

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Research

Along with the development of the times, women's careers are no longer only focused at home, doing kitchen work and childcare, in fact women today have their own careers and work together with men to drive the development of the country. This is due to the advancement of society and the changing nature of gender roles. The increase in the progress of science and technology has to some extent boosted the field of the workforce regardless of status and gender. The involvement of women in various aspects of national development cannot be disputed anymore. Almost every sector whether economic, social, legal, education, politics, medicine, security, administration, trade and so on has been ventured by women.

It is no longer possible to deny the presence of women in Malaysia's professional workforce which these individuals hold significant positions throughout the majority of the nation's industries such as vice chancellor or rector and minister of higher education in educational institutions at various levels, social institutions up to the position of Minister of Women, Family & Society, and service sector. Also, a few of them are the top judges in the nation and serve as governors of the central banks. These showed that women's leadership in all its forms, levels, positions, and involvement cannot be dismissed or questioned; in fact, it is gaining respect and trust on a global scale. As time goes on, women now have become more self-conscious and have made a good progress and improvement in terms of their position regarding family rights and professional life. Women's roles have expanded to the point where the majority of them now tend to work, which has significantly improved their status.

According to Malaysian Department of Statistics (DoSM), (2021) declaration, despite women are active in the labor force and achieving a good progress and improvement, nevertheless the data has revealed that the female workforce is continues to remain at low rate. Based through the data of DoSM (2020) as state in figure below (Figure 1.1), has shown males outnumbered females. In 2020, the male population outweighed the female population by 16.8 million (males) to 15.9 million (females), out of a total 32.7 million people. Through the data obtained from DoSM (2021), in fugure below (Figure 1.2) shown that Malaysian women's workforce participation rate was at 55.3 per cent in 2021, compared to 80.7 per cent for men. This circumstance raises concerns about why the gender gap in developing countries continues to increase, despite the global economic boom and remarkable improvements in women's educational attainment. According to the study state by DoSM (2022), showed more than 60 per cent of women believe that the commonly held belief that women hold family-specific obligations, home responsibilities, and community commitments is the key reason they are not in the labor force.

Figure 1.1: Population by sex and sex ratio, Malaysia, 2019-2020. (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2020)

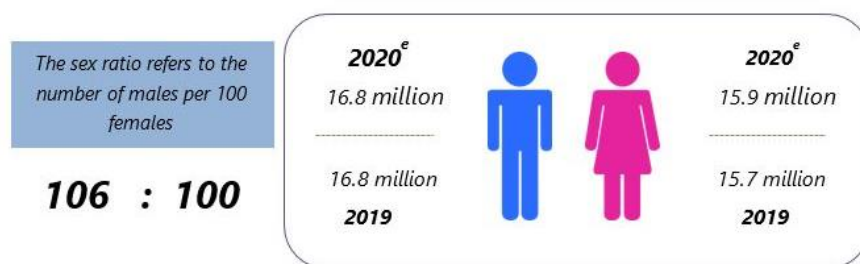
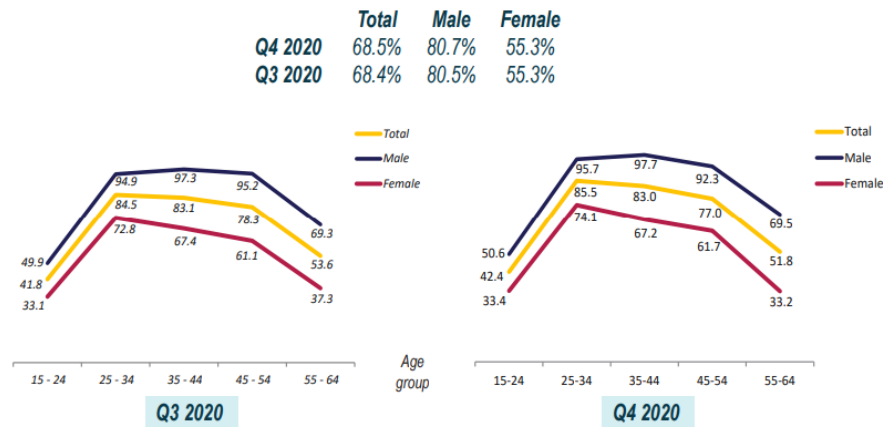


