

CHAPTER
3

3

WOMEN AND WORK: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

3.1 Introduction

From the estimated population of 33.7 million in 2020, 16.8 million will be females and the number of employed women is expected to be approximately 4 million or 40%.¹ The labor force participation rate of married women in Malaysia has increased over the years.² Consequently, this has led to an increase in the number of women occupying both work and family roles.

Earlier development plans did not mention of women's participation in the economy. Women in development, was briefly mentioned in the Third Malaysia Plan (1976-1980). Nagaraj and Siti Rohani Yahya highlighted the significance of this – women were to become *“active participants in, rather than passive participants of, economic growth.”*

The Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005), which charts the steps that Malaysia should take towards becoming a fully developed nation by 2020, reiterates the government's commitment in *“ensuring their (women's) participation as equal partners*

in national development" through the implementation of gender-sensitization and awareness training programs.

This chapter examines the trends and challenges with regards to the participation of Malaysian women in the labor force, namely women academicians in public universities, perceptions of society regarding gender roles and working women's responsibilities in the home.

3.2 Female Labor Force Participation

In 1957, 77% of working women were in the agriculture sector - forming almost 60% of the workforce (Nagaraj, 1995). However, the number of women employed in agriculture dropped from 38% in 1970 to 28.4% in 1995. There has been a trend showing that more women have moved from the agriculture sector into other sectors which they consider more "lucrative" and require much less physical effort.

The industrial expansion of export-processing zones, which began in the 1970s to 1980s, had led to a significant pattern of employment. This period saw the phenomenon of rural to urban migration among young, single, Malay women, which according to Aminah Ahmad (1998), *"signaled a change in previously established societal norms against the movement of unaccompanied young women."*

The 2000 Population Census estimated that approximately 48.9% or 11.4 million of the total population were women. Out of this, 48% of women were in the working age cohort (15-64 years) and this accounted for one third of the labor force. The female to male labor force participation rate dropped slightly from 1:2.3 in 1970 to 1:1.9 in 1995. The highest increase in the labor force participation rate among women was in the 20 to 24 age cohort. These figures, however, do not include those women who are employed in the informal sector.

In 1957, female labor force participation stood at 30.8%. The labor force participation rate for females in the 20 to 24 age cohort was 41.9% in 1970. In 1995, the figure rose sharply to stand at 61.1% (Aminah Ahmad, 1999). In 1995, female labor force participation was 43.5%, but there was a slight increase in 1997 to 45.8%. However, it dropped to 44% in 1998, due to the economic downturn. Subsequently, in 2000, it improved further to stand at 44.5% (Eighth Malaysia Plan). Although a greater number of women have joined the workforce, many are employed in low-paying occupations. Amarjit Kaur (1986) believes that women are under-represented in the skilled, high-income occupations and over-represented in the unskilled, low-income earning categories.

Aminah Ahmad (1998) stated that women are concentrated in labor-intensive operations in manufacturing and they occupy positions that require little pre-employment training, such as production workers, clerical staff, equipment operators, and service

workers. The 1995 Labor Force Survey revealed that there were proportionally more male production workers (38.2%) than female production workers (25.4%).

Generally, the participation of women in the labor force may be considered relatively low. Besides that, there still exists gender-based discrimination, which is preventing women from advancing to the higher echelons of the corporate ladder.

Alison Wee Siu Hui (2002), in her book, "Assembling Gender: The Making of the Malay Female Labour" discussed the issues of gender, ethnicity and job segregation in the electronics industries where the majority of the labor force comprised young Malay women from rural areas. Wee claimed that the concentration of Malay female workforce in the electronics industry was related to the state's role, domination and intervention. Wee wrote:

*"...both government and investors are unified in ideology that treated Malay women as cheap and docile labour force, ...the setting up of coercive and repressive labour legislation that works to obstruct the development of labour organizations."*³

Cecilia Ng and Shanthi Thambiah (1999) explained the status of employed women and the problems that they encountered:

“...the majority of women are still at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, receive low wages and are perceived as low-skilled... The relatively low participation of women, despite the increase in their educational attainment and the buoyancy of the job market, is a certain extent due to the lack of affordable and quality child-care services and flexible working conditions.”

Table 3.1 compares the employment distribution by sector and gender in 1995 and 2000. Data from Table 3.1 show that most women (27.3%) were employed in the manufacturing sector in 2000. The wholesale and retail trade, hotel and restaurants was another sector that showed high female employment, that is, 22.3%.

TABLE 3.1
EMPLOYMENT DISTRIBUTION BY SECTOR AND GENDER, 1995 AND 2000 (%)

Sector	1995		2000	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture, forestry, Livestock & Fishing Mining & Quarrying	21.6	16.9	20.2	14.1
Manufacturing	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.1
Construction	20.2	29.4	20.6	27.3
Electricity	11.3	1.5	12.1	1.5
Transport, Storage & Communications	0.9	0.2	0.7	0.1
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotel & Restaurants	6.2	1.7	6.1	1.7
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	16.6	20.5	18.1	22.3
Other Services	4.3	5.6	4.5	5.7
	18.4	24.0	17.2	27.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Eighth Malaysia Plan 2001-2005

The Eighth Malaysia Plan highlighted that the occupational structure saw an improvement, as more women were moving into higher-paying jobs. Table 3.2 compares the employment distribution by occupation and gender, in 1995 and 2000. As can be seen from the table, there was a marginal increase in the number of women in the professional and technical category, from 12.7% in 1995 to 13.5% in 2000. The proportion of women in the administrative and managerial category during the same period showed a slight increase of 0.4%. In 2000, 22.6% of the total female employment were employed as production and production-related workers. However, in consistent with the overall decline in total employment, in the agriculture sector, the proportion of women employed as agriculture workers dropped slightly from 16.6% in 1995 to 14.8% in 2000.

