns about financial security have been highlighted in this survey (see Finding 8) as a major challenge for employees achieving work-life balance. However, these results show that employees still consider work-life balance to be an important issue and employers would be wise to take heed of this.

Significant Demographic Variables: Table 5

Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A higher percentage of younger employees (age 15 to 39) consider it important for their workplace/boss to address the issue of work-life balance than workers age 40 and above.</li> </ul>	See Graph 5.1

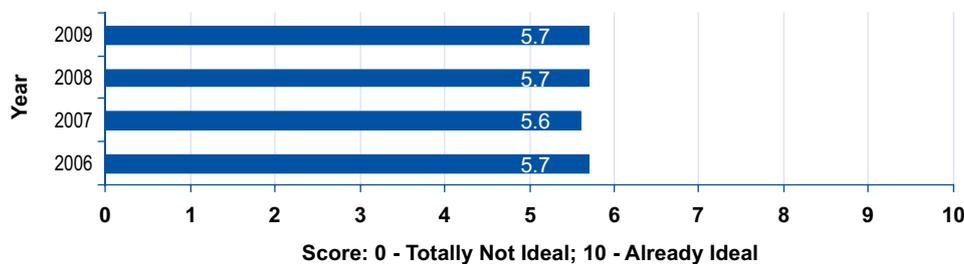


## C. Problems with Current Work-Life Balance and Desired Solutions

### Finding 6: Employees in Hong Kong have made no progress in achieving their ideal work-life balance over the last four years

As in previous years, respondents were asked to rate how far they felt they had achieved their ideal work-life balance on a scale of 0 to 10. The higher the score the closer they are to their ideal situation with the score of 5 being neutral. The average score in 2009 is 5.7 which is consistent with findings over the past four years. This suggests that employees in Hong Kong have made no progress in achieving their ideal work-life balance since 2006.

Figure 11. Degree to Which Employees Have Achieved Their Ideal Work-Life Balance (2006 to 2009)



Significant Demographic Variables: Table 6

Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees in Government/Public Affairs (6.5), Property (6.1) and Banks and Finance (6.1) are closer to achieving their ideal work-life balance than any other industries.</li> <li>The three industries that scored the lowest are Film/Entertainment (4.0), Warehouse Duties (5.2) and Restaurants/Hotels (5.2).</li> <li>As compared to last year, respondents from Telecommunication say they are closer to achieving their ideal work-life balance (4.8 in 2008 compared to 6.0 in 2009). Conversely, respondents from Law, Accountancy, Professional Information Services has worsened (from 6.6 in 2008 compared to 5.5 in 2009).</li> </ul>	See Graphs 6.1a and 6.1b
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent with previous findings, employees from lower income groups are further from their ideal work-life balance than those in higher income groups. In particular, respondents from the lowest income group (HK\$10,000 or below) gave a lower score over the past four years than any other income group.</li> <li>The largest decline by income group is amongst those earning HK\$30,001 - HK\$40,000 (5.6 in 2009 compared to 6.5 in 2008). The biggest increase was amongst those earning HK\$40,001 - HK\$50,000 (5.5 in 2008 compared to 5.8 in 2009).</li> </ul>	See Graph 6.2



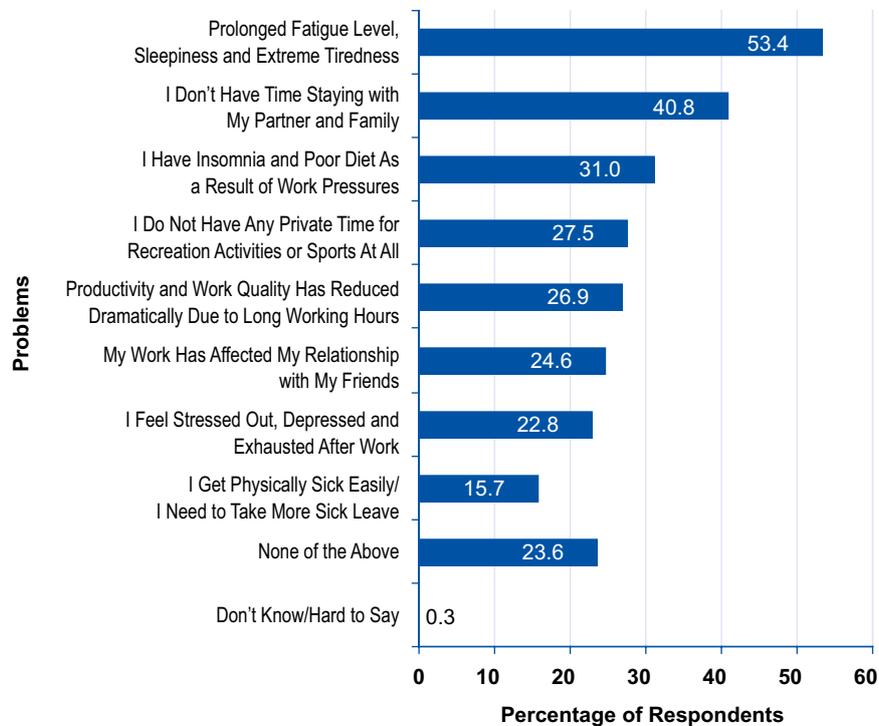
## The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

### Finding 7: Poor work-life balance continues to negatively impact employees' productivity, family life and health

Respondents were asked what problems, if any, they have encountered as a result of their work-life balance and were given a list of options to choose from. Employees were able to choose more than one option as shown in Figure 12.

For the purposes of this year's survey, the question was changed slightly to reflect the impact of the economic recession. Specifically, respondents this year were asked what problems they have encountered over the past 12 months, rather than an open-ended time frame as asked in previous years.

Figure 12. Problems Resulting from Poor Work-Life Balance (2009)



More than three-quarters (76.1%) of respondents say they have encountered some kind of problem in the last 12 months as a result of poor work-life balance. Over half of the respondents (53.4%) claim they have suffered from prolonged fatigue, sleepiness and extreme tiredness. The second and third top problems faced by employees are not having time with their partner and family (40.8%) and insomnia and poor diet as a result of work pressures (31.0%).

As this year's Survey changed both the wording of the question, no year on year comparisons can be made with respect to this finding. However, it is interesting to note that in 2008, employees cited the same top three problems resulting from poor work-life balance as this year's Survey.



Significant Demographic Variables: Table 7

Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is most common for respondents in the second highest income bracket (HK\$40,001 - HK\$50,000) and second lowest income bracket (HK\$10,001 - HK\$20,000) to experience problems of prolonged fatigue, sleepiness and extreme tiredness due to poor work-life balance. (64.9% and 59.9%, respectively).</li> </ul>	See Graphs 7.1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Across all age groups, experiencing prolonged fatigue, sleepiness and extreme tiredness is the most common problem and is particularly prevalent amongst the youngest generations surveyed (age 15 to 29 - 64.4% and age 30 to 39 - 53.2%).</li> <li>Younger workers seem to encounter more problems resulting from poor work-life balance than older workers. Only 17.1% of 15 to 29 year olds say that they have not encountered any problem as a result of poor work-life balance, compared to 31.6% of those age 60 or above.</li> </ul>	See Graphs 7.2a and 7.2b

**Finding 8: The need for financial security has overtaken long working hours as the most difficult work-life balance challenge this year**

Respondents were asked to select the most difficult work-life balance challenge they face from a list of options. They were only allowed to choose one factor from the list given to them in Figure 13. The 2009 Survey included a new option: increased workload due to company downsizing. Given that this option was not included in previous years, no year on year comparisons can be made regarding this question.

Figure 13 shows that 88.1% of employees experience challenges in achieving work-life balance. Financial well being/ wealth management (13.8%) has overtaken long working hours (12.1%) as the top issue, whilst increased workload due to company downsizing (11.5%) ranks third, narrowly pushing leaders' attitude to fourth place (11.4%). Given the current economic downturn and general market uncertainty, these findings are perhaps not surprising. Employees are clearly concerned about their financial security and having to take on additional workload as a result of corporate restructuring. Leader's attitude, which has appeared in the top three challenges in previous year, has only narrowly been squeezed out to fourth position - suggesting that this continues to be a problem for employees in Hong Kong.



# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

Figure 13. The Most Difficult Work-Life Balance Challenges (2009)



\* Option first introduced in 2009 Survey

### Significant Demographic Variables: Table 8

Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees in specific industries cite financial well-being/wealth management as the most difficult work-life balance challenge. This is particularly true for Warehouse Duties (33.3%), Insurance (26.7%) and Import/Export Trade (21.9%).</li> <li>For employees in specific industries, long working hours is the most difficult work-life balance challenge. This is highest amongst employees from Film/Entertainment (25.0%), Information Technology (25.0%), Restaurants/Hotels (17.3%) and Education (17.0%).</li> </ul>	See Graph 8.1

### Finding 9: Hong Kong employees continue to identify a 5-day work week and more paid annual leave as the ways to best help them achieve a better work-life balance

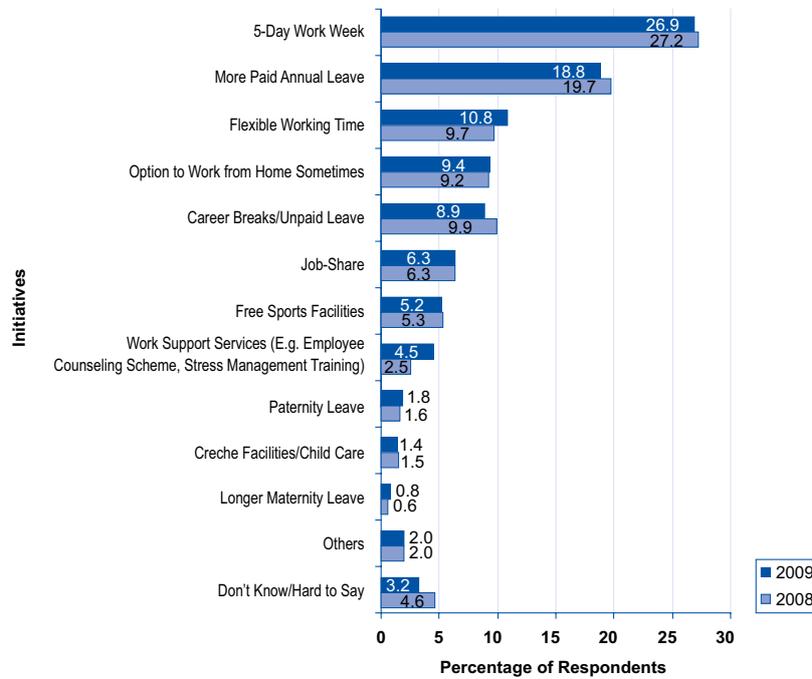
Respondents were asked what work arrangements or facilities they believe would most help them achieve better work-life balance. They were given a range of options to choose from.

As shown in Figure 14, the largest group of employees (26.9%) cite a 5-day work week as the most desirable arrangement followed by more paid annual leave (18.8%) and flexible working time (10.8%). In 2009, flexible working time and the option to work from home sometimes (9.4%) has surpassed career breaks/unpaid leave (8.9%) as the third and fourth most desirable work arrangements. This could reflect employees' concerns that career breaks and unpaid leave are not realistic options at a time when they are more concerned about financial well-being and job security.



# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

Figure 14. Initiatives Provided by Employer that Would Most Help Work-Life Balance (2008 and 2009)



Significant Demographic Variables: Table 9

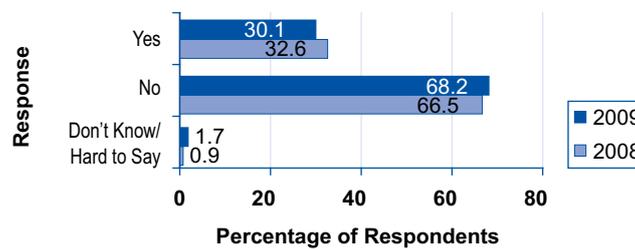
Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All respondents earning less than HK\$40,000 have selected a 5-day work week as the top initiative to assist with work-life balance. In contrast, respondents from the highest income groups desire more paid annual leave (HK\$40,001 - HK\$50,000: 29.7%) and options to work from home (HK\$ 50,001 or above: 22.2%).</li> <li>Since 2007, findings consistently show that a 5-day work week is the preferred option for employees from the lower income groups.</li> <li>The Survey also indicates that only a small number of respondents from the lowest income groups regard the option to work from home as a desired work arrangement (HK\$10,000 or below: 4.0%; HK\$10,001 - HK\$20,000: 7.1%).</li> </ul>	See Graph 9.1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent with previous years, a 5-day work week continues to be the most desired work arrangement across all age groups.</li> <li>Significantly more respondents from the age group 15 to 29 prefer more paid annual leave than any other age group.</li> <li>Employees under age 50 prefer the option to work from home sometimes more so than employees age 50 and above who cite flexible working time as more important.</li> </ul>	See Graph 9.2a, 9.2b and 9.2c



**Finding 10: Three out of ten of employees in Hong Kong would consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance**

Since 2008, respondents have been asked if they would consider leaving their current job in order to achieve a better work-life balance. As shown in Figure 15, slightly fewer respondents would consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance this year (30.1%) than last year (32.6%). However, it is interesting to note that even in the uncertain economic climate three out of ten employees would still consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance.

Figure 15. Considering Leaving Current Job for Better Work-Life Balance (2008 and 2009)



Significant Demographic Variables: Table 10

Demographic Variable	Key Findings	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar to last year, more younger employees would consider leaving their current job for better work-life balance than older ones. Indeed almost half (47.8%) of the respondents between age 15 and 29 would consider leaving their current job in 2009, a finding that declines significantly with age.</li> </ul>	See Graphs 10.1a and 10.1b



## 7. APPENDICES

### Appendix I - List of Survey Questions

- Q1. Take the last month as an example, how many hours a week do you actually work on average for your full time job?**  
\_\_\_\_\_ hours (*Insert exact figure*)  
Don't know/ Hard to say  
Refuse to answer
- Q2. Take the last month as an example, how many hours a week do you actually spend on doing some personal or private activities, like meeting friends and engaging in activities for leisure such as sports and traveling?**  
\_\_\_\_\_ hours (*Insert exact figure*)  
Don't know / Hard to say  
Refuse to answer
- Q3. In your view, what would be the preferred but realistic ratio between the time you want to spend on working and the time you want to spend on personal or private activities? Please base on your realistic number of working hours and exclude sleeping time (the ratio must add up to 100%)**  
\_\_\_\_\_ % on work and \_\_\_\_\_ % on private life  
Don't know / Hard to say  
Refuse to answer
- Q4. Using 0-10, how much have you achieved in terms of an ideal work-life balance? 0 represents the worst case possible, 10 represents already ideal, and 5 being half-half.**  
\_\_\_\_\_ (*Exact figure from 0-10*)  
Don't know / Hard to say  
Refuse to answer
- Q5. Over the past 12 months, Have you ever encountered any of the following problems due to a disturbed work-life balance? (You may choose multiple answers)**  
Productivity and work quality has reduced dramatically due to long working hours  
Prolonged fatigue level, sleepiness and extreme tiredness  
I get physically sick easily/I need to take more sick leave  
I do not have any private time for recreation activities or sports at all  
My work has affected my relationship with my friends  
I don't have time staying with my partner and family  
I feel stressed out, depressed and exhausted after work  
Work pressure creates insomnia and poor diet  
None of the above  
Don't know / Hard to say  
Refuse to answer



## The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

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**Q6. Under the current economic conditions, which of the following would you consider to be the most difficult work-life balance challenge for yourself? (Choose one answer only)**