Figure 1.2: Labour Force Participation Rate by Sex and Age Group, Malaysia, SThird Quarter (Q3) 2020 & Fourth Quarter (Q4) 2020. (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2021)



Women's economic participation should undoubtedly be encouraged. Increased economic participation by women could reduce poverty in emerging countries, enhance women's access to higher-productivity industries and jobs, and accelerate global economic growth. Because of its significance, issues concerning female labor-force participation have received considerable attention internationally. Increased female economic participation has been connected to global economic growth because it has the potential to eliminate poverty in emerging economies and enhance women's access to high-productivity sectors and jobs (ILO, 2017). This also supported by Chowdhury (2013) that states the involvement of women in workforces has increases household income and ensures sufficient labor in competitive industries in emerging economies. However, women's workforce participation remains low.

According to one of the economics lecturers at Sunway University, Prof Yeah Kim Leng stated, in order for the country to continue to grow, it needs to have a high workforce participation involving both genders (Nina Muslim, 2022). According to experts and this is supported by research, the gap that exists between the genders is because women are more likely to be housewives to take care of children and families, a growing trend due to the spread of COVID-19. That is the most common reason heard when Malaysians are asked why they do not participate

in the labor market. According to DoSM (2021), 42 per cent of the 7.27 million people gave that answer.

The equal participation of women in the country's economic activities is a goal that has been pursued by the government for a long time. Over the past few decades, the female labor force participation rate (FLPR), which is a measure of how many women of working age in a country are working or willing to work, has increased slowly from 43 per cent in 2021 to 52 per cent in 2019, according to the ILO (2019). Meanwhile, DoSM data in 2020 shows that the participation rate of female workers is 55.6 percent. Based to the research source quoted cited by Nina Muslim in Bernama, (2022), Associate Prof. Dr. Shanti from the Universiti Malaysia Gender Studies Program stated that,

"the number is increasing, (and) we are happy to see this development. We have a targeted policy to increase female workforce participation, but during the pandemic there was a sudden drop to 51.3 per cent".

Malaysia is not the only country affected. The transmission of this pandemic has a huge impact on the participation of women in the workforce in most countries in addition to affecting the progress recorded before. At the global level, many who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic and the imposed health restrictions are mostly women, either forced to quit or laid off. Other obstacles facing working women even though in terms of demographics in Malaysia women are more educated, comprising 61 per cent of the student body representation at universities in 2021 and more than 56 per cent of academics, but the number of women leaving the job market is higher (Nina Muslim, 2022).

Many studies have found that many women who quit work to raise children or take care of family members, find that they cannot return to the job market because there are no care centers that meet their needs. Another constraint is gender discrimination. In the beginning, half of the employers may not want to employ women, thinking that women will stop working when they have a family. In fact, if they are able to return to work, it is difficult for women to advance to higher levels in their careers. Coltrane (2004) also while managing all of the family errands and,

especially, child-care responsibilities, it is challenging to maintain the pressure and needs of the corporate world. Working women struggle mightily to maintain a work-life balance; some decide against having children or to stay unmarried in order to concentrate on their careers, which demand all of their attention and resources. Due to their children, some people look for part-time work, change to less demanding careers, or quit their jobs (Ragins et al., 1998).

In other words, the main objective of this thesis is to have a deeper understanding relate to the issues of womens career advancement in Malaysia government scope in term of find their factors that influencing women in influencing their career advancement and the barriers that they are facing in pursuing their career advancement path.