TABLE 3.2
EMPLOYMENT DISTRIBUTION BY OCCUPATION AND GENDER, 1995 AND 2000 (%)

Sector	1995		2000	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Professional, Technical & Related Workers	8.4	12.7	8.9	13.5
Administrative & Managerial Workers	3.9	1.8	4.7	2.2
Clerical & Related Workers	7.5	17.5	7.1	17.5
Sales & Related Workers	10.5	11.6	11.1	12.1
Service Workers	9.4	14.4	9.5	17.4
Agriculture Workers	21.9	16.6	20.4	14.8
Production & Related Workers	38.3	25.4	38.4	22.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Eighth Malaysia Plan 2001-2005

The female labor force participation rate in the 20 to 24 age cohort, was 62% in 1993 (Nagaraj, 1995; Jamilah, 1994). There has been a slight increase of women employed in the professional and technical category – from 12.7% in 1995 to 13.5% in 2000.

In the private sector, women accounted for 24% of dentists, 29% of engineers, 27% of building draughtsmen and 34% of surgeons (Maimunah, 1995). On the average, the percentage of women's participation in these professional and technical areas is below 30%. It can be said that it is relatively low in comparison to the number of registered female students in universities.

The Women's Aid Organization's Status Report on Women's Equality in Malaysia (March, 2001) stated that the largest growth in women's participation has been in the middle and low-level jobs, such as clerical and production jobs. More women were entering the professional sectors, namely the nursing and teaching professions. In 1980, female employers accounted for only 7% while in 1990, the figure rose to 8.5%. The Report states: *"Especially in the private sectors, women continue to collect lower wages than their male colleagues."*

In 1992, the Ministry of Human Resources conducted a survey on a total of 414 establishments from 24 manufacturing sub-sectors. It was found that out of a total of 146,823 employees, 58% were women. More than half of the women employees worked

either as general factory workers or production workers. In 1994, the manufacturing sector provided employment for 1.9 million workers. The proportion of women employees in this sector saw a tremendous increase from 28.1% in 1970 to 43.4% in 1995. Women have remained the largest contributor of labor in the manufacturing sector (Jamilah Ariffin, 2000).

The Economic Report 2001/2002 highlighted that Penang, the center of Malaysia's electronics industry (mainly among hard disk manufacturers), recorded the highest number of retrenchments, with 5,102 workers. To quote the report:

"A number of industries, notably electronics which contributed 68.5% of Malaysian exports, has scaled down their operations, resulting in reduced employment in the face of declining demand for electronic products and components."

Women were the most affected by the lay-offs that occurred between 1998 and 2001. Unskilled women workers, especially female heads of households were in a vulnerable position. By the end of 2001, women accounted for 53% or about 18,287 of the 34,502 retrenched workers – mostly from the electronics sector. An in-depth study on the consequences of economic downturn (1998-1999) on women in Bayan Lepas, Penang, was carried out by KANITA. It was found that these retrenched factory workers suffered a loss in income amounting to RM1,200 per month (excluding overtime earnings RM400-RM600).⁴ In the case of women who were single parents, the loss of jobs would

mean that their families would endure greater suffering, as they would not have sufficient income to spend on food, education, medicine and other essentials.

3.3 Challenges Faced by Women Academicians

3.3.1 Developments in Tertiary Education

Public universities in Malaysia are faced with the task of upgrading themselves so as to meet the challenges of globalization, liberalization and the K-economy. The main thrust of human resources development in the Eighth Malaysia Plan is the creation of a large human resource base to support the K-economy and emphasis is being given to the development of manpower in the areas of research and development (R&D), as well as science and technology (ST). This, as will be explained, has far reaching effects on institutions of higher education.

Tertiary education gained greater importance with the implementation of the New Economic Policy in 1971.⁵ More graduates were needed to fill up vacancies at the professional and higher management levels. In 1972, there were only five public universities – Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur (1959), Universiti Sains Malaysia (1969), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (1970), Universiti Pertanian (now Putra) Malaysia (1971) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (1972). The two new universities, which were established in the 1980s were Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (1982) and Universiti Utara Malaysia (1983). Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) was established in 1993 and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) was set up in 1995.

Meanwhile, in 1997, the Sultan Idris Teacher Training College was upgraded to Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). This shows that education and training are indeed important vehicles used by the government to achieve the objectives of employment restructuring.

The increase in the number of public universities and the expansion of their programs were in line with the increasing demand for tertiary education. Several private universities were established in 1996 and this led to the increased involvement of the private sector in tertiary education.⁶ In addition three foreign universities have set up their branch campuses in Malaysia.⁷

Massification of Higher Education

Enrolment at the tertiary level has increased more than twofold, from 147,927 in 1995 to 321,757 in 2000. In 2000, 170,794 students were enrolled in first-degree courses, 92,304 were enrolled in diploma courses and 28,180 were in certificate-level courses. In line with the need to develop a pool of science and technology human resource (or K-workers), there was an increase in the enrolment of students in these two areas at the first-degree and diploma levels. In 1995, the enrolment in science and technical courses at the first-degree level was 41% while in 2000, the enrolment rose to 52%. The enrolment in these two courses at the diploma level rose from 45% in 1995 to 56% in 2000.⁸ In addition, the total student enrolment of private universities at the end of 2000 was 209,585 students (degree to certificate levels).⁹

In order to achieve the 60:40 ratio of Science to Arts enrolment, enrolment in medicine and dentistry, engineering, architecture, survey and town planning was doubled. In addition, the enrolment of students in ICT courses increased almost four fold, from 3,770 students in 1995 to 15,050 in 2000. It is estimated that by 2005, a total of 32,810 R&D scientists and technologists are needed to fulfill the demand in specialized fields such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, photonics and fuel-cell technology. Enrolment at the tertiary level is projected to increase to 456,077 in 2005, with 289,806 doing their first degrees and 41,000 or 14% pursuing post-graduate courses. Hence, to expand further the absorptive capacity of public institutions of higher Education, more universities in will be built.¹⁰

Distance and on-line learning are becoming more popular. Malaysia's first virtual university, UNITAR was established in 1998. This mode of learning has attracted an increasing number of working adults who are keen to pursue their higher education. A consortium of eleven public universities, known as the Multimedia Enhancement Technology Operation or METEOR, was established by the government.¹¹ METEOR had a total enrolment of 20,000 students in 2000. In 2005, the number of students enrolled in distance-learning programs is expected to increase to 54,000.

