

## **GENDER EQUALITY AND GOVERNMENT POLICY AS PREDICTORS OF CAREER CHOICE AMONG WOMEN CIVIL SERVANTS AT MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT, PUTRAJAYA**

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### **Abstract**

Women's credibility to be in an employment sector is always being underestimated by men. While seeming the progress towards the empowerment of women in the public sector, yet they are still constrained in many ways. The aim of this study is to analyse the factors influencing career choice among women in public sector particularly at the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment (NRE), Putrajaya. The study examined two factors which are gender equality and government policy in women employment. Survey questionnaires were used to gather information from 160 women civil servants at Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment (NRE), Putrajaya. This study employed quantitative method to identify the correlation of the variables. Findings revealed that gender equality and government policy have significant relationship with their career choice in the public sector.

**Keywords:** *Women Employment, Career Choice, Public Sector*

*Article history:- Received: 07 August 2017; Accepted: 05 February 2018; Published: 19 May 2018  
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### **Introduction**

According to Za'afaran (2011), the number of women participation in public sectors particularly in an upper level of management and professionals are quite impressive. Nevertheless, the number of women who are employed in public sectors are still small compared with the number of men who hold their positions in all types of sectors. Women continue to face challenges in term of carrying out their job responsibilities. A study by Maimunah Ismail and Mariani Ibrahim (2008) found that executive women perceived that the family structure and commitment to the family were the most challenging factors in their career progression. On top of that, working women also being challenged to develop their career due to gender inequality practices at workplace. Bhatt (2005) revealed that women workers in Malaysia are discriminated in recruitment process, salary, promotion as well as sexually harassed. In the context of government policy, the efforts taken by the government in tackling the gender issues at work are crucial to eliminate discriminatory practices at the workplace. Without extensive initiatives by the government, gender gap in employment sector could increase and restrict the capability of women to contribute to the economy (Zaiton Othman & Nooraini Othman, 2015).

Malaysian government had acknowledged the contribution or impact of women toward the development of the country. Hence, the government is always encouraging women participation towards the national development process by giving them wider opportunity to be employed in public and private sector. Appreciating the role of women in family, society,

economy and politics, the government acknowledged that there are specific policies or approaches that need to be developed to ensure that women are effectively involved in the development process. Thus, the potential of women can be optimized with existence of policy as a guidance for them.

According to the Ministry of Women's, Family and Community Development, the number of women in the public sector in 2004 had doubled up from 18.8 percent to 35.8 percent in 2016. Meanwhile, the percentage of women in the corporate sector for both public and private is as much as 29.9 percent (The Star Online, 2017).

Many factors have contributed to the increase in the number of women in employment. Women's decision to work in the public sector might also be influenced by various factors among others, the status of gender equality and government policies in women employment.

Gender equality is not only about the equal status that the women are entitled to, but it is more concerning on the opportunity available for women to participate. The concept of gender equality is where the women and men are subjected to the same conditions to realize full human rights and having equal chance to contribute towards economic, social, cultural and political development (Zeti Aziz, 2011).

It is important to realise that Malaysia was ranked at the 111th place out of 145 countries according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2015 (World Economic Forum, 2016) in terms of participation of women in economic, political and social aspect. Though the rank is considered moderate, government still planned and conducted many initiatives to improve the status quo for better gender equality in the future.

Moreover, a survey conducted by Randstad in 2016 revealed that 87 % of Malaysian employees had positive response towards equal treatment for men and women within organisations. This result is the highest percentage in this region. Malaysian employees also believed that the opportunity to get rewards from the employer is equal for all employees regardless of gender with the percentage of 83.0 as the highest in the region (Randstad Workmonitor, 2016).

In the light of government policy, the government has implemented many initiatives to empower women in employment sector. Government had ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Action Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995.

Furthermore, Women's Development Action Plan had been reviewed in 2009 to achieve gender equality in Malaysia as to address the challenges currently faced by women. The core mission of national development agenda under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, the government's commitments in various forums at international level such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Putrajaya Declaration and Program of Action on the Advancement of Women in Country Members of the Non-Aligned Movement showed the commitment of the government in tackling the issue of gender equality (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 2011).