1.2 Problem Statement

Today, the role of women is much different than before. Many women now have careers in their respective fields of expertise. However, in achieving a balance especially between the demands as an employee and also the responsibility to the family is a challenge and not an easy task.

In reality, the role of women is not only in managing the household, but as a contributor to the family economy. In fact, this responsibility is not only borne by married women, but is also part of the responsibility of those who are not married (Siti Nur Husna et al., 2017). The meaning here is that the role of women in the family is as a child who obeys both parents, a wife who obeys her husband and always takes care of herself and a mother who puts children as a priority with perfect religious upbringing. In addition, from a social point of view, they are involved in charitable works and contribute in the aspects of education, economy and politics. This will have a direct impact on the economic development of families, communities and the country (Siti Nur Husna et al., 2017).

However, through the citing report published by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), not to mention as show in figure as addressed below (Figure 1.3), in the fourth quarter of 2020, there were 9.27 million male employed people, accounting for 61.2 per cent of total employed people. While, females made up 38.8 percent of all employed people, with 5.89 million people. This has shown that, male labour force participation rate (LFPR) increased and was remained consistently higher compared to female LFPR. Besides, DoSM also revealed data that state, schooling (42.5 per cent) and housework/family duties (42.4 per cent) were the most common reasons for not looking for job among the population of unemployed people. If either group is interested in working, they have the opportunity to enter the job market. (Figure 1.4)

Figure 1.3: Labour Force by Sex, Malaysia, Third Quarter (Q3) 2020 & Fourth Quarter (Q4) 2020. (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2021)

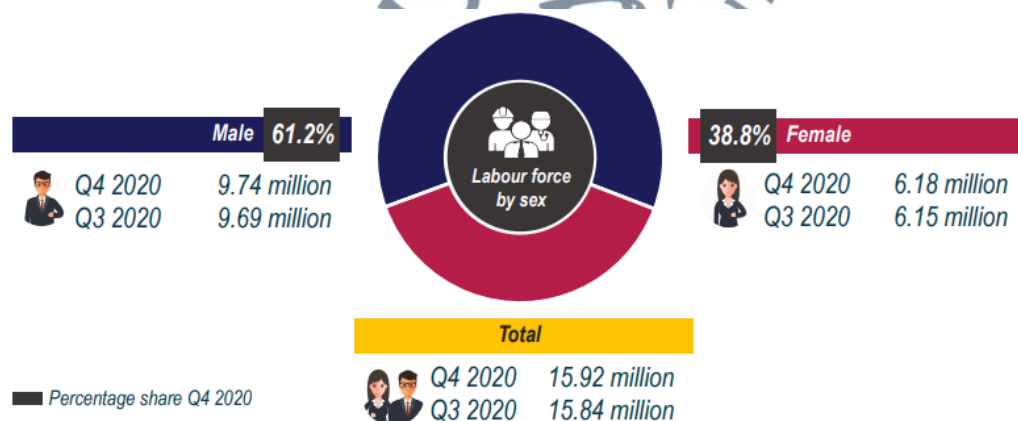
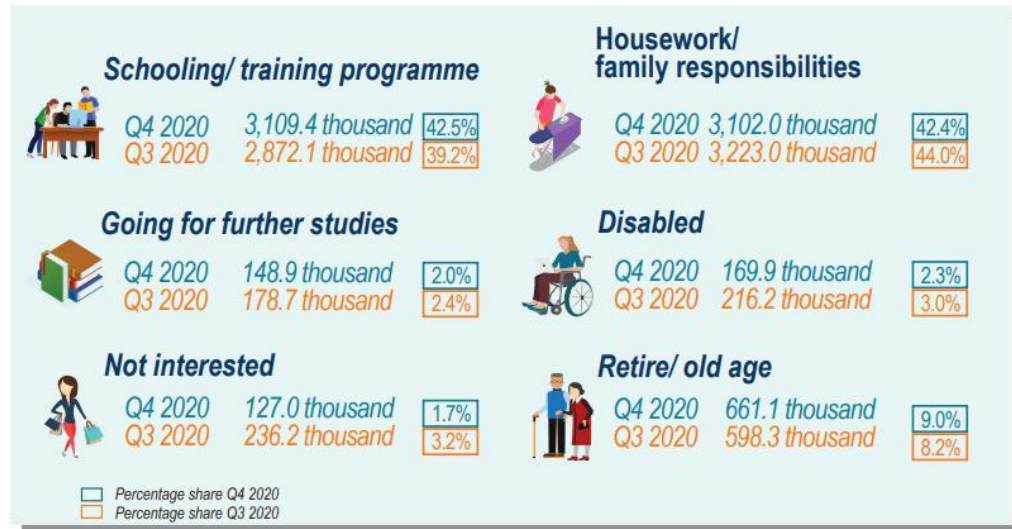