3.3.2 Issues and Challenges Facing Women Academicians

Studies by Manning (1993) and DesJarlais and Johnsrud (1994) found that women in academia were paid less than men of similar position, were promoted more slowly and received tenure at lower rates.¹² O'Laughlin and Bischoff (2001) highlighted that one of the major challenges faced by academicians was striking a balance between parenthood and career.¹³ According to them:

"....women in academia may face greater hurdles than men in the work environment, creating greater potential for work to family interference."

The preceding discussion, which focuses on the development of tertiary education in Malaysia and its future directions, is of great relevance in the context of women academicians in public institutions of higher education in Malaysia.

A. Centers of Excellence

One major challenge facing public universities in Malaysia is that they are to become centers of excellence, which are comparable with those in reputable foreign universities, in line with the government's aim of promoting Malaysia as a regional center of educational excellence. This would entail the upgrading of infrastructure, provision of well-equipped, state-of-the-art facilities, ensuring quality of their teaching staff and strengthening their research and development (R & D) capabilities.

In Singapore, for example, National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU) have been recognized as institutions, which provide world-class education. According to *Asiaweek's* 2000 poll, NUS was placed ninth among multi-disciplinary universities in the Asia-Pacific region, while NTU was ranked ninth among science and technology institutions.¹⁴

However, in the case of Malaysian universities, some critics argue that our public universities are more concerned about numbers rather than quality. According to *Asiaweek's* 1999 poll on top universities (Best Multi-disciplinary Institutions) in Asia, Universiti Malaya (UM) took the 27th place. Out of 79 universities in Asia, USM, UKM and UPM were placed 42, 56 and 69 respectively. However, in 2000 UM dropped to the 47th place, UPM took the 52nd place, while USM was ranked 57th. In 1999, UTM was ranked 22 out of 35 Best Science and Technology Institutions in Asia but it dropped to the 30th place in 2000.¹⁵

B. Internationalization

Universities are being encouraged to promote aggressively their programs abroad to attract more international students. As higher education is exported, internationalization would be manifested in the increase of foreign student population. The number of international students is projected to increase from about 20,000 in 2000 to 25,000 by 2005. In 2002, foreign students accounted for about 20% (about 400) of

UKM'S post-graduate student population.¹⁶ In comparison, as of February 2003, NUS has a cosmopolitan student population of 32, 000.

In order to attract international students, the medium of instruction at the post-graduate levels, would have to be the English Language. As such, proficiency (or even mastery) in the language is a pre-requisite. To a large number of women academicians who had obtained their degrees from local universities, where the medium of instruction is Malay, teaching in English can be a daunting experience.

C. Market- Driven Curriculum

Public universities seem to be moving away from being "ivory towers" which provide education that is based on the philosophy of idealism ("learning for the sake of wisdom and truth") to becoming providers of higher education based on a more pragmatic philosophy of developing technological innovations and acquiring materialistic gains.¹⁷ To produce highly trained and qualified graduates, universities need to get input from the industry. This may result in reassessment of the current courses and curriculum to suit the demands of the industry. Failure to incorporate technological developments and the needs of the industry into the curriculum could result in courses being "obsolete" and graduates being unmarketable.¹⁸

With emphasis being given to science and technology and the redesigning of the curriculum to cater to industry needs, courses that may be viewed to be of little market

value, such as archaeology, literature, history, philosophy and religious studies may be phased out. As such, job security could be a cause for concern among women academicians who were trained in the social sciences.¹⁹

D. Corporatization

With the amendment to the University and College University Act 1971 in 1995, public universities have become corporate entities. Five public universities were corporatized in 1998. They were to adopt more “business-like” approaches in terms of their management and income generating activities.

Molly N.N. Lee (1998) highlighted several issues raised by academicians regarding corporatization:

“The penetration of corporate culture into the university has generated much anxiety among academics, who fear that the many entrepreneurial activities will impair the academic quality and freedom of the university.”

E. Distance Education Teaching-Learning Methodologies

In his keynote speech entitled, “The Traditional University is Dead: Long Live the Distributed University”, Steve Wheeler stated that a successful university of the future, is one that ‘will go to the students’ instead of ‘students going to (the) university’. He also highlighted the dangers of universities not embracing technological change:

*"...antiquated practices are still very much in evidence, underlining the fact that generally the traditional university is not moving with the times. The traditional university cannot survive in its present format, because global trends are ensuring that alternative methods are gaining ground."*²⁰

Changes in teaching-learning techniques, educational technology application and distance education methodologies and assessment may bring about feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty and anxiety among women academicians, especially those who are uncomfortable with the use of information and communication technologies in their teaching. Quite a number of academicians have problems keeping up with 'the seemingly break-neck speed' of technological change. To quote Wheeler (2000):

"Some teachers are particularly concerned about the challenges of new technologies on the traditional paradigm.... The changes affect the very fabric of the teaching process, from conceptualization of a course through its delivery and evaluation. Teaching on-line for example, requires the teacher to move away from a role as 'the source of all knowledge' and more towards the role of mentor or guide (Forsyth, 1996:31)."

As such, women academicians would need to undergo constant training so as to keep abreast with the latest innovations in the field of ICT and to be able to apply them in their teaching.

