

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Women's economic activities in the informal sector and marginalised work tend to be under-reported in the population censuses and labour force surveys. To a large extent, the under-reporting may be perpetuated by the women themselves who do not report themselves as working.

In view of this, this study focuses on time use study to analyse participation of female hawkers in economic and family activities. Time use study has the added advantage of not needing the respondents and interviewers to interpret what constitutes economic and family activities. This paper is interested to know how much time do the female hawkers spend on economic and family activities every day. Multivariate analysis is used to identify the factors that determine time allocated to economic and family activities.

Besides looking at the participation of female hawkers in economic and family activities, this paper also looks at the contributions of female hawkers from various approaches. It is hoped that this paper will contribute towards increasing the research on women generally and female hawkers specifically.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Female hawkers are generally not highly educated especially those who come from the East region. The majority of the female hawkers are trading in non-food items. They marry at a very young age, some 61.3 per cent of them got married before age twenty. Entry requirement into hawking is easy and thus there is an oversupply of hawkers resulting in low return for the female hawkers. On the other hand, mobility of the female hawkers is low especially for those trading in food and non-food items. The majority of them remain as hawkers since first started work.

The activities carried out by the female hawkers are classified into three main sub-categories namely economic activities, family activities and other activities. On a typical work day, female hawkers spend on average 9.1 hours on economic activities and 2.0 hours on family activities. Female hawkers work long hours on economic and family activities even on a typical rest day. Some 78.3 per cent of the female hawkers do not have a typical rest day. Due to the long hours that female hawkers kept, they have little time or energy to take part in interactive and social activities with family members and friends. They only spend on average 12.6 minutes on interactive activities and 1.8 minutes on social activities every day. Most of their free time is spent on just resting and relaxing or indulging in leisure activities like watching television or listening to the radio.

Multiple Classification Analysis is used to identify the more important factors in explaining the variances in the time spent on economic and family activities for the female hawkers on a typical work day and a typical rest day. A model with seven

independent variables of region, ethnic group, educational level, age group, marital status, place of operating stall and main income-generating activity is found to be significant in explaining the variances in the time spent on economic and family activities of the female hawkers. Region is the main factor causing the differences in time spent on economic activities while marital status of the female hawkers is better able to explain the variances in time spent on family activities.

It is found that female hawkers are poorly remunerated. They earn on average RM142.80 per week which comes to about RM570 per month. An hourly rate was calculated by dividing the weekly income with the weekly hours spent on economic activities and it is found to be around RM2.60 per hour. Multiple Classification Analysis shows that regional variation is the most important factor in explaining the variances in the hourly rate of the female hawkers.

Some 82.9 per cent of the female hawkers give financial support to their family members as compared to only 74.1 per cent who receive financial support. As much as 6.0 per cent of the female hawkers neither give nor receive any financial support from family members. About one-fifth of the female hawkers give but do not receive any financial support from family members. Female hawkers also contribute significantly to the family's income with 57.1 per cent of them earning higher income compared to their husbands. Some 51.6 per cent of the female hawkers are owner of hawking facilities. Although female hawkers make great contribution to the financial and well-being of the family, they are lacking in social security coverage. Some 86.2 per cent of the female hawkers do not subscribe to any protection scheme. In view of the longer life expectancy and the ageing population, this is an issue worth considering. Without

enough savings during their productive period and the lack of protection for old age, the welfare of the female hawkers and the well-being of their families would be an high priority concern.

5.3 Emerging Issues and Policy Implications

The present statistics on women tend to under-enumerated women's economic contribution. Thus women are often neglected in term of opportunities for investment in training, skill upgrading and economic resources. Policies to integrate women's concern into all aspects of development planning would consider the actual and potential role of women in all sectors of the economy and the impact of all policies, plans and programmes on women.

There is a high concentration of women in the informal sector especially in hawking due to the flexible hours, greater compatibility with family responsibilities and relatively easier access and lack of other opportunities. Women, particularly those who are head of households with young children are limited in their employment opportunity because of inflexible working conditions and inadequate sharing by men and society of family responsibilities. There is thus a need of policy to harmonise work and family responsibilities for women with equal partnership between women and men in family and community life and society. The sharing of family and employment roles by women and men will promote true equality, allow men to participate in the emotional rewards of the care and development of children, increase the potential labour force of both women and men, and promote a better utilisation of all human capital.

Female hawkers work long hours but are poorly remunerated. The long hours spent on economic and family activities have serious implications on women well-being, the quality of life as well as their health status. With an ageing population and more and more of the older persons being female, critical intervention is needed so that this group of women will enjoy the basic health and other services for their old age. Consideration should also be given to protecting women working as unpaid family workers.

Female hawkers spend very little time on interactive and social activities with family members and friends and neighbours. Considering that many of the female hawkers are not receiving financial support from family members, support from the community is needed especially during old age. The media can play an important role in putting up awareness campaigns to promote strong familial and community ties. The media also can highlight the problems faced by female hawkers and identify the channels from which women in need can get help. Women who have just embarked on new businesses may have a better chance of success if they have access to a network of counsellors who could assist them with a range of advice and services, including accounting, payroll preparation and financial services.

Special efforts should be made to provide opportunities for economic activity for women. For women to advance, and to become economically independent and self-reliant, they must first have access to the resources for the survival, not only of themselves but for the survival of the families depending upon them. By identifying the group of women who are in the vulnerable groups, activities and resources can be targeted exclusively to the intended women beneficiaries.

Policies and programmes to develop entrepreneurship abilities should be created and not just to generate income as a supplementary or secondary activity for women. To ensure that as many women as possible benefit, the focus should not be on industry sectors which do not normally involve women.

As many of the women in the hawking community have low levels of education, a critical area of intervention is in education. There should be awareness campaigns for families and communities that an educated girl is an asset, and investing time and money in her education is not a wasted cost, and that educating girls has a positive multiplier effect on the family and society. One way is to develop female role models and political leaders who can encourage girls and female students.

This paper shows that by improving the measurement of women economic activities, the needs of women can be identified and specific programmes and strategies drawn up to improve and enhance women's contribution to the family and society.