Figure 1.4: Population Outside Labour Force by Reasons for Not Seeking Work, Malaysia, Third Quarter (Q3) 2020 & Fourth Quarter (Q4) 2020. (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2021).

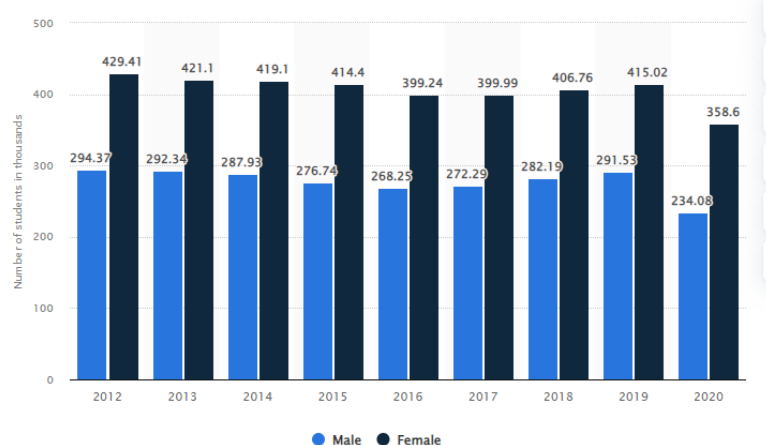


According to a BH Online article dated March 8, 2019, the role of women is seen as important and has made up half of the country's population. Furthermore, we have seen that women are no longer limited to carrying out duties and responsibilities at home alone. Women has even ventured into a field of work that was previously dominated by men comparable to the level of educational attainment. In addition, women have also succeeded in increasing their potential and helping to strengthen the family and national economy. This scenario is different from the life of women in the past who were often associated with the responsibility of managing the family and household, taking care of the children and not even running away to be in the kitchen to cook. Their world is only at home surrounded by parents and siblings. For those who are married, it is their responsibility to be by the side of their husbands, children and in-laws.

Nevertheless, women are seen to be increasing over time, not to mention having a higher level of education and some holding important positions in the professional field. In Malaysia statistics had shown a scenario where more female

graduates but less female workers. This is what happens today which they get a higher graduates show a lower workforce participation. A Statista Research Department report in 2022 indicated that there were 358,600 female students against 234,080 male students enrolled in Malaysia's public higher institutions in 2020. Despite having higher enrollment rates and a higher graduation rate than men, women are still underrepresented in the workforce. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM) (2022), female graduates make up more than half of the unemployment rate (54.2 per cent) compared to males (45.8 per cent). Based to Azalea Anuar (2022) majority of female jobless workers had to maintain household or family duties (35.3 per cent), followed by attending training or school courses (32.3 per cent), while the rest were continuing their education (4.9 per cent). When examining the gender breakdown of graduates who were employed in 2021, women made up a greater percentage, at 51.9 per cent, or 2.37 million people, compared to men, who made up 48.1 per cent (2.2 million people). In accordance to a report by DoSM (2022), compared to the previous year, the number of employed female graduates experienced a higher annual growth of 7.4 per cent in 2021 as opposed to an increase in the number of employed male graduates of 2.5 per cent. (Figure 1.5)

