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Relationship between Discrimination in Career Development and Stress among Female Workers in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Female workers always felt discriminated by the organization as it is difficult to attain equal opportunities to develop their career. They do not receive the same opportunities as the other sex for mentoring, training, promotion, and rewards. This may lead to the cause of stress as they cannot develop in their career and reach for a better position in the organization. This paper will investigate on the relationship between discrimination in career development and stress among female workers. The sample consists of 86 female workers from supervisor level and above. Findings indicate that the female workers are being discriminated from obtaining opportunity for mentoring, promotion, and rewards; and there is a significant correlation between the discrimination in career development and stress.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional and modern women in Malaysia were different in terms of works. According to Hamidi and Mustafa (2013), in the 1950s, women were seen as the housewives, wives, and caregivers in context of country development. Malaysia has conducted a number of development programmes related to family planning, pregnant distinct, and health of mothers and children. Meanwhile in the 1960s, there were countless of women leaving rural to town to get a job as factory workers in free industrial zone. They also stated that after 50 years independent of Malaysia, women are more advanced and there are more women that became an organisation's leader in public, private, and corporate sectors. Although there has been an increase in numbers of women entering the labour force, the problem occurs for female's leadership in Asia including Malaysia still arise and has become persistent in gender gap (Tuminez *et al.*, 2012).

According to Tuminez *et al.* (2012), in the past five decades, Asia has seen more female that are becoming healthier and well educated; and more female are entering Asia's workforce but culture and social norms continue to become barriers for female to aspire and work towards positions of leadership. Furthermore, more female in Asia are dropping out in the transition from middle to top management roles. They also stated that in Global Gender Gap Report showed only 59 percent of the gap in economic participation has been closed and Asia Pacific comes to second-to-last on economic participation which Malaysia is on a lag at level of 97 among other countries. This showed that there is still persistent gender gap for economic participation in Malaysia even though female workforce had increased from year to year.

Malaysia's Ministry of Women, Family, and Community (2012) stated that there has been an increase in numbers of female participate in labour force. In 2000, there are 3,340.9 female that enter labour force and 3,235.5 female are employed. Meanwhile in 2011, there are 4,575.3 female that enter labour force and 4,426.4 female that employed. Thus it shows that the labour force participation amongst female in Malaysia has increased from year 2000 to 2011. Besides, the labour force participation rate for female in Malaysia is 47.2 percent in 2000 and increased to 47.9 percent in 2011. Then, from 96.7 percent of female employed in Malaysia on 2011, only 3.6 percent of them are managers and others are working as professionals (14.7%); technician and associate professionals (8.7%); clerical support workers (18.1%); service and sales workers (25.5%); skilled agriculture, forestry, and fishery workers (5.2%); craft and related trade workers (4.2%); plant and machine operators and assemblers (7.6%); and elementary occupations (12.4%) (Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, 2012). According to the statistic, female that employed as managers are less than any other occupations and this

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can cause by discrimination. Issue of female become discrimination victims in occupation is still a permanent issue in Malaysia (Noor, 2012).

Discrimination is defined as treated someone differently from others based on their membership in social group (Whitley & Kite, 2006). Female can be discriminate as cultural and social norms continue to disadvantage female who aspire and work towards position of leadership (Tuminez *et al.*, 2012). Study by Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) showed that Malaysian community are still biased towards female workers and male are seen to be better as a leader than female. Moreover, advancement of female in management is limited even though numbers of female that entering workforce increased (Kang & Rowley, 2005). They have also stated that research on female in management is limited, partly due to fewer female managers. So, there are less female managers maybe because they cannot develop their career and get into top management.

Furthermore, more women in Asia are dropping out in the transition from middle to top management roles (Tuminez *et al.*, 2012) and this can cause stress as females are seen to receive opportunity for career development (Handwerker, 1999). Female employees would feel stress when there are restrictions in their career development (Broadbridge, 2002). Thus, the aim of this article is to explore on discrimination in career development among female in middle management in Malaysia and the relationship to stress cause by the discrimination.

Discrimination in Career Development:

Noe (2008) defined career development as a process which employees progress from a series of stages, and each stage characterized by different sets of development tasks, activities, and relationships. Employees, managers, and employers are responsible for planning, guiding, and develop their employees' career (Dessler, 2009). Furthermore, Dessler (2009) stated that duties of employers in career development is to use the career-oriented assessment which the managers are trained not only to evaluate employees but also to match the advantages and disadvantages with an appropriate career path and development tasks required.

