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#### FACTORS IMPEDE MOTHERS ACHIEVING TOP MANAGEMENT POSITIONS: THE CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS

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#### *Abstract*

The impact of motherhood associated with female's employment is still underestimated. This article aims to provide an overview of motherhood discrimination to top management positions in connection with the contemporary business. The conceptual model examines relationships of organisational practices and work-life conflict on motherhood discrimination to top management positions. Based on the literature review, the current research builds a conceptual model consisting of organisational practices, work-life conflict and motherhood discrimination to top management positions. The research propositions may provide recommendation and assist the Malaysian organisations as well as Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development of Malaysia in designing suitable guidelines to minimise motherhood discrimination in organisation issues. An evaluation of current policies may be needed, which will help policy makers understand the factors impede mothers in top management positions. The current research is specifically crucial to mothers in middle management positions. Past researches have revealed compelling findings on factors impede females achieving top management positions. However, there is a lack of studies on the variable of motherhood discrimination to top management positions. Thus, this conceptual model is crucial to reveal the factors impede mothers achieving top management positions as they progressively seen to have a competitive advantage which is crucial for contemporary business landscape.

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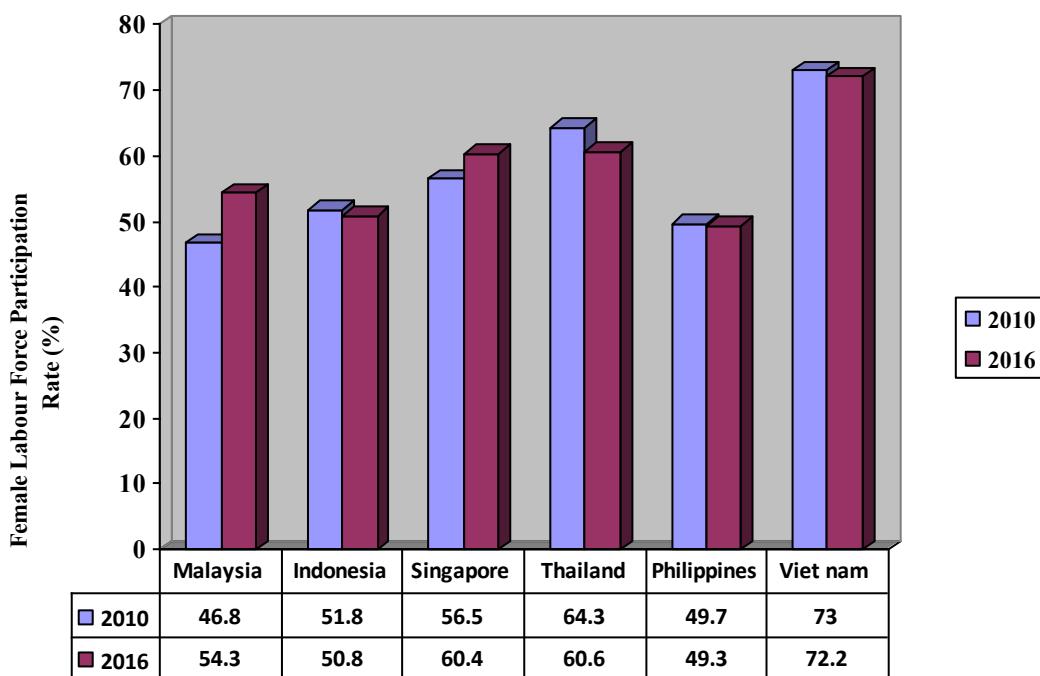
**Keywords:** Organisational Practices, Work-Life Conflict, Motherhood Discrimination to Top Management Positions



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## 1. Introduction

The majority of aspiring females are struggling to obtain recognition and remuneration within the prevailing business environment. Female's organisational recognition and remuneration remain elusive even though they have contributed to the organisations. Significant evidence proves that higher female's participation rate can increase the organisation's ability to respond to major shifts in the economy. Referring to The Economist (2005), the Catalyst's report demonstrated that between 1996 and 2000 the number of female executives strongly correlate to the Fortune 500 companies' performance. For the organisations that moving towards a contemporary business approach will be implementing diversity as for cultural change and not for compliance purpose only.