- Job security
- Long working hours
- Lack of flexibility in working hours
- Work location
- Leader's attitude
- Peer pressure and competition among colleagues
- Personnel changes
- Taking care of children or family members
- Not enough time for personal exercise and taking courses
- Financial well-being / Wealth management
- Increased workload due to company downsizing
- I do not find work-life balance is a challenge to me
- Others (Please specify)
- Don't know / Hard to say
- Refuse to answer

**Q7 Under the current economic conditions, in order to help you achieve a better work-life balance, what type of work facility/arrangement would help you best? (Choose one answer only)**

- Flexible working time
- 5-day work week
- Option to work from home sometimes
- Free sports facilities
- Crèche facilities / Child care
- Work support services (e.g. employee counseling scheme, stress management training)
- Paternity leave
- Longer maternity leave
- Job-share
- Career breaks/Unpaid leave
- More paid annual leave
- Others (Please specify)
- Don't know / Hard to say
- Refuse to say

**Q8 In terms of effort and resources required to balance work and life, how much effort do you think your workplace / boss has paid to promote work-life balance? Please use a scale of 0-10 to measure it, with 0 representing no effort at all, 10 representing all possible efforts have been made, and 5 being half-half.**

\_\_\_\_\_ (Exact figure from 0 - 10)

- Don't know / Hard to say
- Refuse to answer

**Q9 Under the current economic conditions, how important is it that your workplace/boss addresses the issue of work-life balance?**

- Very important
- Quite important
- Neutral
- Not quite important
- Not important at all
- Don't know/Hard to say



**Q10 Would you consider leaving your current job for better work-life balance?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / Hard to say
- Refuse to answer

**Demographics**

**Q11 Gender**

- Male
- Female

**Q12 Age**

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Exact age)
- Do not want to tell

**Q12a [For those who do not want to tell their exact age] Age interval**

- 15-19
- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60 years old or above
- Do not want to tell

**Q13 Education Attainment**

- Primary school or below
- Secondary school
- Matriculated
- Tertiary, non-degree course
- Tertiary, degree course
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree
- Refuse to answer

**Q14 Position**

**White collar:**

- Professional / Manager / Executive
- Trader / Proprietor
- Office: skilled
- Office: unskilled

**Blue collar:**

- Factory/Shop / Outdoor: skilled manual worker
- Factory/Shop / Outdoor: unskilled manual worker
- Refuse to answer



## The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

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### Q15 Industry

Banks and Finance  
Commercial Services  
Construction  
Education  
Film / Entertainment  
Government / Public Affairs  
Import/Export Trade  
Information Technology (IT)  
Insurance  
Law, Accountancy, Professional Information Services  
Manufacturing  
Media  
Medical, Hygiene and Welfare  
Oil, Energy, Resources and Utilities  
Other Personal Services  
Property  
Restaurants / Hotels  
Telecommunication  
Transportation  
Warehouse Duties  
Wholesale / Retail  
Others (*Please specify*)  
Refuse to answer

### Q16 Marital Status

Single  
Married  
Divorced / Widow  
Refuse to answer

### Q17 Do you have children? If yes, how many?

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ child (ren)  
No children  
Refuse to answer

### Q18 Your personal monthly income, including bonus, is \_\_\_\_\_ ?

HK\$ 10,000 or below  
HK\$ 10,001 - 20,000  
HK\$ 20,001 - 30,000  
HK\$ 30,001 - 40,000  
HK\$ 40,001 - 50,000  
HK\$ 50,001 or above  
Refuse to answer

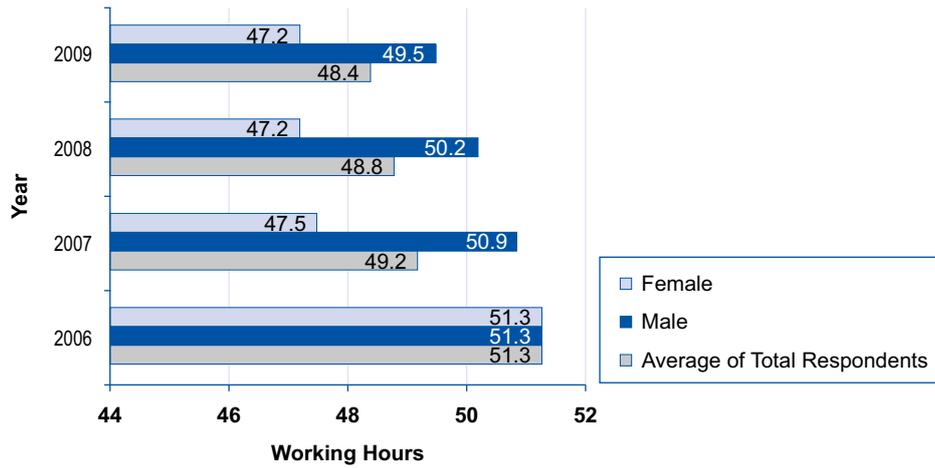


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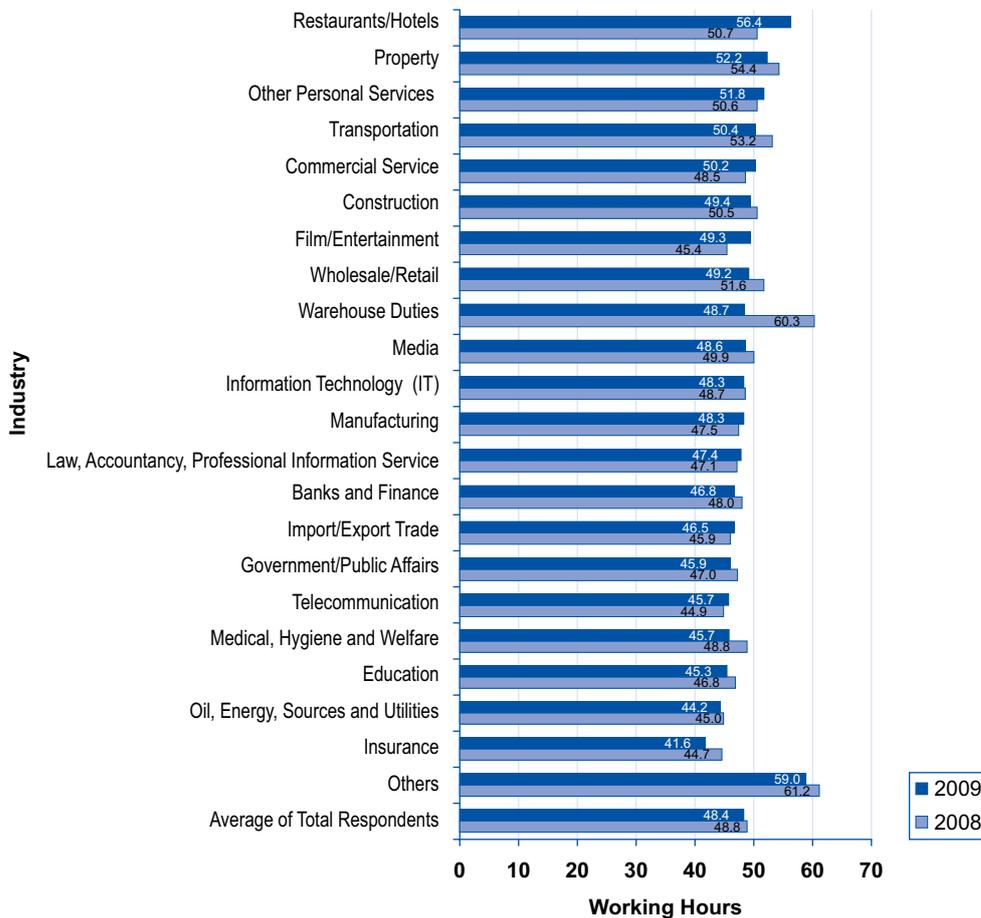