Besides, career development is different between male and female as female has more interruption in career (Catherine, 2007). In addition, female need to work harder and longer to show their credibility (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008; Kattara, 2005) and they need to be more prepared, more skill, and more experienced (Kass *et al.*, 2006). According to Bober (2005), every employee must get opportunity to develop their career. Moreover, executives and managers in private sector need an offer for a job that require the use of their skills; support career development and give opportunity for promotion; and organize the workplace according to interaction, not by hierarchy (Bober, 2005). Therefore, female employees cannot receive opportunities to develop their career and the discrimination that occurred makes it even harder to develop their career.

Gender discrimination in career development can be seen in the opportunities for mentoring, training, promotion, and reward. Discrimination occurred because the community often see women with certain stereotypes and this leads to discrimination (Kattara, 2005). Previous studies from other countries have shown that gender discrimination is one of the contributing factors that caused female workers to gain less opportunities in employment (Kass *et al.*, 2006; Pais, 2010) and restricted them from reaching the highest position (Kattara, 2005; Pais, 2010). In addition, women are often associated with the effects of glass ceiling that prevent female workers and minorities from advancement within an organisation (Helgeson, 2009; Woolnough *et al.*, 2006). Likewise, Chen, Roy, and Crawford (2010) agreed that the glass ceiling is one of the factors that may explain gender differences in the workplace where according to Catherine (2007), women in Nigeria get less promotion due to discrimination. Thus, in general, opportunities for mentoring (Zafir & Fazilah, 2003), promotion (Powell & Graves, 2003), and training (Rothman, 1998) in organisations are the key factors associated with career development.

One of the barriers in career development for female workers is the lack of opportunity to acquire a mentor (Gibelman, 1998; Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008). Moreover, the lack of career development for female workers is also attributable to them not getting the support of a mentor (Kattara, 2005). The importance of mentoring programs was proven from a study by Woolnough, Davidson, and Fielden (2006) which raised the awareness of the glass ceiling faced by female workers and issues related to career development. In addition, Kass, Souba, and Thorndyke (2006) emphasised that the major obstacle in developing a career is the lack of effective mentoring. The result from one year study (one year) suggests that career support from a mentor is important for the development of women's career (Tharenou, 2005). In addition, a research done by Allan (2010) on female workers in the United Kingdom showed that they have been discriminated against due to lack of mentoring practice. Moreover, 85 percent of respondents in a survey on the clothing and textile industry agreed that mentoring is important for career development by which mentors help in providing support, guidance, and solving problem (Johnson *et al.*, 2001).

Besides, Shields and Ward (2001) state that nurses in the National Health Service in England lacked training opportunities. Dessler (2009) states that the focus of training is more extensive today as compared to a few years ago and is called the recovery education training. It means that the training involves developmental programs that require workers to produce charts and graphs, and evaluate data. Dessler (2009) further explains that training

plays an important role in implementing the strategic work plan and that the developmental or training programs may succeed if workers receive feedback from the programs. According to Aamodt(2010), employees will be more motivated to learn something when they are given feedback and sometimes, the learning can occur naturally. Moreover, Gibelman(1998) suggested that female workers need to get support from employers in order to be offered opportunity for additional training so that they can develop their career. Studies have shown that there is no significant distinction between male and female workers for opportunities in training such as in the study by Zunz(1991) and also Almeida-Santos and Mumford(2004) in Australia. However, Ying Chu(2005) reported that female workers in the manufacturing sector at Shanghai received less opportunities for training (on-the-job training and off-the-job training). This shows that female workers receive less opportunities in training and that the organisational politics causes the working environment to not be conducive, consequently hindering the true ability of female workers because they are seen as unsuitable and not committed in their job (Catherine, 2007).