**Figure 01.** Female Labour Force Participation Rate of Some Southeast Asia Countries (Comparison between 2010 and 2016)

Based on Figure 1, a comparison of female labour force participation (FLPR) of selected southeast countries indicates that Malaysia and Singapore have made substantial progress. Malaysian FLPR has increased from 46.8 per cent in 2010 to 54.3 per cent in 2016 (Asian Development Bank, 2017). Meanwhile, Singapore FLPR has risen from 56.5 per cent in 2010 to 60.4 per cent in 2016 (Asian Development Bank, 2017). In contrast, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam showed a decreasing trend. Overall in 2016, Malaysian FLPR were 54.3 per cent, indicates one of the countries with lower participation rate compared to Singapore (60.4 per cent), Thailand (60.6 per cent) and Vietnam (72.2 per cent) (Asian Development Bank, 2017). In addition, Malaysia persists to be as one of the lowest Global Gender Gap Index compared to Southeast Asia and the Pacific countries, European countries and Northern America (World Economic Forum, 2017). Economic participation and opportunity ratio in Malaysia has had a slightly decreased from 0.66 in 2016 to 0.65 in 2017 (World

Economic Forum, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2017). A part of being rank as 104th country over 144 countries, the Malaysian ratio of female to male legislators, senior officials as well as managers decreased to 0.26 in 2017 compared to 0.29 in 2016 (World Economic Forum, 2017). There is an exacerbation of the gender gaps when moving from the female labour force participation to female labour force participation in decision-making positions. As stated by Profeta (2017), only minorities make it the highest position even in countries with the high participation of females in the labour market. Hence, Malaysia has yet to achieve gender parity in the workforce. Malaysian firms with top female managers ratio were only 0.36 (World Economic Forum, 2017). These ratios illustrated that despite the enrolment of female to male ratios in tertiary education were 1.53 and tertiary education attainment were 1.14 for age 25 to 54 (World Economic Forum, 2017), there is an underrepresentation of females in top management. Hence these narrow down to female's marital status in the workforce. Referring to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Labour Force Survey Report (2016), married females have the lowest labour force participation were 56.7 per cent compared to the married males' counterpart of 92.8 per cent. The differences in married marital status between male and female were 36.1 per cent, constitute the highest differentiation compared to another marital status. Thus based on literature review from past studies, this paper attempted to examine the relationship between organisational practices and work-life conflict towards motherhood discrimination to top management positions.

## 2. Problem Statement

Working mothers have been excluded from crucial positions, projects and equal opportunities. Why are mothers facing unpalatable discrimination? As mentioned by Jauhar (2017), "new mothers are not just expected to raise children and bring bread to the table, but also to take on the role of caretakers for their entire family". Piterman (2008, p.9) argued that because of a culture and the work structure that does not fit in with mother's needs, they have been excluded from key positions, projects as well as opportunities. McIntosh, McQuaid, Munro and Dabir-Alai (2012) contended the effect of motherhood in connection to female's employment is still underestimated. The researchers added that because of motherhood, females faced devaluation of abilities, opportunity's denial as well as penalisation in regard to careers.

Several of models, as well as empirical researches, have suggested that the increase in gender parity can lead to significant economic dividends, which vary depending on the circumstances of different economic conditions and the distinct challenges they face (World Economic Forum, 2017). World Economic Forum (2017) suggest that the United Kingdom Gross Domestic Product (GDP) can have additional US\$250 billion, the United States with US\$1,750 billion, Japan's with US\$550 billion, France's with US\$320 billion as well as Germany's with additional US\$310 billion, if the countries achieve economic gender parity. Female's economic empowerment can enhance the growth and stability of the country, combat shrinking workforce, and contribute to the development of the economic (International Monetary Fund, 2013). International Labour Organisation and Gallup (2017) indicated that in 2016 gender equality is still far from achieving, and the results show actual divisions are still present in many parts of the world. Workplace gender inequality is fundamental to be taken into account in regards to the sustainable development of organisations and economies rather than female's issues, because as stated by

World Economic Forum (2017) making certain the healthy development as well as appropriate utilisation of half of the world's total talent pool is thought to be great for the growth, competitiveness and readiness of the future of the economy and businesses around the world. Besides, Chanavat and Ramsden (2014) have conducted a performance comparison between 2009 and 2013 of 863 companies that do not have females on their boards, and 990 companies with at least 10 per cent females on boards revealed that companies with mixed boards have better performance. In order to achieve sustainable development of business and economic, equal rights provision and opportunities as well as female's empowerment and are essential. Based on the research of Leader-Chivee (2013) and Deloitte (2012), in rapidly changing and highly interconnected world, diversity is important for making corporate decision and innovation of business.