## Appendix II - Graphs of Significant Demographic Variables

**Graph 1.1 Actual Working Hours Per Week by Gender (2006 to 2009)**



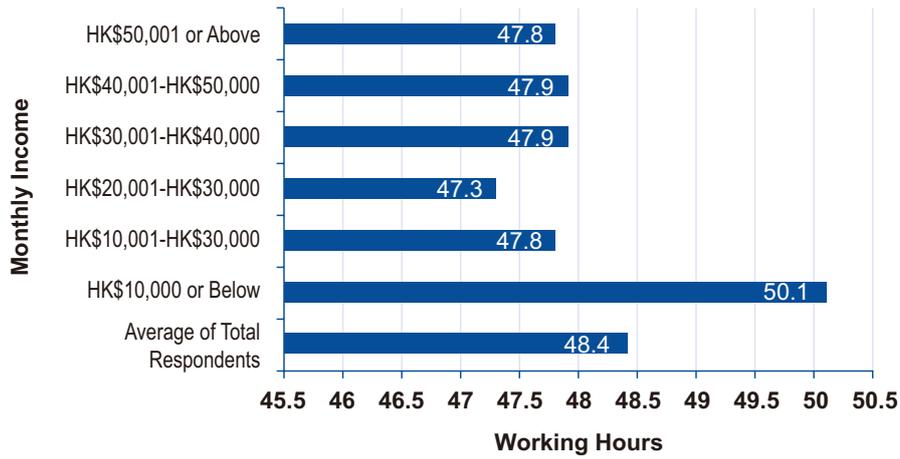
**Graph 1.2 Actual Working Hours Per Week by Industry (2008 and 2009)**



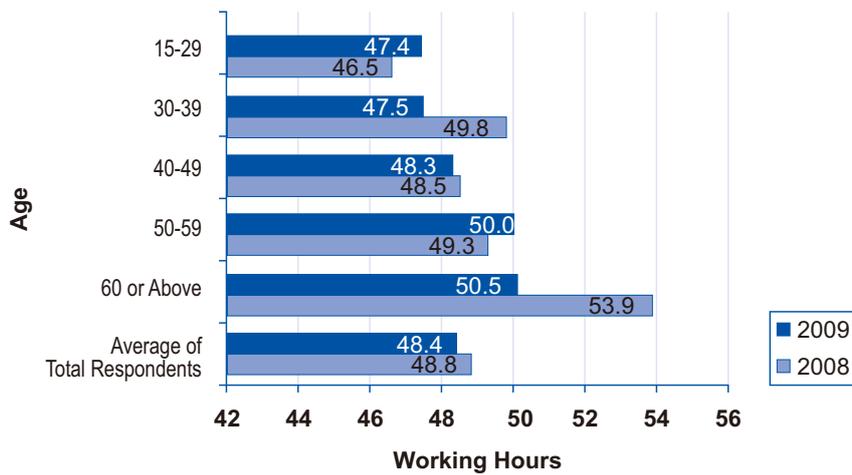


# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

**Graph 1.3 Actual Working Hours Per Week by Income (2009)**



**Graph 1.4 Actual Working Hours Per Week by Age Group (2008 and 2009)**

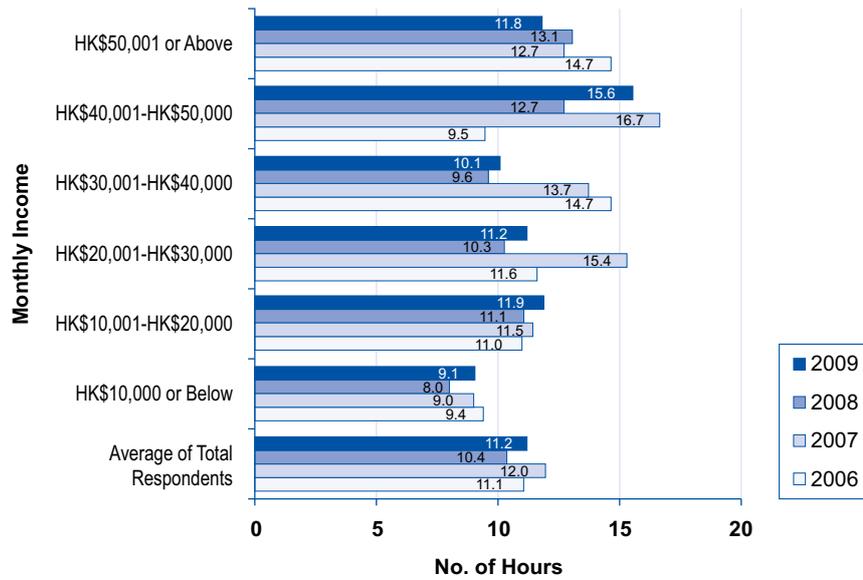




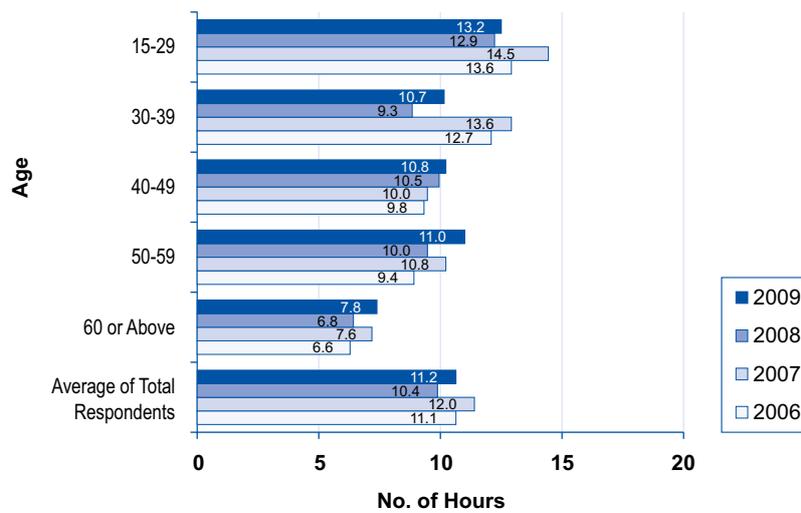
# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey



Graph 2.1 Time Spent on Personal Activities Per Week by Income (2006 to 2009)



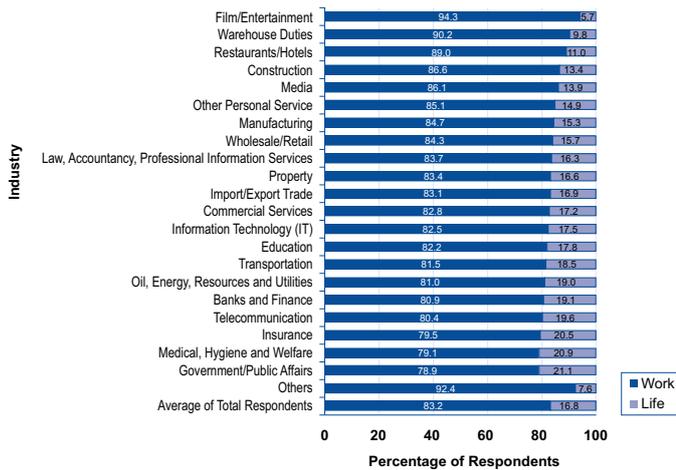
Graph 2.2 Time Spent on Personal Activities Per Week by Age Group (2006 to 2009)



