

WOMEN'S RIGHTS SITUATION IN TAIWAN

Over the last decade, new definitions of women's roles have been formed as more Chinese women have received higher education, joined the work force, begun to compete with men, and become financially independent. In 1999, there were 10.78 million women in the Taiwan area, compared to a male population of 11.31 million. On average, first-time brides were 27 years old, up from 25.8 in 1990. Almost half of Taiwan's women are regular wage earners and help support their families financially.

The Constitution provides for equal rights for women, and, while still underrepresented, their role in government and politics is increasing.

In March a woman for the first time was elected vice president ([Annette Lu](#)), and nine women are members of the Cabinet, including the Minister of Interior and the Chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council. Two of 29 Control Yuan members are women. A number of women also hold important political party positions. Two of the 11 members of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Central Standing Committee are women, as are 11 of the Kuo Min Tang's (KMT) 31 Central Standing Committee members.

In ancient China, few women were taught to read and write. However, at the end of 1999, 56 percent of junior college graduates, 51 percent of university and college graduates, and 27 percent of graduate school graduates were women. Two decades earlier, the figures were 37.6, 36, and 16 percent, respectively. Women now have better education opportunities, with female graduates from university, college and graduate school having increased by 50 percent in 20 years.

Violence against women, including domestic violence and rape, remains a serious problem. Wife beating is especially widespread. In 1994 the DPP Women's Development Committee claimed that 35 percent of married women were victims of spousal abuse. The authorities fund domestic violence hot lines, which have handled some 17,000 cases over the past decade. The Ministry of Justice has taken steps to strengthen the protection of women and children against violence in accordance with the 1999 Domestic Violence and Protection Control Law. This law allows prosecutors to take the initiative in investigating complaints of domestic violence without waiting for a spouse to file a formal lawsuit. Although some cases are prosecuted, strong social pressure discourages abused women from reporting incidents to the police in order to avoid disgracing their families. Rape also remains a serious problem, and its victims are stigmatized socially. One expert estimates that 7,000 rapes occur annually--10 times the number reported to the police. In 1999 the LY passed legislation that permits the prosecution of the crime of rape without requiring the victim to press charges. According to a law passed in 1997, rape trials no longer are public unless the victim consents. The Code of Criminal Procedure establishes the punishment for rape as not less than 5 years' imprisonment, and those convicted usually are sentenced to from 5 to 10 years in prison. There were 2,042 cases of rape or sexual assault reported in 1999. A total of 627 persons were indicted for the crime of rape and 197 were convicted. Marital rape is a crime.

In 1998 the LY passed legislation that required all city and county governments to set up domestic violence prevention and control centers. The centers provide victims with protection, shelter, legal counseling, and other services on a 24-hour basis. The Taiwan area had 43 comprehensive welfare centers offering counseling, vocational training, seminars, and other services to disadvantaged women. Halfway houses and shelters for women numbered 28 that year, up 13 from 1994. With a maximum capacity of 441 persons, they accommodated 545 in 1999. From July 1999 to October 2000 the centers handled 34,904 cases of domestic violence. Under the law, a judicial order may be obtained to prohibit violators from approaching victims. The Ministry of Interior also provides assistance, such as financial assistance and shelter, to victims of rape or domestic violence. In 1999 the Ministry established a domestic violence prevention committee to implement a comprehensive program for the protection of women and children.

Prostitution, including coerced prostitution and child prostitution, is also a problem. The authorities are phasing out legalized prostitution; in 1999 the LY banned prostitution, but exempted prostitutes already registered with the authorities. Under the law, no new houses of prostitution may be registered. There have been reports of a growing trend of young women, often well educated, voluntarily entering into part-time prostitution to earn additional spending money. There also are credible reports of women being trafficked into the country for purposes of prostitution.

The law prohibits sex discrimination, and the LY in recent years has begun a systematic review and revision of those portions of the legal code relating to divorce, property, and child custody. As a result of legislation passed in 1998, many sections of the code that discriminated against women were eliminated. For example, women now are no longer required to adopt their husband's last name after marriage.

There is no equal employment rights law, and enforcement of existing sex discrimination laws remains a problem, although the major city and county administrations have set up committees to accept complaints of sexual discrimination in the workplace. Labor laws provide for maternity leave, but employers do not always grant it. Women also complain of being forced to quit jobs due to marriage, age, or pregnancy. Women often complain of less frequent promotions and lower salaries than their male counterparts, although the Labor Standards Law prohibits gender-based differences in wages. According to the Council on Labor Affairs, salaries for women average 85 percent of those for men performing comparable jobs.

Male spouses of female citizens now are treated the same as female spouses of male citizens. In 1999 the LY passed legislation permitting spouses of citizens to apply for permanent residency after residing in Taiwan for 5 years. However, the Citizenship Law continues to stipulate that the transmission of citizenship occurs exclusively through the father. A citizen mother with a foreign husband thus cannot apply for a Taiwan passport for her child. However, when such a child reaches age 14, the child may apply.

In the last 15 years, numerous women's organizations have been established to help women solve problems and clarify liberalized roles for both men and women. The government has adopted measures to protect women's welfare by setting up a women's protection hotline, Women's Rights Promotion Committee under the Executive Yuan, and Sexual Violation Prevention Committee under the Ministry of the Interior. City governments also allocate specific budget items for women services. Many local governments, under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior, have organized regional coalitions to help women generate public awareness about gender issues, and provided medical, legal, psychological, educational, and vocational assistance.

Sources:

[Country report on human rights practices: Taiwan \(2000\)](#)

[Women in Taiwan](#)