However, Hassan, Marimuthu and Johl (2017) argued that there is no significant impact on gender diversity towards firm value. Subsequently, the authors pointed out that, "there is a need to investigate this problem in a more holistic way and with rigorous statistical estimation". This is contradicting to previous researchers findings. To formulate such research findings, further researches have to be conducted at different points in time to find out whether such findings will continue to change over a long period of time. When it comes to understanding the various problems faced by working mothers, this research is specially designed to explore the perspective of mothers on factors impede them climbing to top management positions.

### **3. Research Questions**

There are two research questions in this current research:

- Do organisational practices has an impact on motherhood discrimination to top management positions?
- Does work-life conflict have an impact on motherhood discrimination to top management positions?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Accordance with the research questions, there are two purposes of the study:

- To examine the relationship between organisational practices and work-life conflict towards motherhood discrimination to top management positions.
- To discuss the formulation of the conceptual framework and propositions.

#### **4.1. Motherhood Discrimination to Top Management Positions**

Only a few females achieved top management positions, regardless of the rise of gender parity in today's workforce. Wood (2008) contended that females are seen as not suitable to be appointed as the senior management roles because of many male managers' that views females as a lack of fit to hold senior management roles. Eagly, Karau and Makhijani (1995), Heilman (2001) and Engen, Leeden and Willemse (2001) highlighted that females face discrimination in regards to many leadership roles, especially male-dominated employment, as such positions are seen as incompatible with female's gender

role. Hence, this may explain the low participation of females at the top of organisations, especially in the environments of masculine business (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Booth, Francesconi and Frank (2003) illustrated that females also faced other types of prejudice, for instance, lower wages for females than for males doing the same work. Konrad and Cannings (1997) stated that in the industrialised western industry, female's gender roles are considered homemaker and guardians of children, while the males' gender role is considered as the breadwinner for the families. A country could achieve its mission and vision only with well-managed talents. If good talents being discriminated based on gender, it will be devastating to organisations and the country's economic development.

Hurley and Choudhary (2016) indicated the highest possibility of being a CEO for females when they have no children. The authors added that with each additional child, the probability decreased rapidly. Based on their research, the probability of achieving the top management roles is almost zero, when they have up to four children. Lips (2013) revealed that when females do have children, even though if their working hours not lessen, employers and co-workers assume that females have less commitment. As a result, Grimshaw and Rubery (2015) illustrated that employers can practice what can be referred to as "statistical discrimination", presume that all females expect career interruption, showing less interest to participate in improving skill-sets' training and are unlikely to take roles where the compensation is future-loaded. To the extent employers believed that mothers' commitment in the workplace is reduced, researcher contended that mothers will be discriminated subtly by employers when making evaluations affecting hiring, promotion as well as salary decisions. Hurley and Choudhary (2016) illustrated that the lower the probability of females holding the CEO position when there is an increase in the number of children and years spent in education.

Why is the participation of motherhood at top management positions crucial? According to McIntosh et al. (2012), gender has a relatively positive impact on male career progression; while when a female has more children their career progression is reduced incrementally. The researchers added that "the effect of motherhood, working hours, career breaks and school-aged children upon career progression has been discussed widely, its actual scale and magnitude has received less research attention". Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009) indicated that research on corporate boards specifically focusing on the females is an essential tool for contributing academically and provides the basis for change in the more equitable form and effective representation of gender at the corporate decision-making positions. The traditional approach shows that the feminine management style is not relevant in managing an organisation. However, a new approach to management indicates that the feminine style of management is the reality of any contemporary organisation (Nikulina, Khomenko, Sediakina & Kanov, 2016). Hence, the current research proposes to examine organisational practices and work-life conflict towards motherhood discrimination to top management positions.

#### **4.2. Organisational Practices**

Tlaiss and Kauser (2010) contended that the definition of organisational practices is the organisational engagement that includes policies that associated with the selection and recruitment of managers, the assessment of performance, career advancement and training and development. Since the last twenty-first century, the gender stereotypes have impeded female's career progression, with the

ongoing masculine management role. Because of the perception that females are ideally suited for support and nurturing role as a mother instead of holding a decision-making role in management. As mentioned by McIntosh et al. (2012) motherhood has a proportionally greater amount detrimental effect on female's career progression. The authors added that "the degree of women's restricted career progression is directly related to the school age of the dependent children: the younger the child the greater the detrimental impact". However, males do not face "career penalty" like the females do. Hence, Jogulu and Wood (2011) contended that, by highlighting barriers experienced by certain employees' group, organisations can set about to shift their organisational culture with the aim that the career barriers that may impede middle managers' career advancement are recognised and addressed.

