

## COMPLETION REPORT

### Do Women Really Hold Up Half the Sky?

A Comparative Study of Labor Force Participation of Married Women between Malaysia and Japan.

Dr. Suriyani Muhamad

Associate Professor

Faculty of Management and Economics

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu,

### **Do Women Really Hold Up Half the Sky? A Comparative Study of Labour Force Participation of Married Women between Malaysia and Japan.**

“Women hold up half the sky,” encapsulates the economic role of women within both the household and the larger economy. This research aims to investigate i) the expectations among working mothers in Malaysia and Japan when they first enter the labour market and ii) their point of views on the suitable policy that could sustain women participation in the labour market based on those implemented in Nordic countries. The research involved in depth interviews with working mothers having children aged between 0 to 8 years old and used childcare centre facility. In both countries, the findings of this research showed that the status of women as working mothers had a big impact on their life. Both Japanese and Malaysian working mothers place family welfare, especially the children well being, as the top priority before joining the labour force. In terms of satisfaction as working mothers, more than half of Japanese respondents said they were not really satisfied being working mothers. The main reasons are their husbands’ low commitment in household chores (including child care), and the struggle to allocate quality time with kids. In contrast, most of the Malaysian respondents were satisfied being working mothers. An important reason is the sharing of obligations with their husband in household chores and child care. The second research findings has been narrowed down to the family-friendly policies under i) quantity and quality of formal childcare facilities and services and ii) child related leave arrangements. The policies on childcare in Nordic countries (as a ‘best’ model for the forerunners on high female labour participation rate) were explained to the respondents. All Japanese respondents stressed on the limited capacity in public childcare and cited as an important reason why Japanese women quit working. They suggested that a better mechanism for child care center set ups is needed in order to motivate women to work. In terms of quality, they were satisfied with the quality of facilities and services of public child care centres. The findings in Malaysia also revealed the same outcome where there are limited public childcare centres and the priorities are given to low income family earners. Though, most of the Malaysian respondents were unhappy with the quality childcare centres. With regard to child related leave arrangements, the Japanese regulations provide a comprehensive model for parents with young children. However most of Japanese respondents highlighted that their spouse did not take or will not take a parental leave even though they are entitled for. The traditional thinking on the important role of women in raising children remain strong. It is the responsibility of men to work. However, model and regulations on child related leave arrangements are weak in Malaysia. The big differences compared to Japan findings are Malaysian spouses took a full parental leave entitled to them.

In conclusion, most of Japanese respondents quit their job after delivering the first baby. Low support from spouse

in child care, the long working hours and the availability of places in childcare contributes to this decision. This explains the contrasting career progression between men and women in Japan. In contrast, Malaysian respondents have support from their spouses in terms of child care and household chores. None of them quit jobs after having baby. Generally, childcare policies in the Nordic countries are better off compared to Japan and Malaysia. The low cost of childcare, generous parental leave and the shorter working hours facilitate better work-family balance for Nordic families. The Japanese and Malaysian working mothers expressed their support for the Nordic initiatives on working mothers. Having family-friendly policies will motivate them to join and sustain in the labour force. As such, the review on policies in terms of supporting working mothers in Japan and Malaysia are required, albeit in the context of the Asian tradition.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

**Planned verbal presentation under the theme ‘Market Limitation on Women’s Career’**

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**Under Review**

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