As for the promotion policy, the employer must first identify a number of issues such as those related to workers' age or the length of service countered with efficiency (Dessler, 2009). Typically, efficiency is a priority for promotion, although most service organisations or civil unions still give the advantage of promotion to the older employees. Moreover, Aamodt(2010) indicated that despite the fact that it seems fair to promote the best employees, this is a rare occurrence due to the policy of many organisations that are more concerned with the view that the older employees must get promoted. In addition, promoting the best employees or employees who work longer often produces the Peter Principle which is formulated by Dr. Laurence and Raymond Hull in 1969 (Aamodt, 2010). The Peter Principle states that employees must be promoted until they reach the highest level of expertise. As evidence, a past research on gender discrimination in Egypt showed that female are less likely to get promoted(Kattara, 2005). Apart from that, a study in Canada showed that men receive more promotion and more quickly compared to female workers (Chênevert & Tremblay, 2002). Not only that, according to a study by Anonymous (2006), 28 percent of the respondents in Organisation X stated that discrimination occurs in promotion and 24 percent said it involved compensation. Studies in the 90s also showed that men are significantly promoted faster than female (Zunz, 1991) and according to Snizek and Neil's (Snizek & Neil, 1992) study, 37 percent of female workers felt that they faced discrimination related to promotion. The community, according to Gibelman(1998), assumes that male are better as administrators than female and this causes female to have less opportunity in promotion. In comparing the studies in the 90s and the 2000s, the results showed no difference in the discrimination against female workers in the promotion aspect. Woolnough *et al.* (2006) stated that there are less career path and management positions available for female workers. Discrimination related to promotion especially for management jobs would therefore give negative impact to female workers (Tacneaux, 2012) as they cannot get promoted easily and fairly.

Wages and benefits are also important for employees' career development which will lead to the development of self-respect and self-esteem in the employees (Abd. Rahim, 2006). Abd Rahim also stated that incentive payment such as overtime payment and payment for specific tasks must be taken into consideration in order to engage and retain good employees from leaving. However, financials and rewards are not given equally; every organisation has a different reward system which mostly provides wages based on gender and race (Acker, 2009). A study done by Ismail and Ibrahim(2008) at an oil company in Malaysia showed that female workers feel that they are not given the same wage as male workers. In addition, female workers received lower compensation and unequal wages for the same work as male workers (Childs, 2012). The difference in wages and compensation, according to Childs, would cause a gap for total pension between male and female workers. Besides that, Tacneaux(2012) also agrees that gender discrimination do occur in reward preference in which male and female workers of the same level received different wages and rewards. Wages and benefits for managers are usually determined through individual negotiations and this process can be influenced by the perception that female workers are less competent than male workers (Acker, 2009). Furthermore, if companies still consider female workers as incapable of becoming leader or manager, this will affect the distribution of wages (Mihail, 2006). The lack of opportunities in promotion, mentoring, training, and rewards for female employees make them cannot go further in their job and just stuck with their positions as they need to compete with male colleague. So, when female employees get less opportunities in career development, it can lead to stress.

Stress and Discrimination in Career Development:

Discrimination in career development can made someone feel stress as Rout (2000) stated that one of the sources for stress is career development. Stress is defined as a reaction to a disturbing situation and environment and require an adjustment either to the system of body or mind (Ma'arof & Haslinda, 2006). Moreover, there are many causes of stress which are work demands, lack of sources, and career development (Rout, 2000); discrimination (Mustillo & Jackson, 2001); and work routine and less of promotion (Wickramasinghe, 2010). As stated, discrimination and career development can lead to stress especially when the female employees thought that discrimination happened to them.

In addition, there are many issues regarding discrimination that happened in many countries. According to Mustillo and Jackson (2001), female that thought discrimination is still a problem in American society would feel more stress. Broadbridge (2002) stated that issue in career development that related to discrimination are the cause of stress for manager in United Kingdom. Female employees would feel stress when they thought they are not perfect, has restrictions to advanced, served as a subordinate and being despised (Handwerker, 1999). So, stress would happened to female employees when discrimination happened in career development because of they are being despised and the efforts to advance are sealed.

Research by Johnson *et al.* (2001) showed that mentoring relationship is important for career development. In addition, lack of mentoring are one of the obstacles in career development (Briggs *et al.*, 2011). Robinson (2003) showed that discrimination and lack of mentors are the causes of stress for female physicians. Besides, Wickramasinghe (2010) stated that lack of opportunity in promotion has positive relationship with stress. This showed that when female employees cannot get opportunities to develop their career, it lead to more stress. Moreover, lack of promotion and competition for advancement would increase the level of stress (Gellis *et al.*, 2004). In a whole, discrimination in career development that happened to female employees would become a situation that can lead to stress. Female employees whom thought discrimination happened to them and get lack opportunities to develop their career would be more stress. Moreover, the level of stress for female employees who have a goal for top management would increase because of the competition with male counterparts and their efforts to develop the career been abducted. So, this study is to investigate the relationship between discrimination in career development and stress among female workers.