The efforts continued with several actions by the government including the introduction of the 30 Percent Women in Decision Making Positions in Public Sector policy in 2004 (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 2011). Prior to the introduction of the policy, the range of percentage of women in decision making in public sector was between 11.8

percent to 12.9 percent only (Economic Planning Unit, 2011). A huge positive impact can be seen after its implementation with 33.7 percent for high managerial position in 2012 (Sharifah Syahirah & Norfarhanis, 2015).

In addition, Datuk Seri Najib has suggested to the employers in Malaysia to establish the Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) scheme that has been accepted by various government agencies and ministries. FWA provides flexibility in term of period, place and time of work. For instance, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development had implemented FWA including its agencies starting in 2015. The objective of the scheme is to provide ‘work-life balance’ environment for the government officials. On top of that, it aims at increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the government officials through outcome-based principle (Karim, 2015).

The government is also implementing the Women Director programme in the corporate sector for placement of women in decision making. This programme has positively improvised the status of Malaysian women as directors in which it currently outranks Singapore and Japan (The Star Online, 2017).

### Methods

In this study, the total population of Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment (NRE), Putrajaya, is 280 female employees. From the total number of population, the sample size was determined by using sample size table by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). Therefore, 162 respondents were selected for this study. The purposive sampling technique was used since this the sample must be selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. Survey questionnaires were prepared in the form of dual languages which are in the English and Malay language. The number of questionnaires distributed were 162 and the response rate is 98.7%. Then, correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between variables.

### Results and Discussion

Table 1. Correlation Analysis between career choice and Gender Equality

	career choice	Gender Equality
career choice	1	.482**
Sig. (1- tailed)		.000
Gender Equality	.482**	1
Sig. (1- tailed)	.000	

Table 1 shows the result of Pearson Correlation for career choice and gender equality. The result indicated a positive relationship between career choice and gender equality,  $r(160) = 0.482$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . This suggests that they prefer to work in public sector because of the gender equality status in that organisation. The more positive gender equality practised in the public sector, the higher career choice of female employees to work in the public sector. Equal treatment between men and women might influence the women to be committed at work. Gender equality can be seen in various aspects of employment including decision making, wages and promotion. A study conducted by Noor Rahamah (2014) has revealed that women are more struggle in the discrimination of income gaps than men. Women are unhappy for being offered job with low wages, facing the difficulty of promotion and exposed to sexual harassment in the workplace. This indicates that women are looking for better and equal

treatment regardless of gender, so that they will be more satisfied at work. Thus, effort for better gender equality in the organisation may attract women to have a career in public sector.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis between career choice and Government Policy

	career choice	Government Policy
career choice	1	.457**
Sig. (1- tailed)		.000
Government Policy	.457**	1
Sig. (1- tailed)	.000	

Table 2 shows the result of Pearson Correlation for career choice and government policy. The result indicated a positive relationship between career choice and government policy,  $r(160) = 0.457$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . This suggests that they prefer to work in public sector because of the government policy. The more positive government policy on women employment in the public sector, the higher career choice of female employees to work in the public sector. Recognising the importance of women in a family institution, the government had come up with various initiatives to support them in employment sector. Government have taken steps to ensure that their burden in juggling between family and work can be reduced without discounting their important roles at work. Implementation of government policy is rather crucial so that all the policy objectives to assist the women at work would be effectively achieved.

### Conclusion

To conclude, both factors are assumed to be predictors for women in deciding the organisation to work for. Organisational practices of gender equality and implementation of government policies are among the factors that women will consider before giving commitment in employment. Therefore, it is recommended that the management must always put priority on gender equality to prevent any arising issue of discrimination and biasness among women employees. Gender mainstreaming need to be manifestly implemented and enforced in public organisation so that it could attract women to work in public sector. Government also is encouraged to provide more training and development programmes in order to provide qualified women human capital for the future. In addition, future research should delve into study that focus on different sets of respondents, for example comparing between public and private sector. This is because, there is a lot of initiative implemented by the government to promote equality and women employment, but still there are issues regarding gender equality in private sector.

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