Figure 1.5: Number of students enrolled in public higher education institutions in Malaysia from 2012 to 2020, by gender (The Department of Statistic of Malaysia, 2022)



However in term of the number of women holding senior leadership positions in Malaysia has hit 37 per cent this year, the highest ever recorded despite the COVID-19 pandemic affecting economies around the world, according to Grant Thornton's annual Women in Business report through a written statement in The Edge Malaysia (2021). It is great to see that there are now 37 per cent more women in leadership positions in Malaysia than there were last year (31 per cent). Additionally, this proportion exceeds the global average of 31 per cent. Furthermore, it exceeds the crucial 30 per cent mark, which, according to research, is the minimal representation required to alter decision-making procedures, according to Grant Thornton Malaysia's National Tax Practice Leader Seah Siew Yun (Syafiqah Salim, 2021). One factors contributing to Malaysia rate in achieving their career is in term of getting a huge supports from behind it. According to research, Malaysian businesses are acting positively, and the top three steps they have taken to achieve a more balanced gender mix in their leadership team are to foster an inclusive culture (54 per cent), guarantee equal access to opportunities for professional advancement (48%), and offer mentoring and coaching (47 per cent) to both men and women (Syafiqah Salim, 2021).

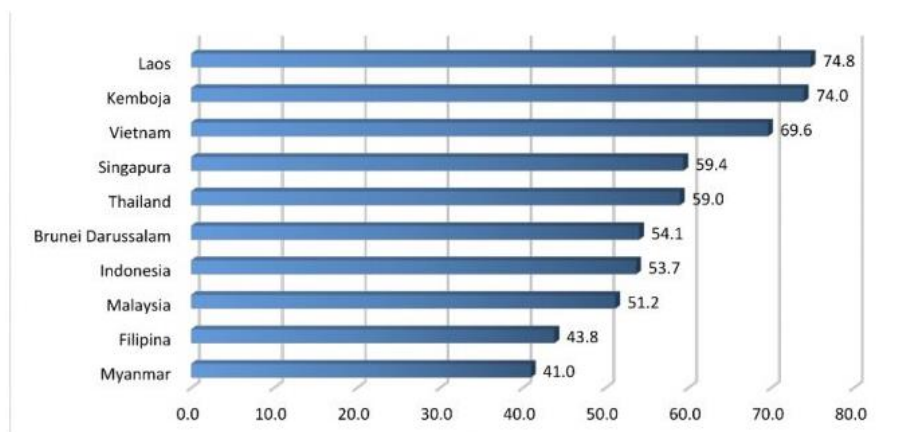
Referring to International Labour Organization (2022) as presented in Figure 1.6 below, the involvement of women in the professional workforce in Malaysia cannot be denied anymore, they hold various important positions in the main sectors of the country. It is quite surprising to see that Malaysia is ranked 8th in terms of female labor force participation among the 10 ASEAN countries. The countries of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, which are slightly behind in terms of development and education, especially have higher female labor force participation compared to Malaysia, namely 74.8, 74.0, and 69.6 per cent, respectively, in first, second, and third place.

Meanwhile, the level of female labor force participation in Singapore and Thailand is almost the same, 59.4 and 59 per cent respectively. The majority of women in Cambodia work in the clothing industry and the tourism sector. The high involvement of women in the labor force for Vietnam and Thailand because most of the female labor force is involved in the tourism sector which is the main source

of income for these two countries. The same diagram also shows that Indonesia has overtaken Malaysia in terms of female labor force participation (ILO, 2022).