Studies by Budig and England (2001), as well as Budig and Hodges (2010), revealed that female managers frequently experience difficulties in motherhood's wage penalty. The findings of Grimshaw and Rubery (2015) confirm that even with grown-up children, motherhood's wage penalty persists. Female faced motherhood's wage penalty because of family responsibilities as well as reduced hours due to childbirth or take time off work and they may unable to catch up in the hierarchy of pay later on. Davies, Joshi and Peronaci (2000) have further strengthened that mothers trapped in the limited pay promotion opportunities' employment. Based on the existing researches comparing the mothers' average wages and female employees without children, females do face motherhood wage penalty. The findings of Agüero, Marks and Raykar (2011) validates that, based on research in 21 developing countries, there was 42 per cent of average motherhood penalty. Concisely, mothers are having a lower salary compared to the male counterpart, even though they are qualified and holding the same position as the male workforce. Whereas Blau and Kahn (1997) found that especially during the 1980s, the relative position of females considerably improved when males faced real earnings decline while real wage of females rose very rapidly. Referring to Jordan, Clark and Waldron (2007) findings, it is interesting to note that in year 2001 to 2003, based on Fortune 100 top executives' analysis of (3 female CEOs which is 3 per cent of them, and 24 female officers which is 5.8 per cent of them) did not show statistical difference when comparing between the total compensation of median or mean by gender, utilising nonparametric tests for medians or simple t-tests for means. These are compelling findings and seem incongruent with the assumptions presented in this research. Will the results keep on inconsistent over a long period of time? Hence generalising research findings will need more researches that direct at different points in time. The findings of this study also have potential implications, specifically to mothers in middle management that facing obstacles to holding top management positions.

#### **4.3. Works-Life Conflict**

As mentioned by Hanson, Hammer and Colton (2006) the conflict of work-life refers to ones' domain involvement, such as works or a persons' life, meddling with other domain involvement. The findings of Fei, Kuan, Yang, Hing and Yaw (2017) claimed that the conflicts of work and family, as well as obstacles to career attainment, were positively connected to occupational stress among female middle managers. How do mothers rise to the top management positions when they also have significant family care responsibilities? According to Twomey, Linehan and Walsh (2002), the need in resolving work and family could be circumvented in circumstances where females are unmarried and remain childless.

Miller's (2004) conducted research on female engineers shown that the pressure faced by the females in balancing work and family is regarded as the most important obstacle in female's attempts to progress. Because of 12 to 14 hours duration of work, the research of Miller's further indicates that females in the engineering field fail to attain senior positions. There is the differentiation between female leaders and male leaders to the extent that concerning non-work responsibilities, as Schiebinger and Gilmartin (2010) stated that females have had higher demands of housework, and Powell and Greenhaus (2010) indicated that females have the lower probability to be married and having children. Hurley and Choudhary (2016) affirm that female leaders that have children prefer to have the small number of children compare to male leaders, and have the lower probability to attain a leadership position with each additional number of children. On the other hand, Hakim (2006) argued that the policies of family-friendly have the possibility of discrimination against males, inadvertently compromising gender equality in workplace not only with the lack of policy for males but also because of socially defined gender stereotypes which have the possibility to limit the support that offered to males in applying policies even when the policies are available. These are compelling findings. Notably, however, Schiebinger and Gilmartin (2010) argued that even though males have taken part in more non-work obligations compare to the past, females keep on bearing the main burden of such task, even in the egalitarian family. Concisely, work-life conflict may play an important role for mothers in middle management that facing obstacles to holding top management positions.

#### **4.4. Role Congruity Theory**

The existence of prejudice is when a person that holding beliefs or stereotyping about a group which is conflicting with the behaviour that is considered to be necessary in order ones to achieve success in a particular role is known as gender role congruity (GRC) (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995). Because of role congruity, workplace conflict still exists, particularly within leadership positions for females. Eagly and Karau (2002) demonstrated that gender role congruity refers to the congruity between gender as well as other roles, including the roles of leadership. Consequently, the authors added that the masculine gender role is more congruent to leadership compare to feminine gender role. Females' low percentage at the top of organisations can be explained by these results, as Eagly and Carli (2003) claimed that this is particularly in masculine business environments, and Booth et al. (2003) highlights that other forms of prejudice for instance females get lower wages to compare to males counterpart although they are doing the same work. Lyness and Thompson (1997) as well as Ohlott, Ruderman and McCauley (1994) contended that other studies have shown that when comparing both of female and male managers that are holding the same position, female managers had smaller extent access to the top-position roles as well as the complex challenges that may be the precursors to promotion .