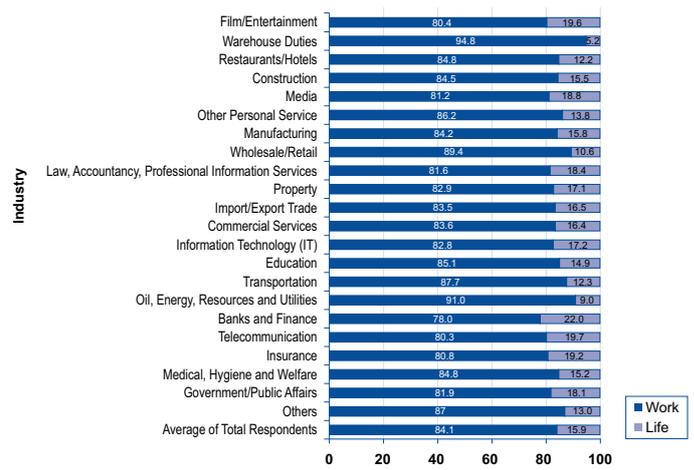


# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

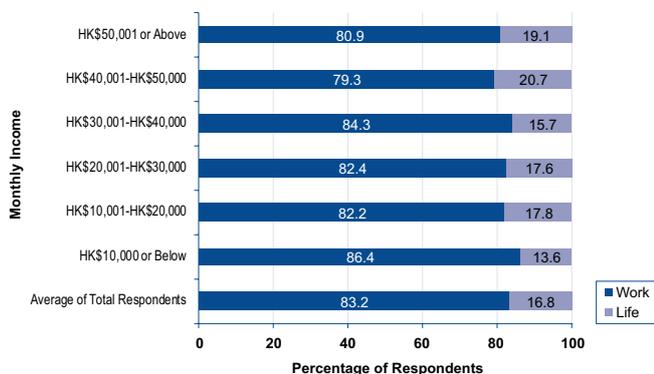
**Graph 3.1a Actual Work-Life Balance Ratio by Industry (2009)**



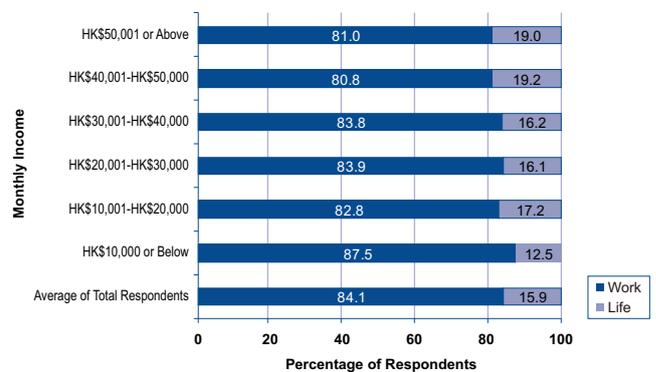
**Graph 3.1b Actual Work Life Balance Ratio by Industry (2008)**



**Graph 3.2a Actual Work-Life Balance Ratio by Income (2009)**



**Graph 3.2b Actual Work-Life Balance Ratio by Income (2008)**

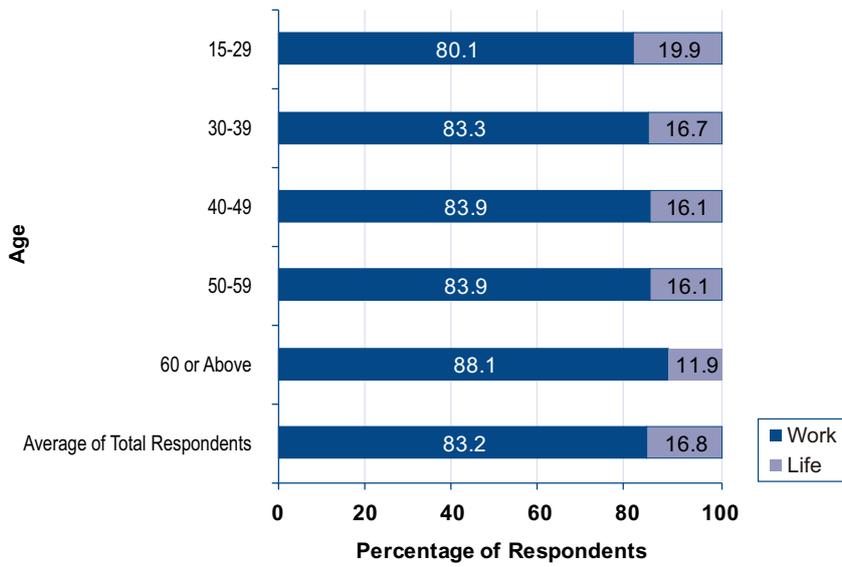




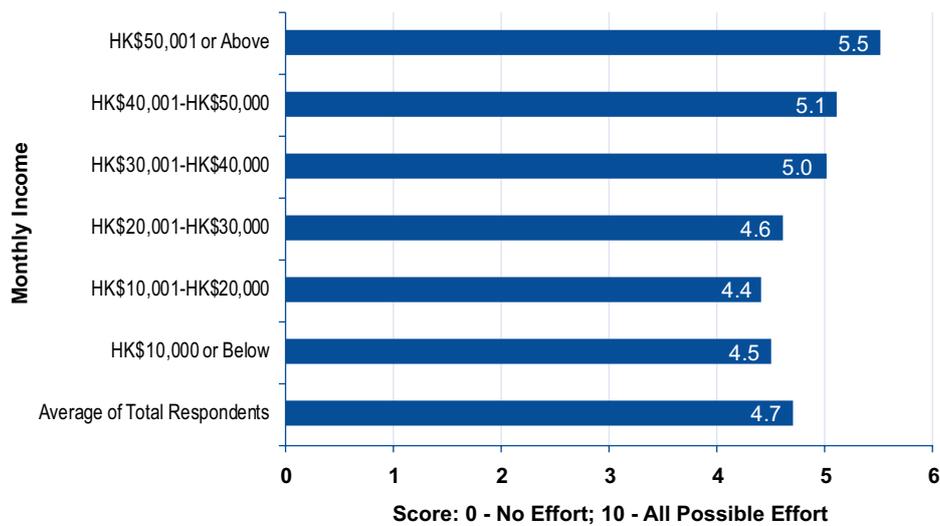
# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey



**Graph 3.3 Actual Work-Life Balance Ratio by Age Group (2009)**



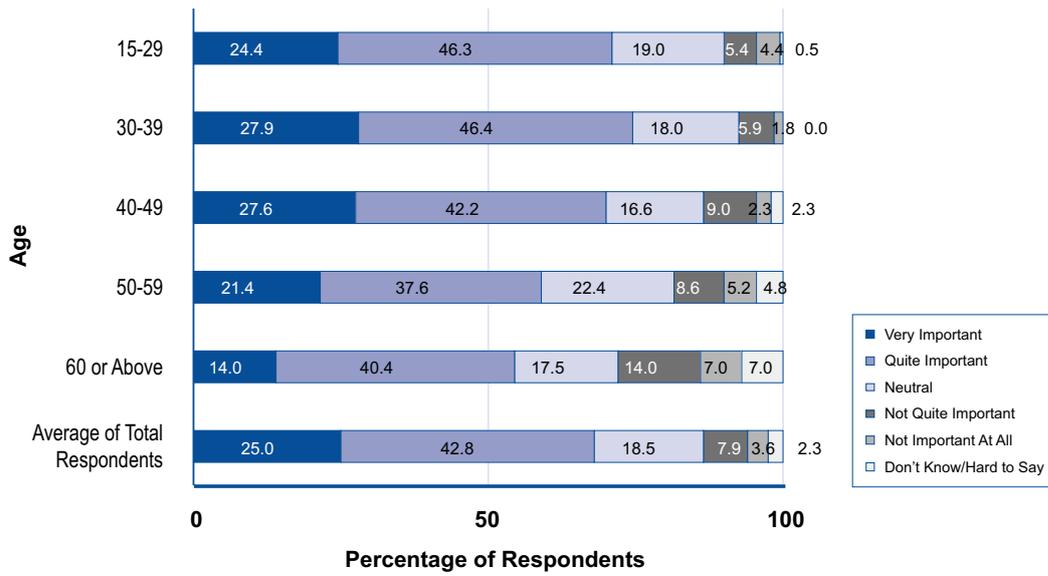
**Graph 4.1 Effort and Resources Spent to Promote Work-Life Balance by Income (2009)**