F. Increased Workload

Besides being receptive to new methods, technologies and applications in their teaching, women academicians are required to carry out research throughout the course of their career as academicians. Failure to do so may affect their chances of promotion.

In their study with regard to the effects of corporatization on UTM, Bahrom Sanugi et. al (2000) claimed that the main obstacle in the way of efforts to enhance research and post-graduate studies was the imbalance between responsibilities and incentives given to lecturers. Lecturers' workload, teaching hours and time spent on evaluating students' assignments and tests increased as a result of larger class size.²¹ Their findings indicate that there was an imbalance in the distribution of time between teaching and conducting research among lecturers in the various faculties.²² Some lecturers seemed to give greater priority to doing consultancy work and the teaching of off-campus programs (because of their financial rewards) rather than to research. In addition, lecturers were burdened with administrative duties.

3.4 Academic Staff in Institutions of Higher Education

Table 3.3 presents the total number of academic staff of seven universities between 1986 and 1993. These universities are UM, UKM, USM, UPM, UTM, UUM and UIAM.

TABLE 3.3
NUMBER OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES,
1986, 1987, 1991 & 1993

YEAR	1986	1987	1991	1993
Total	5721	6238	5687	6467

Source: Compiled from Educational Statistics of Malaysia, Ministry of Education.²³

The data indicate an upward trend with regard to the number of academic staff in the seven universities during this period. The total number of academic staff in these seven universities rose by 13% in 1993 compared to the 1986 figures.

In 1993, from a total of 5,392 academicians and administrators in the seven universities in Malaysia, 28.2% or 1,520 were women. UM had the highest number or 30% of the total figure - the majority of whom were women lecturers. There were only 233 or 19.6% women associate professors. Men still dominated professorial positions. The total number of female professors in USM, UUM, UKM and UM was only 27 or 9.4%.²⁴

Men also dominated top-level management positions. From the total of 230 heads/directors, deputy deans/deputy directors in all the seven universities, women accounted for only 16 or 7%. On the whole, there were only 5 or 5.3 % women deans or directors in all the universities. The most often quoted 'logical' reason for this scenario is the pioneering status of men in most Malaysian universities. A more thorough discussion regarding this scenario will be provided in subsequent paragraphs.

In 1992, 50% of the academic staff of UTM's Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology was female. With regard to the teaching of computer science and IT-related courses, Ng and Yong (1995) found that in 1993, women academicians accounted for 57% of UUM's academic staff who taught these courses, while the figures for UPM and UM were 43% and 52% respectively. In 1994, 54% of UKM's Faculty of Information Technology consisted of women.

TABLE 3.4
NUMBER OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
ACCORDING TO GENDER AND POSITION, 1997-2001

POSITION	1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Professor	479	71	494	89	539	109	580	119	636	156
Assoc. Prof.	1,350	385	1,347	445	1,433	518	1,549	569	1,806	791
Lecturer	4,015	3,238	4,400	3,779	4,366	3,889	4,857	4,542	5,005	4,739
Tutor	355	371	532	568	563	594	771	928	936	1,096
Language Teacher	609	616	453	505	512	569	374	443	372	466
Total	6,808	4,681	7,226	5,386	7,413	5,679	8,131	6,601	8,755	7,248

Source: Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Malaysia

Table 3.4 shows the number of teaching staff in institutions of higher education in Malaysia according to gender and position from 1997 to 2001.²⁵ These institutions of higher education include the eleven universities and five college universities.²⁶ At the end of 2001, there were 16,003 academicians in all the institutions of higher education in Malaysia. The number of female teaching staff in these institutions of higher education increased slightly from 4,681 or 40.8% in 1997 to 7,248 or 45.3% in 2002. The number of women professors rose from 12.9% in 1997 to 19.7% in 2001, while the number of

women associate professors increased from 22.2% in 1997 to 30.5% during the corresponding period. In 1997, women lecturers made up 44.7% and in 2001, the number of women lecturers increased slightly to 48.7%.

TABLE 3. 5
NUMBER OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN LOCAL UNIVERSITIES
ACCORDING TO GENDER AND POST AS OF DECEMBER 2001

UNIV.	PROF.		ASSOC. PROF.		LECTURER		LANG. TEACHER		TUTOR		TOTAL
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
UM	122	55	221	181	401	390	36	37	113	118	1,674
USM	74	5	194	37	547	329	75	106	-	-	1,367
UKM	113	37	222	125	496	487	21	59	57	104	1,721
UPM	73	24	217	80	386	295	11	23	178	258	1,545
UTM	90	5	238	70	502	386	7	20	172	108	1,598
UUM	18	2	56	18	319	280	17	2	117	166	995
UIA	40	16	94	16	291	197	188	197	38	63	1,140
UNIMAS	17	3	33	7	127	102	-	1	51	60	401
UMS	25	3	21	6	131	91	4	1	45	29	356
UPSI	6	1	23	1	111	72	8	8	16	22	268
UiTM	41	4	440	245	1,340	1,743	-	-	66	80	3,959
Total	619	155	1,759	786	4,651	4,372	367	454	853	1,008	15,024

Source: Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Malaysia

As can be seen in Table 3.5, the total number of academic staff in the eleven universities at the end of 2001 was 15,024; women academicians accounted for 45% of this total.²⁷ In UiTM, women academicians accounted for almost 57% of the total number

of teaching staff. Out of this total, there were only 4 (9%) female professors. UM had the highest number of female professors (31%) and associate professors (45%). However, female professors accounted for only 5% in UTM – the lowest in comparison to the other universities. In addition, relatively few females had been appointed as professors (6.3%) and associate professors (16%) in USM.