Consistent slight prejudice acted on can greatly reduce female's opportunities of climbing up to organisations' top-level positions. Other causes also deserve attention, specifically the organisational practices where prejudice changes into discriminatory actions (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Role congruity theory in this study is relevant as the barriers investigated in this study are such that emanates from their social roles as female regarding their position as wives and mothers. Eagly and Karau (2002) argued that more variables can be created from the principles illustrated in this theory that may have an

effect on the incongruity level between leadership roles in opposition to female gender roles relationship and the weight set for the roles of gender to be investigated besides those variables which have been researched in the past. The present research examines the factors impede mothers in top management positions.

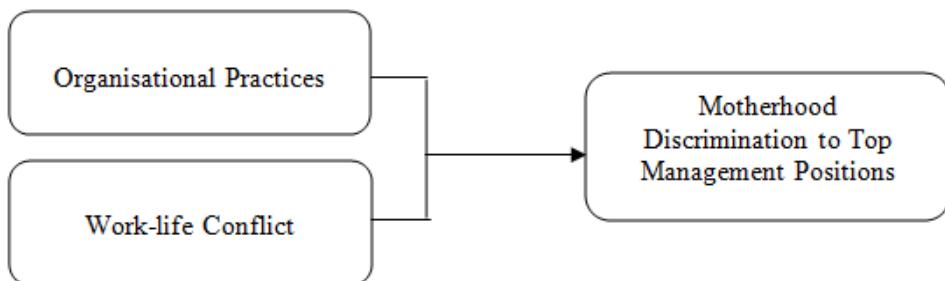
## 5. Research Methods

Collection of data will be utilising self-administered questionnaires. The researcher will distribute the questionnaires to the respondents within respective companies and collect the completed questionnaire. This conceptual model will examine the relationship between organisational practices and work-life conflict on motherhood discrimination to top management positions. Although probability sampling believed as ideal in research, the vast majority of studies in social science research actually draw upon non-probability samples (Rowley, 2014). The researcher will employ non-probability sampling. By utilising purposive sampling, the current research will focus on Malaysian manufacturing and service industry. Referring to Gross Domestic Product First Quarter 2018, the service sector recorded as the highest key contributors with 54.8 per cent and manufacturing sector is the second key contributors with 22.8 per cent (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). The growth rate for the service and manufacturing sectors were 6.5 per cent and 5.3 per cent respectively.

Thus, the researcher proposes the sample of the study will be the middle management's female (mothers) from Bursa Malaysia's companies, particularly in the service and manufacturing sectors. The reason the researcher choose only female respondents especially mothers is that, based on Thomas et al. (2017) findings, males are more likely to think the workplace is equitable which about 50 per cent of males thinks females well represented in leadership, even only one in ten senior leaders is a female. It demonstrates that males do not see anything wrong with the status quo even when there is only one female in the top position. To calculate the sample size the researcher utilises the G\*power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner & Lang, 2009) software. Thus, the minimum sample size for 2 predictors is 107 respondents.

## 6. Findings

The lack of studies on the variable of motherhood discrimination to top management positions has prompted the researcher to dwell on this issue.



**Figure 02.** Conceptual Framework

The propositions have been generated base on argument and explanation in the literature review. Based on Figure 02, the first proposition in this current research is ‘the organisational practices have a significant impact on motherhood discrimination to top management positions.’ While the second proposition is ‘work-life conflict has a significant impact on motherhood discrimination to top management positions.’

## 7. Conclusion

Mothers are underrepresented at leadership levels, as they combine motherhood and employment. It is important to explore factors impede motherhood discrimination to top management that hinders their career progression. This research might provide useful information on the motherhood discrimination with regard to contemporary business.

The proposed conceptual framework hope to contribute to females’ equality in top management positions especially mothers, thus aim to minimise motherhood discrimination to top management positions as it is important for sustainable development of the organisations and economies as well as business innovation.

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