This is because Indonesia has slowly shown development with international giant companies choosing Indonesia over Malaysia as their investment destination such as Unilever, L'Oreal, Google and Marriott International, which will increase employment opportunities and further encourage the participation of women in the labor force industry in Thailand. Former Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said, this rate is low when compared to neighboring countries such as Singapore at 59.4 per cent and Thailand at 59.0 per cent (Omar Zin, 2022).

Figure 1.6: Female Labor Force Participation Rate (15-64 years, %) among 10 ASEAN Countries in 2021. (International Labour Organization, 2022)



The country of Malaysia is now facing a major challenge when the female population in 2020 is 47.7 per cent, which is almost half of the Malaysian population, while the female workforce participation rate in 2021 is only 55.5 per cent. The enrollment rate of women in all levels of education whether primary, secondary or tertiary is high, but, in terms of the participation rate in the labor market, the participation of women is low (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021).

Among the many factors argued, flexible working time management methods are still different in the government and private sectors. The support system is still at a low level and the cost of childcare in registered childcare centers (nursery) is relatively high. When the country was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, some women had to give up their jobs and the remaining salary after being cut was not worth continuing to work or sending their children to daycare. The problem of nurseries not being allowed to operate also presents a big challenge for child management. This includes addressing the persistent gender pay gap where women face barriers to equal pay and career advancement. Reducing inequality to enhance Malaysians' well-being and create a harmonious society is part of the "Developing Malaysia Madani" concept for the retabling of Budget 2023 (Kartina Abdul Latif, 2023).

Based on the article writing by Kartina Abdul Latif (2023), the main reasons of pay equality problems in Malaysia are complicated and numerous, and they might involve a variety of things like gender-based discrimination, occupational segregation, and the unequal distribution of education and training opportunities. Despite recent improvements, women in Malaysia still encounter major obstacles to equal pay and career progression prospects. According to data from the Statistics Department's Salaries and Wages 2021 Report (2022), the median monthly income for women in Malaysia was RM2,145 in 2021 (RM2,019 in 2020), compared to RM2,315 in 2021 (RM2,093 in 2020) for men. Because of this, there may be a lingering pay disparity between men and women, with women typically earning considerably less over the length of their careers. Malaysia's gross domestic product suffers from decreased female involvement in the workforce. Unfair compensation diminishes the value of women's contributions, reduces the incentives for women to enter the workforce, and decreases economic growth by lowering income and purchasing power.

However, the life of a working woman will have its own challenges and conflicts in finding a balance between work and life, especially for those who bear the responsibility of being a wife and mother. It is not an easy task for us to reach that balance point. Therefore, how can a woman divide her time between work and

family? There are certainly various emotions and pressures that women have to experience, whether positive or negative. Failure to overcome these emotions will have a major impact on career due to loss of focus and productivity at work and neglecting family responsibilities.

In short, it is important to examine first the factors that influencing Malaysian women career advancement in order to understand in depth about an issue that is still remain until now for Malaysian women in pursuing their career advancement path.

1.3 Research Question

1. What are the factors influencing women career advancement?
2. What are the barrier faced by women career advancement?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To explore the factors that influencing women career advancement
2. To discover the barriers faced by women career advancement

1.5 Significance of Research

This research focused on the factors influencing women career advancement and the barriers facing by women career advancement. It is essential to obtain accurate data about it and at the same time will know directly what the main problems facing by female staff in pursuing their career advancement in government sectors.

Besides that, through the discovery indicate to the female career development, the researcher also brings the information based on the Naqli

(revelation) and Aqli (human mind) arguments. This indirectly will gain more understanding about the working women in this era.

1.6 Scope of Research

This study will only focus on women working in Malaysian government sectors. The author chose Malaysia as the case study due to its distinct effort to encourage women to work. The researcher decided to narrow down the scopes of this study intentionally in order to prevent information overload which able to mislead the aim of the study. In this paper, the main topic that discussed by researcher specifically are about the factors influencing women career advancement and the barrier faced by women career advancement in government sectors. The research will then focus on the contemporary issues faced by women working in Malaysian government sectors.