According to Cecilia Ng and Shanthi Thambiah (1999), the promotion and appointment of women do not mirror the increases in number of employed academicians and their professional experience. Promotion, especially in the academe, is not at par with increased numbers of professional women. Etzkowitz and Kemelgor's (1994) paradox of critical mass is clear in Malaysian institutions of higher education. Although a critical mass of women professionals in a faculty has been reached, the expected effect and qualitative changes have not been achieved. According to Harding and Mc Gregor (1995), it is quite common, for example, that university teaching to be a feminized sector - especially at the level of instructors and lecturers.

The scenario in Malaysia is not very different from that in Britain. In an article, "How can women get on in academic life?", Wendy Berliner quoted the UK-based Higher Education Statistics Agency which stated that in old universities, only 8% of women were professors and more than one-third were on the lowest lecturer pay scale, while in the new universities, women professors accounted for 16% and about half were on the lowest lecturer pay.

To quote Berliner:

*"British universities are still bastions of male dominance and although women are at the forefront of academic inquiry and debate, they are often sidelined into lowest-paid jobs and temporary contracts."*²⁸

3.5 Reasons for Male Dominance in University Administration

There may be several factors for male domination of top-level management positions in local universities. These causal factors are as follows:

A. Socio-Cultural Factors

First, traditionally, sons were usually given preference and had the privilege to further their studies, while daughters were socialized to perform the role of the homemaker. Before the passing of Education Act 1961, male children had greater educational opportunities to pursue their studies than did female children. In 1957, only about 29% of pupils in Standard Six were females.²⁹ According to Fatimah Hamid Don (1984), some of the factors for the under-representation of females, particularly in institutions of higher education are low education levels of parents, low family income, fear of moral threats of co-educational setting and distance.

Azizan Baharuddin (2003: 42) argued that the reasons for the smaller numbers of women in science and technology were perceptions, values and attitudes of parents, teachers and peers.

According to Azizan:

*"Social and cultural stereo-typing usually transmitted through parents convey powerful messages to girls to avoid technical and scientific subjects as unsuitable and unnatural for women."*³⁰

It can be seen that the factors, which have led to occupational segregation are social attitudes and gender inequality in education and training.

B. Rate of Social and Policy Changes

Second, improved educational opportunities for women to pursue tertiary education could be attributed to the changes in society and educational policies in the 70s and 80s.³¹ In 1970, the enrolment of female students in universities was 29.1%.³² It was only in 1996, did the number of female students in universities rise significantly to 51%.³³ As such, in line with this trend, there existed a bigger pool of qualified and experienced male academicians to be selected from, to fill the top-ranking positions in various universities.

C. Negative Perceptions

Third, to a certain extent, pre-conceived ideas on the part of male academicians had led to sexual discrimination of female women academicians in some universities. In a study conducted by Wazir Jahan Karim (1996), it was found that male academicians agreed that women academicians experienced sexual discrimination.

Women academicians were perceived by their male colleagues to be cliquish (being in the circle of women friends) and men academicians, on the other hand, were perceived by their female colleagues as establishing a system of "alliances" among male academicians when carrying out various projects. Male academicians were of the view that the reason why female academicians projected a passive image (towards their jobs) was because they did not want to hold administrative positions.³⁴ On the other hand, women academicians felt that they were not given the chance to hold these positions. Women academicians were also perceived as not giving full concentration to work because their time and energies would have to be divided between office work and housework.³⁵

Khadijah Muhamed (2003:289) observed that there was discrimination against women academicians with regard to the promotion into management and administrative positions.

In addition, Jasbir K.S. Singh (1999) pointed out three factors that might explain the small proportion of women in top management positions in institutions of higher learning. They are:

- i. Person-centered perspective: Women lack the necessary psycho-social attributes (personality characteristics, attitudes and behavioral skills),

- ii. Structure-centered paradigm: Women are in a disadvantageous position in the organizational structure (few numbers, little power and limited access to resources), and
- iii. Culture-centered perspective: The existence of gender-based social roles that are irrelevant to the workplace.

She acknowledged the existence of "the glass ceiling" in institutions of higher learning: *"The consensus appears to be that an increasing number of competent women find themselves blocked from the very top positions, and that subtle factors are at play preventing their crashing through the glass ceiling"*.

Mohamad Nasir (1997) outlined four key factors that he believed were preventing women from ascending to top-level management positions. These were the failure of superiors to guide subordinates, gender discrimination, the lack of political skills and poor planning in terms of career path development.

The International Labor Organization Report (1997) identified *"the nature of women's career paths"* to be the major obstacle affecting a woman's progress to top-management positions. In other words, women were placed in non-strategic sectors rather than in professional and management positions that led to the top. In addition, women were cut off from informal and formal networks that were deemed *"necessary for advancement within enterprises"*.

D. Different Sets of Priorities

Another inhibiting factor mentioned in the 1997 ILO Report was the inability of balancing family and career:

"For women with family responsibilities, their upward movement may be further hampered, as they juggle time to devote to both career and family."

It is not uncommon, particularly among young women academicians to give priority to childbearing and caring; thus temporarily postponing opportunities for further education.³⁶ A woman academician with young children, for example, will readily take up the opportunity to do her Ph. D. if she is able to solve the problems of childcare and domestic chores. However, the delay in pursuing post-graduate degree will have negative consequences on her career advancement and promotion opportunities.

3.6 Measures to Increase Female Labor Force Participation

The government has taken various steps to increase female participation in the labor market. In 1998, the Employment Act 1955 was amended and a provision for flexible working hours was included. From May 1998, maternity leave up to 60-days for a maximum of up to five children came into effect; thus allowing a much longer duration for women in the public sector to care for their infants. Employers who provide childcare centers near or at the workplaces are able to apply for tax deduction. Finally, employers

are encouraged to provide proper housing, transport and healthcare for the rural migrant workers, who are mostly women.

3.7 Perceptions Regarding Wives' Employment Status and Responsibilities

To understand the challenges faced by Malaysian working women, one would first have to understand the culture, norms and values of the society within which they live. According to Epstein (1970):

"The problems faced by professional women in their work and personal lives cannot be meaningfully investigated without examining the cultural themes and the value system that bear on the roles of women in society."