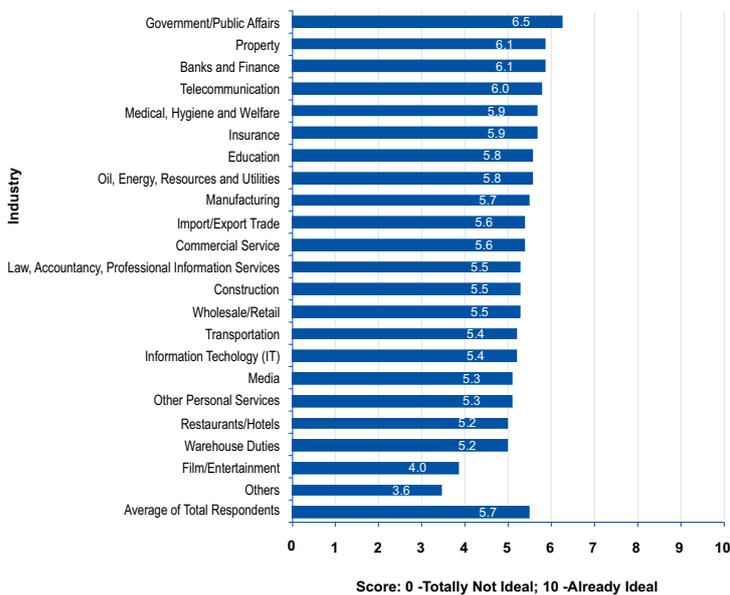


# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

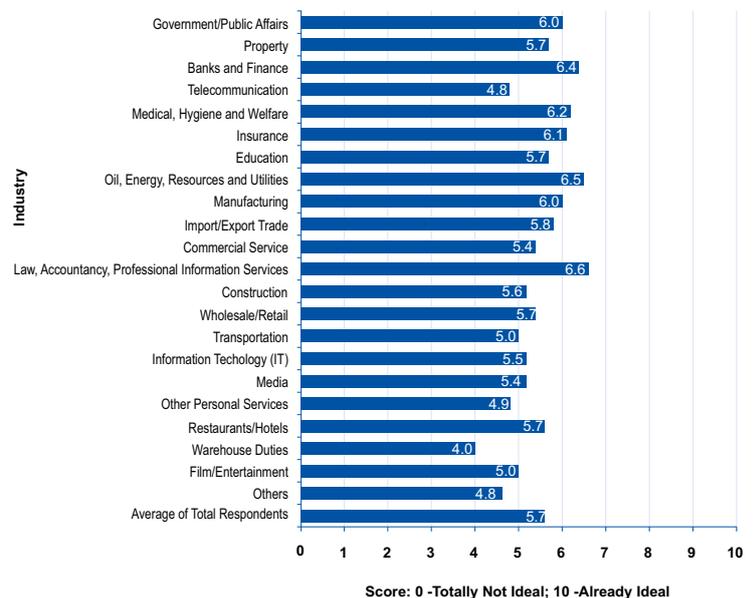
**Graph 5.1 Importance of Employers to Address Work-Life Balance by Age Group (2009)**



**Graph 6.1a Degree to Which Employees Have Achieved Their Ideal Work-Life Balance by Industry (2009)**



**Graph 6.1b Degree to Which Employees Have Achieved Their Ideal Work-Life Balance by Industry (2008)**

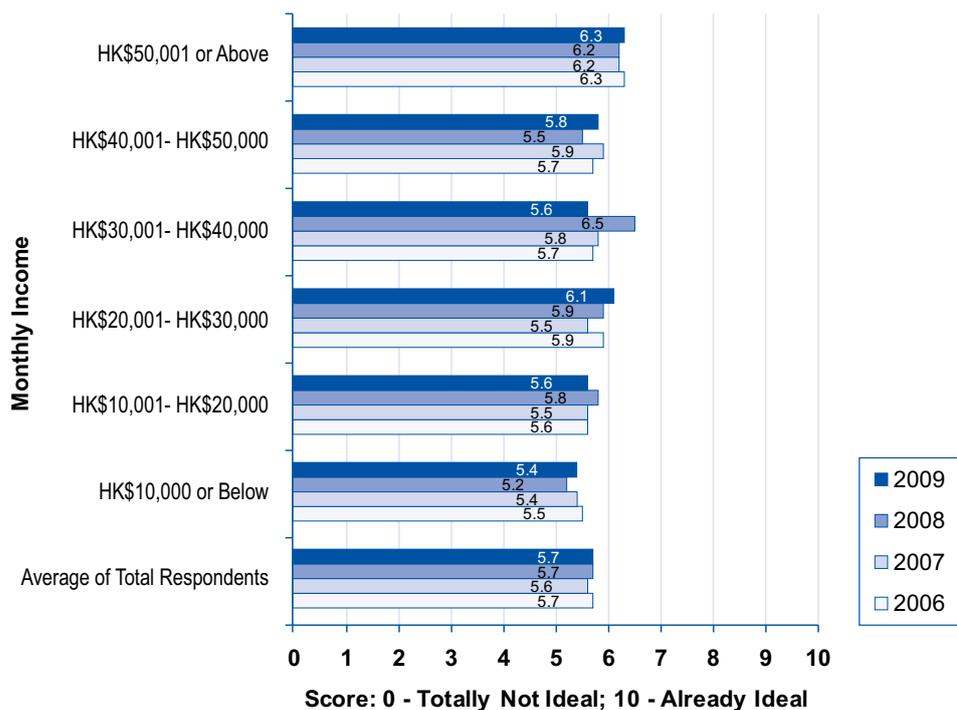




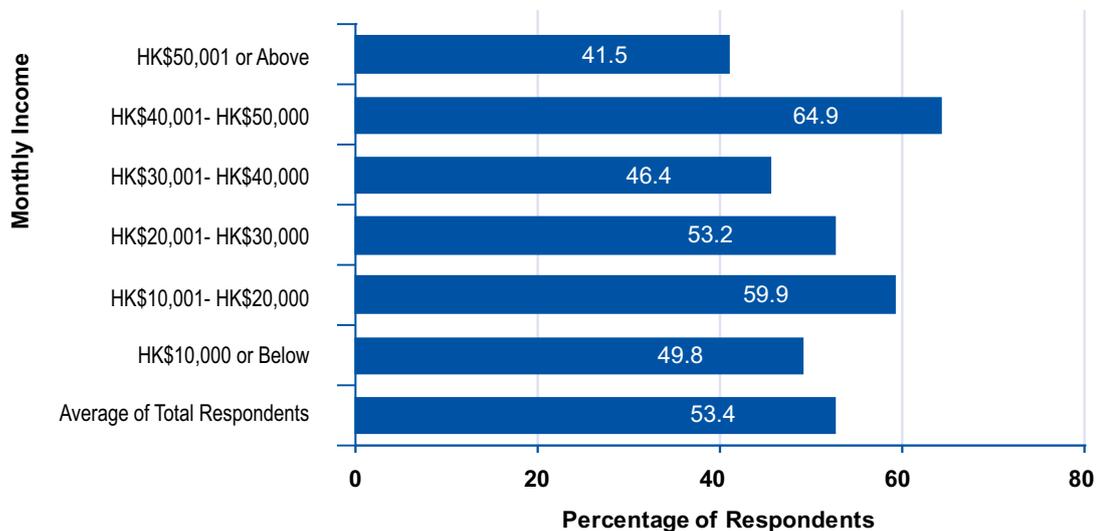
# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey



Graph 6.2 Degree to Which Employees Have Achieved Their Ideal Work Balance by Income Level (2006 to 2009)

