

Women make new gains in workplace

Women are making significant progress in the workplace in China, even in some traditionally male-dominated areas, according to a new report released ahead of International Women's Day on Wednesday.

In China last year, women held 44 percent of senior management roles in companies, according to a report released by LinkedIn, a US-based professional networking website.

The report, based on employee surveys, also showed women represented 35 percent of those who reach the chief executive suite.

While not directly comparable, the numbers appeared to show significant progress when compared with the 2012 Women in Senior Management report released by Grant Thornton International, a professional services network. That report showed women holding 25 percent of the leadership roles at director level or above.

The LinkedIn report said that in several fields, including education and nonprofit organizations, women held up to 47 percent of the jobs at director level or above. In the traditionally male-dominated sector of science and technology, the number of women in senior posts has increased by 18 percent since 2008.

The report was based on surveys with 25,000 employees, one-third of them with Fortune 500 companies.

Zhang Hongxia, program operations director from international charity Save the Children's Beijing office, said five people out of six on their senior management team are female, including in traditionally male-dominated emergency response jobs.

"Women and children used to be regarded as those who needed help during emergency response, but now, more and more women are engaged in domestic and international emergency response," Zhang said.

Young women are an increasingly strong presence in leadership positions, the LinkedIn report showed.

Women occupied 51 of 100 senior positions among people below age 35. But the ratio of women on boards decreases with age, becoming only about 1 out of 10 after age 45, the report shows.

Still, the LinkedIn report indicated an imbalance remained in many industries, including finance and consumer goods manufacturing, with male executives still far outnumbering their female counterparts.

Disruption from family commitments and pressure from social opinion are two major obstacles to women advancing in the business world, said Zhu Xueping, vice-chairwoman of Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions.

“But actually, women have unique advantages if hired into leadership positions. They’re more patient, compassionate and sensitive when working with different people and have a stronger ability to build a sense of teamwork,” Zhu said.

“Women shouldn’t set limits for themselves,” she said.