Women in Malaysia have been able to break free from many legal, institutional and social constraints, which had inhibited them from participating in the development process. The number of female students receiving tertiary education has increased tremendously since the last decade. Female students account for 70% of student enrolment in almost all public universities in the country.

The participation of women in the labor force is directly related to their educational attainments.³⁷ There is a trend indicating that the number of dual-career families is steadily increasing. However, in the mindsets of many Malaysians, both males

and females, the traditional model of "the husband being the breadwinner and the wife being the home-maker" still prevails.

"A Study of the Effects of the Development Process on Malaysians and Their Gender Attitudes Towards Women's Appropriate Roles" was conducted by Jamilah Ariffin (1997).³⁸ 2953 men and women throughout Peninsula Malaysia participated in the survey between 1993 and 1994. Findings indicated that more than 60% of female respondents believed that the family should take precedence over career (Appendix 3).

In 1995, the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) conducted a research on 1,200 respondents above the age of 18, in Kuala Lumpur and Klang Valley. The title of the research was "The Effects of Socio-Economic Development on Family and Gender Relations".³⁹ The findings of this research indicated several qualitative changes within the family institution in Malaysia. However, some traditional and conservative elements can still be found in the family institution in Malaysia. There seemed to be a general consensus that family should take priority over a married woman's career. In addition, women are still perceived to be basically responsible for housekeeping and child-rearing (Appendix 4).

It is still quite common for a Malay husband refer to his wife as "*orang rumah*", which literally means "home person", even though she may be a professional or a career woman. Equal sharing of household duties and child rearing is not the norm, even if both partners work.

3.8 Working Women and Their Family Responsibilities

Society is concerned about the negative impact of working mothers on their children's development. Working women have been accused of causing family instability, "evident" in the increasing trends in divorces, female single parenting or female-headed households, child abuse cases and drug addiction as well as petty crimes among teenagers / school children (Husna Sulaiman, 1993).

When women work, they take on the role of employee, while maintaining their traditional roles of housewife and mother (Greenglass et al., 1989). The study by Scarr, Phillips and McCartney (1989) suggested that regardless of social class, when both spouses were employed, wives still did a bigger share of household chores and childcare.

As a result of meeting the demands of both their jobs and families, it was found that employed women worked an average of 15 hours more per week and got half an hour less of sleep each night.⁴⁰ Noraini (2001) pointed out that, in comparison to men, the total workload for women increased with the increase in the number of children living at home. She mentioned that Malaysian women experienced a greater sense of guilt if they

failed to carry out home-related responsibilities “properly” because of religious and cultural values that “*place extreme importance on the women's homemaker role*”.

It can be seen that some employed women have two jobs, paid employment, as well as, responsibility for unpaid housework. Arlie Hochschild (1989) described this situation as a “second shift” of unpaid work in the home. One estimate suggests that about one quarter of wives with full-time jobs do most of the household chores.⁴¹ These household chores are done at the end of the day or squeezed into weekends. Thus, wives in dual-career families spend much more time on average on household tasks than do their husbands.⁴² Mothers work longer hours than anyone else because fathers do not participate equally in household and childcare (Scarr, Phillips & McCartney, 1989). Cowan (1983) stated that fathers devote an average of 50 hours per week to employment and housework, compared to 80 hours per week for mothers.

Women are more likely to feel that family responsibilities are theirs and thus, they view housework as less of an imposition (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991). A study by Goldschieder and Waite (1991) revealed that there was a clear division of labor along gender lines.⁴³ In their research, Anderson-Kulman and Paludi (1986) found the areas of conflict (and major sources of stress) among working mothers to be: managing the household and home-cleaning. Majority of the women reported that they experienced conflict about care of sick children. Other problems were time-management, stress and fatigue.

3.9 Childcare

Childcare has often been viewed as a women's problem and women are considered to be responsible for childcare. This only reinforces traditional gender roles within the family. Inadequate childcare is often quoted as the main reason for women not being in the labor force or for being restricted in their employment (Kamerman, 1985). According to Ross and Mirowsky (1988), childcare arrangements affect working women's emotional adjustment.⁴⁴ Working women whose husbands help in childcare report less depression.

According to the Malaysian Family Life Survey (MFLS) of 1988, 54% of married women between 15 and 49 years were working. Tey (1991) concluded that labor force participation tended to increase with age, even among women with young children.⁴⁵ According to Tey:

"In the early stage of family formation, some women do withdraw from the labour market, but reenter when the youngest child reaches certain age".

Data from the MFLS (1988) as in Table 3.6 indicate that almost 23% of women (or about 1 in 4 women) from various economic sectors stopped work to look after their children. With regards to childcare, the survey found that as high as 41.6% of the children whose mother worked in sales were left on their own.

TABLE 3.6
CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENT AMONG WORKING WOMEN

Occupation	Child Care Arrangement (%)			
	Family Members	Someone Else	No Help	Total
Professional, technical & administrative	32.9	61.4	5.7	100
Clerical	42.1	55.3	2.6	100
Sales	43.8	14.6	41.6	100
Service	48.9	28.6	22.5	100
Agriculture	51.9	28.1	20.0	100
Production & transportation	53.9	20.6	25.5	100
All	47.0	32.4	20.6	100

Source: 1988 Malaysian Family Life Survey

Khairuddin Yusof (1991) estimated that at least 30% of 1.9 million children below the age of 5 would require some form of childcare services (home-based, institutionalized or estate type). According to Population Census 2000 estimates, there were 7.71 million children in the 0 to 14 age cohort and this accounted for 33.1% of the total population. As more families become dual-career families, more childcare facilities would be required. Access to childcare and pre-school facilities would allow more women to participate in economic activities.⁴⁶

In an earlier study on the quality of childcare centers, Khairuddin et al. (1987) found that the quality of most of these centers ranged from bad to very poor.⁴⁷ He also pointed out that these childcare centers were “*merely exercising custodial functions and not fulfilling their role as child development centers*”.