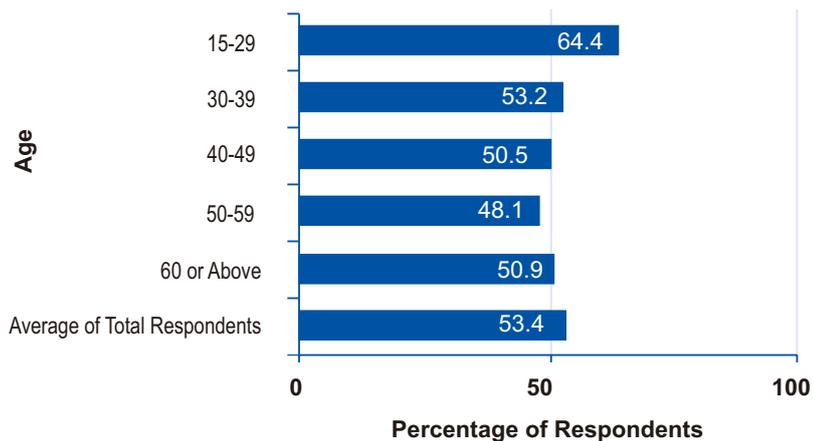


Graph 7.1 Prolonged Fatigue Level, Sleepiness and Extreme Tiredness Resulting From Poor Work-Life Balance by Income (2009)

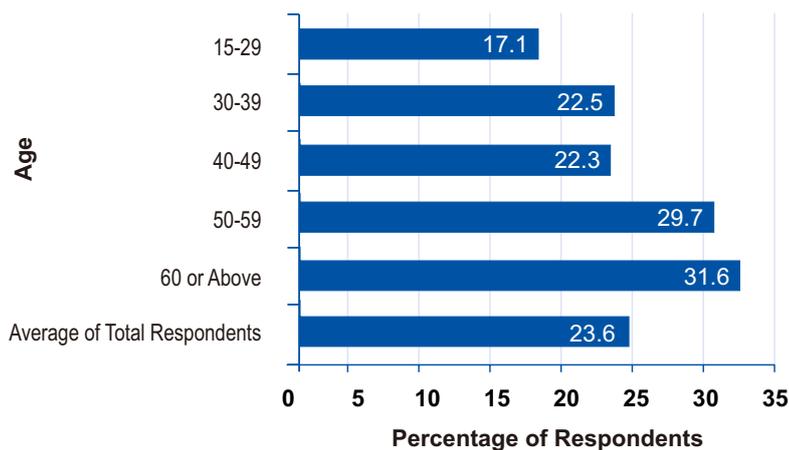




**Graph 7.2a Prolonged Fatigue Level, Sleepiness and Extreme Tiredness Resulting From Poor Work-Life Balance by Age Group (2009)**



**Graph 7.2b Respondents Not Encountering Any Specified Problems Resulting From Poor Work-Life Balance by Age Group (2009)**

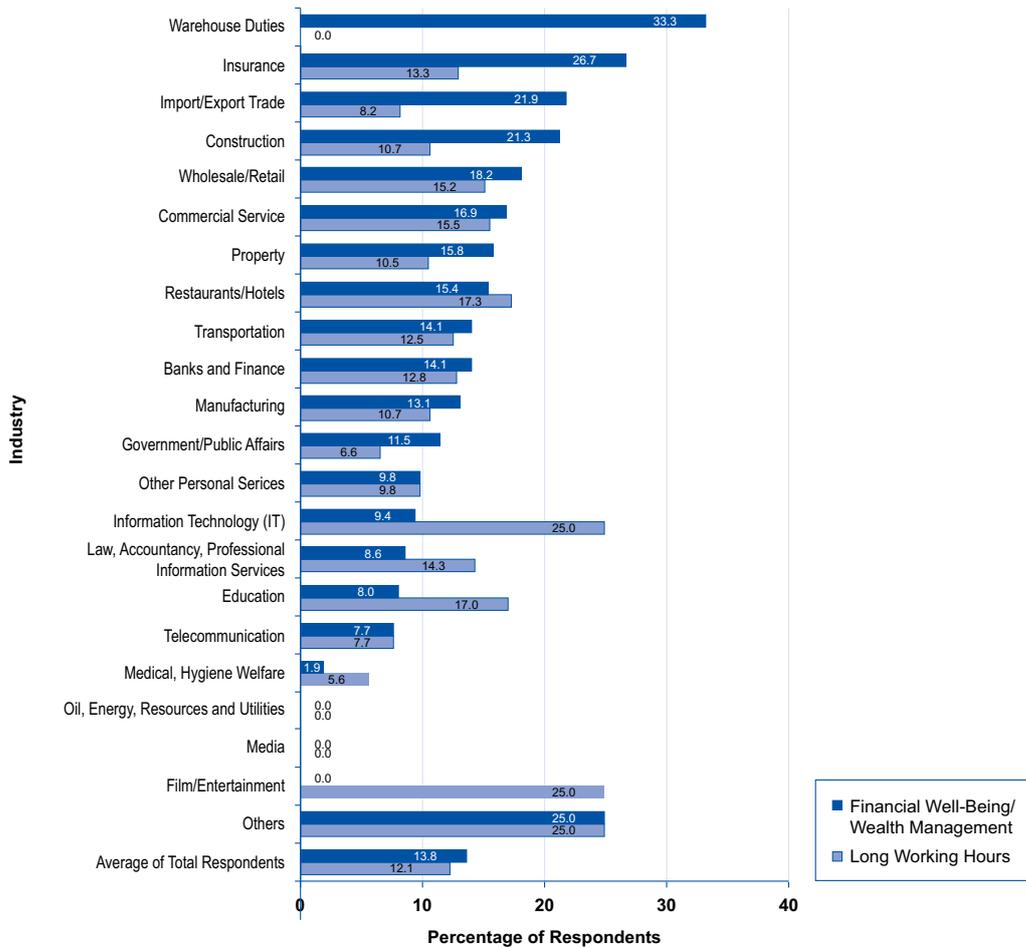




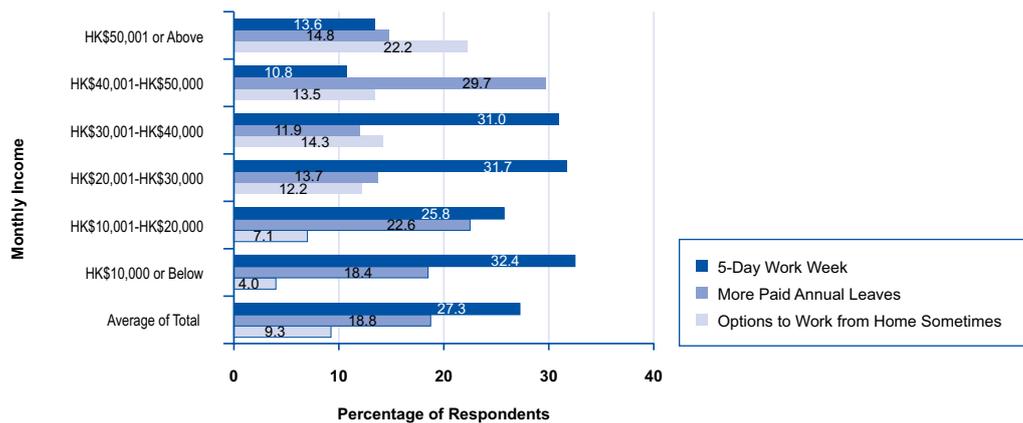
# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey



**Graph 8.1 Top Two Most Difficult Work-Life Balance Challenges by Industry (2009)**



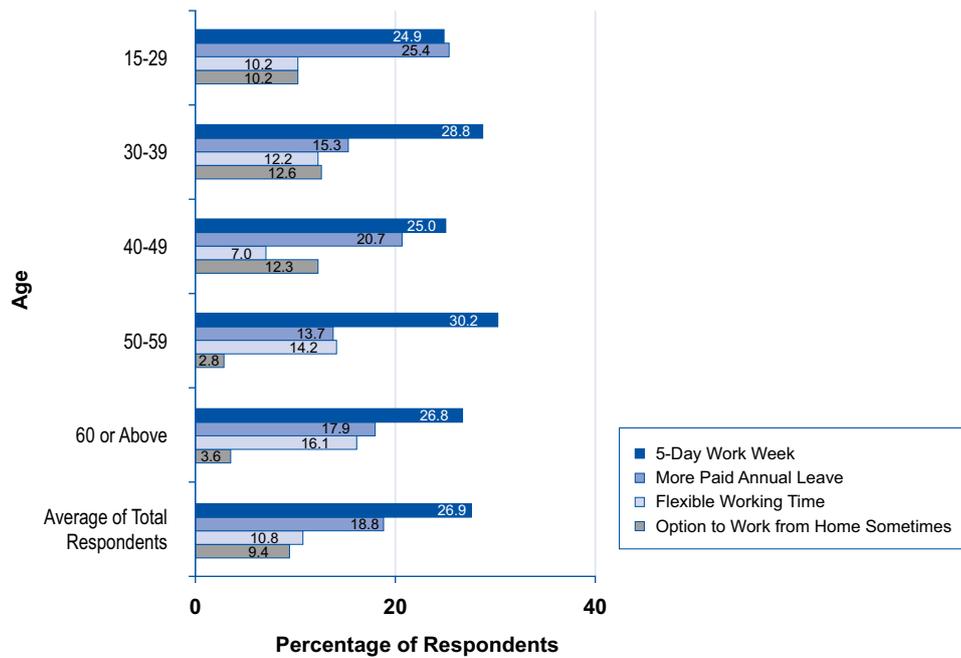
**Graph 9.1 Major Initiatives Provided by Employer That Would Most Help Work-Life Balance by Income (2009)**



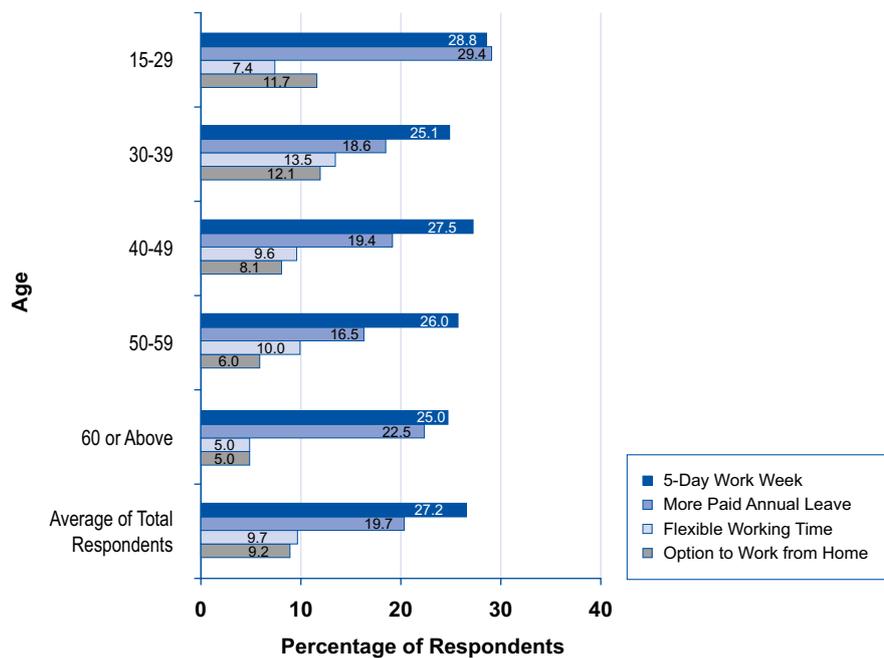


## The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

Graph 9.2a Major Initiatives Provided by Employer That Would Most Help Work-Life Balance by Age Group (2009)



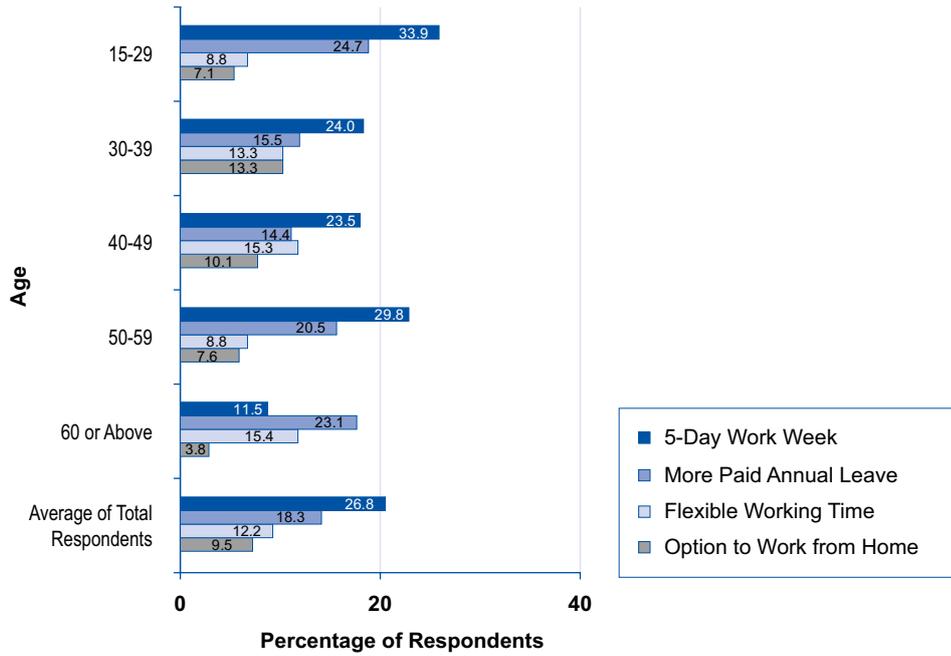
Graph 9.2b Major Initiatives Provided by Employer That Would Most Help Work-Life Balance by Age Group (2008)



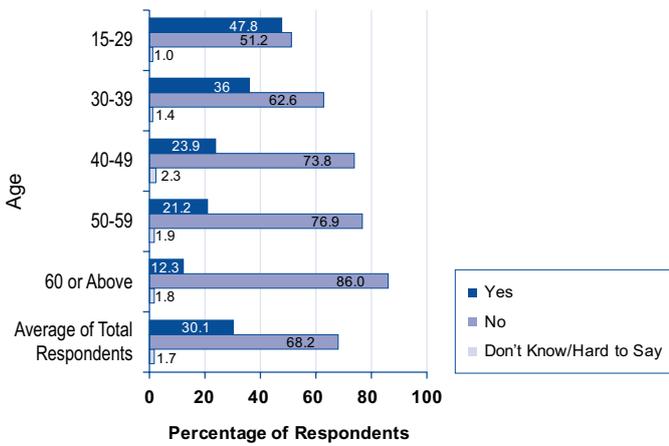


# The State of Work-Life Balance in Hong Kong 2009 Survey

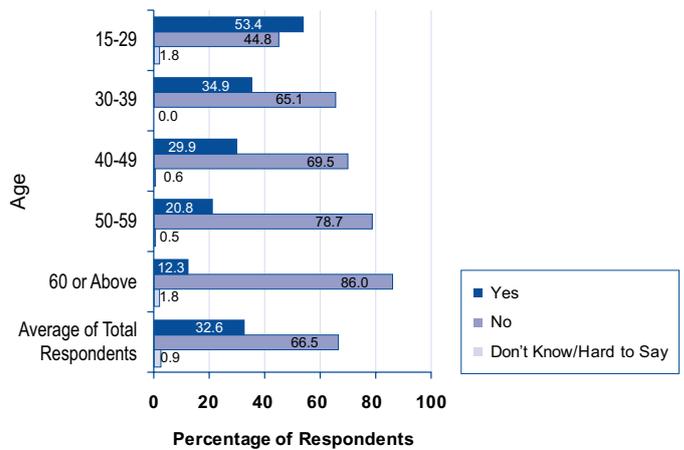
Graph 9.2c Major Initiatives Provided by Employer That Would Most Help Work-Life Balance by Age Group (2007)



Graph 10.1a Considering Leaving Current Job for Better Work-Life Balance (2009)



Graph 10.1b Considering Leaving Current Job for Better Work-Life Balance (2008)





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