Methods:

The design for this study is through survey method. The participants consisted of female workers from supervisor level and above from telecommunication companies. The questionnaire was distributed to 110 female workers and 86 were returned back. The respondents are from the age of 20 to 51 and their mean age are 3.44. The total of Malay respondents is higher than other ethnic respondents with 91.9% and other ethnic respondents with 3.6%. Education level of the respondents is mostly bachelor degree (48.8%) and less from diploma (15.1%), and Master or Doctor of Philosophy (16.3%). The majority of the respondents held manager position (33.7%) and others held assistant manager position (16.3%), executive position (15.1%), and supervisor position (1.2%). The duration of their service are 1 to 5 years (19.8%), 6 to 10 years (32.6%), 11-15 years (10.5%), 16 to 20 years (5.8%), 21 to 25 years (5.8%) and more than 25 years are 4.7%. The mean of their income are 5.13 and 50 percent of them get gross monthly income RM5001 to RM6000.

In this study, the opportunities in mentoring, training, promotion, and rewards are measured for discrimination in career development. The mentoring questionnaire used in this study are taken and modified from Career Mentoring Scale (Carter, 2010) and Mentoring Functions Scale for the Protégé (Wilson, 2006). There are four items for respondents who do not have a mentor to answer and 11 items for the respondents who have a mentor. There are five items for training variable questions that are taken and modified from Job Training and Job Satisfaction Survey (Schmidt, 2007); Appraisal, Training and Promotion (Kisaakye, 2010), and Training Questionnaire (Dijk, 2003). The opportunity in promotion are taken and modified from Attitudes towards Promotion Policy (Morris *et al.*, 2004) and there are six items for promotion variable. The eight items for rewards questions are taken and modified from Job Training and Job Satisfaction Survey (Schmidt, 2007). Then, the level of stress were measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen *et al.*, 1983).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyse the data for this study. A simple descriptive analysis was used to determine the mean and standard deviation of opportunity in mentoring, training, promotion, and rewards as well as stress. Then, the correlation between the four variables of discrimination in career development were analyse using the Pearson correlation method. Table 1 contains the results of means, standards deviations, and correlations among the discrimination in career development variables and stress.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Gender Discrimination in Career Development.

Gender Discrimination	Means (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
1. Mentoring	2.10	1.15
2. Training	3.92	0.52
3. Promotion	1.80	0.65
4. Rewards	1.95	0.63

Table 2: Correlations between Gender Discrimination in Career Development and Stress.

Variables	Means	1	2	3	4
5. Stress	1.22	0.236*	0.228*	0.218*	0.252*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As showed in Table 1, the respondents get less opportunity for promotion, rewards, and mentoring with mean respectively 1.80, 1.95, and 2.10. Most of the respondents agree that they get opportunity for training with mean 3.92. This indicate that they only receives opportunity in training on the assumption that the company is fulfilling their obligation and that it is compulsory that their staff attends the training program. Although they obtained the opportunity to attend for training, they still do not received equal opportunity for mentoring, promotion, and rewards. So, most of the respondents perceived that they are discriminated from getting the opportunity to develop in their career.

However, the level of their stress is low with mean of 1.22. The level of stress is low maybe because they do not have a goal to get to higher position. They do not want to have more responsibility and they are satisfy with current position. The study found that there are significant correlation between discrimination in career development variables and stress (Table 2). There are significantly positive correlation between opportunity for mentoring and stress ($r=0.236$, $p<0.05$), opportunity in training and stress ($r=0.228$, $p<0.05$), opportunity in promotion and stress ($r=0.218$, $p<0.005$), and opportunity in rewards and stress ($r=0.252$, $p<0.05$). This shows that when they do not get the opportunity in career development, they will likely feel more stress. Besides, the result also shows that the female workers are being discriminate from developing in their career and it lead to stress.

Conclusion:

Career development is essential for every worker regardless of their gender. However, discrimination always occurs amongst female employees because people assume that they cannot do the job as well as male workers, especially in management. Mihail(2006) stated that in some workplace, male employees are seen as better managers compared to female. As a result, female employees cannot develop their career as they cannot obtain higher position in the company and they also receive low wages compared to male counterparts, even when their skills and expertise are the same as male employees. As a result, female employees would feel stress as they cannot develop their career. Opportunities for female employees to develop in their career should be broaden as they also have the right to accept opportunities in mentoring, training, promotion, and reward. When they receive equal opportunity for career development, the level of stress also would decrease.

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