As of March 2001, there were only 74 childcare centers established at the workplace; 55 in the public sector and 19 in the private sector. The government has allocated a RM50, 000 grant to any Federal Government department or agency which plans to set up a childcare center at the workplace. A tax rebate of 10% over a 10-year period on the building cost of a childcare center is given to the private sector, as an initiative for employers to set up a childcare center for its employees. This, however, appears to be insufficient.⁴⁸

Private sector employers believe the cost of setting up and operating childcare centers to be too expensive. It would cost about RM50, 000 to equip a childcare center that can accommodate 50 children. The monthly operational cost is estimated at RM10,000.⁴⁹

According to Sarah Sabaratnam's article, "Proper child care makes for happy employees", more women in the European Union and Singapore had opted not to have children or to have fewer number because "*they can't do both: have a career and be there for their children*".⁵⁰ The article also highlighted the views of several prominent people who stressed that the participation of mothers in the economy should not be at the expense of their families. Some of these views are presented below.

Ruth Liew of *Organisation Modiale Pour l'Education Prescolaire* (World Organisation for Early Childhood Education) stressed a pertinent point:

"Employers need to realize, once they provide these facilities (crèches and child care), there will be less absenteeism in the company; parents will have fewer problems at home and thus be more productive at the office; there will be fewer problematic children and thus fewer problems in the society."

Babara Schaeffer-Hegell, president of the European Academy for Women in Politics and Business, Germany, argued in favor of reform in society - that would make it conducive for *"men and women, for work and family"*.

Fatimah Hamid Don, deputy chairperson of the National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID), believed that *"the workplace should be seen as an extension of family life ... and work rules and conditions must be gender-sensitive."* Fatimah pointed out that there were too few childcare facilities in Malaysia and kindergartens were too expensive for many parents. According to her, *"latch-key kids are the norm"*.

Husna Sulaiman (1992) disagreed with the views of some Malaysian employers, who have the mentality or the *"ideology of separation between work and family"*. According to her, such personnel policies would have a negative consequence on family well-being.

At present, there are 180,000 foreign domestic maids working in Malaysia; 80% are Indonesians.⁵¹ Fatimah Saad, Director-General of National Population and Family Development Board believes that with the changes in many Malaysian families (increase in the number of dual-income families), youths are now more exposed to moral danger since most of them are left in the care of domestic helpers or maids.⁵² In instances where children and teenagers are left on their own, there is the possibility of them being influenced by negative peer pressure, which could lead to various social ills.⁵³

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter briefly discussed the trends and challenges with regards to women's participation in the labor force. There is a positive trend indicating that more women have joined the employment market over the last decade. However, the level of women's participation in the labor force is considerably low and the majority of women are found in low-paying occupations. In addition, there seems to be a positive relationship between women's educational achievements and the increase in women's participation in the workforce. The increase in women's participation in the economy can be attributed to greater educational opportunities, positive steps taken by the government as well as changes in the values and perception of society regarding the importance of education for women and women's roles.

Tertiary education will become a multi-million dollar industry in Malaysia in the near future, with institutions of higher education assuming a bigger role as the country's income generator. Several developments, which are taking place in the field of higher education, have a profound impact on universities and academicians. These include the massification of higher education, the corporatization of public universities, the advancement of science and technology, the demand for k-workers, globalization and stiffer competition. One major effect is the quantitative growth and expansion of higher education. The demand for information technology specialists, engineering professionals as well as k-workers, has led to courses in universities to be defined to a greater extent, by market forces. Through the corporatization of public universities, the financial burden of the government has been reduced and public universities have been granted greater autonomy. However, more pressure has been exerted on them to generate income.

To be competitive, local public universities need to move in the direction of other international centers of teaching-learning excellence. In line with these developments, the role of academicians is shifting from that of a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator. A paradigm shift would have to be the first step taken by women academicians before they are able to appreciate and embrace the innovations brought about by ICT as well as apply them in their teaching.

Current data indicate an upward trend in the number of women academicians in public universities. However, most women academicians are found in lower levels of

these institutions of higher learning, while men seem to monopolize important senior management positions. The main inhibiting factors are socio-cultural constraints, occupational segregation, sexual discrimination (attitudinal and organizational prejudices) and organizational structure.

The major barrier preventing women in Malaysia from joining the labor force seems to be the problem of childcare. Good childcare and day care centers are severely lacking; both in the public as well as private sectors. In addition, the majority of childcare facilities, which are operational, are of poor quality.

If the problems and challenges encountered by women are not addressed, the efforts taken by the government, which are aimed at increasing female participation in the workforce, will be futile. A more holistic approach to solving this problem should be considered.

To quote John Clammer (2000):

*"Economic reform does not take place in a vacuum, but always in a context of social, cultural, political and ecological circumstances. And it does not only have economic consequences but, whether successful or not, has profound effects on all dimensions of the societies in which it occurs..."*⁵⁴

Endnotes

¹ A more in-depth discussion on this in *The New Straits Times*, March 6, 2001 'Redefining women's roles.'

² It was 58.2 percent in 1991 compared with 51.2 percent in 1980 (Malaysia, 1995).

³ Wee pointed out the irony that: 'Yet the paradox in Malaysia is that the exploitation of Malay women is done in the name of promoting indigenous interests under the NEP'.

⁴ To supplement their husband's income, these women moved into non-formal service sector (vending, food-catering and direct selling). The time they spent on child-minding and parenting was reduced because more time had to be given to the preparation of food and cakes which were for sale. The study also found that these families reduced their visits to clinic and cut down on nutritional and high protein foods (especially milk products, cereal, beef, fish, fruits and vegetables).

⁵ H. Osman-Rani (2000: 247-266).

⁶ The Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996 allowed the Minister of Education to authorize the approval for the establishment of private universities. Universiti Teknologi Petronas, Universiti Multimedia, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR), Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), International Medical University (IMU) and Universiti Industri Selangor offer courses in engineering, business studies, medicine and multimedia at degree level. Other private universities are Universiti Telekom, Universiti Sains dan Teknologi Malaysia (MUST), and Universiti MARA.

⁷ They are Monash University, Australia; Curtin University of Technology, Australia and the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom.

⁸ Figures taken from Wan Chik Rahmah bt. Wan Din (2001, May).

⁹ Private institutions provided a total of 32,480 places at degree level, 116,265 at diploma level and 60,840 at certificate level. See Wan Chik Rahmah bt. Wan Din (2001, May).

¹⁰ They are in Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang and Perlis

¹¹ It offered 25 distance-learning courses ranging from multimedia to law.

¹² Manning, R. (1993) and DesJarlais, C.D. and Johnsrud, L.K. (1994: 335-353).

¹³ In-depth discussion on this issue can be found in O'Laughlin, Elizabeth M. and Bischoff, Lisa G. (2001).

¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion on Singapore's world-class universities, see *The Sunday Star*, Education, February 23, 2002, 'Keeping one step ahead'.

¹⁵ Compare results from poll conducted by *Asiaweek*. For more details see, *Asiaweek's* 'Asia's Best Universities 2000' (2000, June 30) and *Asiaweek's* 'Asia's Best Universities 1999' (1999, April 23).

¹⁶ (2002, June 2: 24).

¹⁷ Musa bin Muhamad (2001: 1-7).

¹⁸ In 2002, there were about 44,000 unemployed local university graduates.

¹⁹ For an in-depth discussion on this, see Mohd Taib Osman (2002: 42-54).

²⁰ Wheeler, Steve (2000, May 4-7).

²¹ In contrast, in SMU the class size is 40 and the seminar style of interactive, team-centric teaching is used. Professors know each student's name and students are encouraged to be proactive and participative.

²² Lecturers who taught at faculties that offered compulsory university courses and core courses had more teaching hours than those who taught specialized areas.

²³ Published data provided only total figures. There was no categorization according to male/female academic staff. The figures for 1986 and 1987 were found in the Education Ministry's 1990 publication.

²⁴ These figures were taken from 'Redefining women's roles' by Arumugam, Shanti, *The New Straits Times*, March 6, 2001

²⁵ These data were received via e-mail from Puan Rubiah bt. Musa, Statistician, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

²⁶ UM, USM, UKM, UPM, UTM, UUM, UIAM, UNIMAS, UMS, UPSI, UiTM, KUIM, KUSTEM, KUITTHO, KUTKM, and KTAR.

²⁷ These data were received via e-mail from Puan Rubiah bt. Musa, Statistician, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

²⁸ Berliner, Wendy (2002, March 31: 3).

²⁹ Statistics form Ministry of Education, Malaysia (1968).

³⁰ Azizan Baharuddin (2003).

³¹ See: New Economic Policy, 1970; National Policy on Women, 1989 and National Education Philosophy, 1988.

³² The New Economic Policy has enabled women to become trained scientists; many of them are serving in the various universities.

³³ Robiah Sidin (2000).

³⁴ This is an example of a situation where the glass ceiling is supposed to be "self-imposed" by women themselves.

³⁵ Wazir Jahan Karim (1996: 155-170).

-
- ³⁶ See discussion of adaptive strategies used by educated, urban married Malay women in Ong, A. (1990, 1995) and Roziah Omar (1994).
- ³⁷ For an in-depth discussion on this subject, see Fatimah Abdullah (2000: 365-390).
- ³⁸ Jamilah Ariffin (1997).
- ³⁹ See *Survey Report on the Effects of Socio-Economic Development on Family and Gender Relations in Malaysia, 1995*.
- ⁴⁰ Pleck, J.H. and Rustad, M. (1980) and Noraini Mohd. Noor (2001: 69-101).
- ⁴¹ Ferree, Myra Marx (1991: 158-180).
- ⁴² Presser (1993) found that women spend about 34 hours per week on household tasks compared to 18 hours for men. According to Tavris and Wade (1984), women work longer hours than men.
- ⁴³ Women are most likely to assume responsibility for household chores such as, laundry, cleaning and cooking. Men, on the other hand, assume traditional male-typed tasks of maintenance of the car and the exterior of the home. Interior decorating, errands and other gender-neutral activities are more likely to be shared in a more equitable manner.
- ⁴⁴ The difficulty in getting satisfactory childcare has influenced working mothers' depression. Studies also indicate that husbands' lack of participation in childcare affects the development of their wives' depression.
- ⁴⁵ Tey Nai Peng (1991).
- ⁴⁶ Tiun, Ling Ta and Marsitah Mohd. Radzi (1994).
- ⁴⁷ Khairuddin Yusof, Wong, Y.L. Ooi, G.L. and Hamid-Don, F. (1987: 11-16).
- ⁴⁸ According to Datuk S. Veerasingham, Parliamentary Secretary in the National Unity and Social Development Ministry, there were only 54 government agencies and departments with childcare centers. For further information, see *The New Straits Times*, July 10, 2002..
- ⁴⁹ Shamsuddin Bardan (2001, August 23: 7).
- ⁵⁰ Sabaratnam, Sarah (2001, July 26: 5).
- ⁵¹ Murugesan, Meera (2002, February 3: 3).
- ⁵² Children and youth make up almost 40% of Malaysia's total population. See in-depth discussion on this issue in Anthea De Lima (2001, May 15: 6).
- ⁵³ Chiam Heng Keng (1994) and (2002, January 8: 4).
- ⁵⁴ Clammer, John (2000: 69).