



**e-Journal of Media & Society**

## **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Feminism is a social movement of an organized group that acts consciously to promote or resist change through collective action. Feminism movement in Malaysia as in other developing countries and in the West has the same goal for universal women, whether equality in economics, education, politics, or social. This study was done in order to find the level of discrimination of women in Malaysia. This study involved 487 respondents and the respondents were gained from an online survey through Google Survey Form. The form has been distributed on social medias and from that platform we gained all that respondents and used that as data collection. At the end, we now know that there are not much discrimination against women in Malaysia with low mean of 1.49*

*Keynote: Feminism, movement, equality*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism movement in Malaysia as in other developing countries and in the West has the same goal for universal women, whether equality in economics, education, politics, or social.

Feminism is a social movement of an organized group that acts consciously to promote or resist change through collective action (West and Turner, 2018). Social movements are more likely to develop in industrialized societies than in preindustrial societies, where acceptance of traditional beliefs and practices makes such movements unlikely. Social movements are most likely to spring up when people come to see their personal troubles as public issues that cannot be solved without a collective response. Studying social movements as revolutions can illuminate how communities that share the same beliefs and goals form. Social movements are always happening.

Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. According to the book *Introducing Communication Theory* by West and Turner (2014) feminism can be defined as an ideology and a movement focusing on women's social position and desiring to end oppression based on gender and sex. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. The concept of feminism has been evolving since the 1800s. The Western world saw one of the first events in the history of feminism in Christine Pankhurst's fight for the right to practise law. Feminism encompasses many things. A woman probably does not need to have a successful career to embrace feminism. Based on the article written by (The RINJ Foundation Women, 2018), feminism is the pursuit of gender equality for all humans. Feminism is all about improving ourselves to become rich in gender parity, tolerance, kindness, caring, and sharing.

In Malaysia, there is also discrimination among women but very few. Government has given a high commitment in their effort in achieving gender equality by providing education party, equal employment opportunity and implementing anti-discriminatory tools and regulations.

Women are also more vulnerable to economic shocks considering a majority of women are employed in low and semi-skilled positions. The potential of women should be recognised as much as the society at large has always been fast to dismiss women's achievements. For instance, there shall be no discrimination against women especially in the workplace.

## **1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Women are the other half of the human population. Women and men are like two wings of humanity. Inequality will hamper the rise of humankind to lofty heights of progress. From the aspect of inequality, balancing work and caring responsibilities and gender stereotyping are more pressing issues for Malaysians compared to the global audience. The discrimination can be seen clearly in the private sector where it is still a male-dominated area (Click Hole, 2019). Women are also discriminated in the workforce, despite having the qualifications. Besides that, most women are side-lined as promotional positions are given to men. Jobs should be given to males or females based on their merit and qualifications, and not gender and ethnicity.

In this research report, researches will have a further look on issues facing women especially in Malaysia. The top issues facing women are inequality, sexual harassment and physical violence.

## **1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What is the level of discrimination that women in Malaysia have faced?

## **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To study the level of discrimination that should be eliminated in Malaysia.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1) History of Feminism Movement in Malaysia**

The active feminism movement in Malaysia is the establishment Sister in Islam (SIS) which was established in 1988. This organization is largely geared towards family issues and the freedom of woman's rights in Malaysia. The feminist movement in Malaysia has the same goal for universal women, whether equality in economics, education, politics, or social. The development of women issues and demands of equal rights began to rise. The pre-

independence era saw the involvement of women and men together in an effort to expel the British invaders first only after Malaysia's independence in 1957. (Ratna Osman,2014)

The feminist movement in Malaysia in the early stages of its development led to family issues and was less concerned with the violent combating of violence and sexual harassment faced by Malaysian women. In addition, the issues raised by women are related to education, especially for illiterate girls. But now the feminism movement in Malaysia begins to demand some other rights such as claims of equal rights in property inheritance between men and women, claims for the recall of polygamous rights and claims of equality in divorce. Many claims have been made to contribute to the shuffle of the Shariah Family Law. (Ratna Osman, 2014)

#### **Among the feminist movements in Malaysia are:**

- **Zaiton Kasim**

She is a graduate of University of Denver and Universiti Teknologi MARA. He works as a Consultant at IZEC Consulting, Malaysia. In addition, he also worked part-time as an English teacher and editor at IZEC Consulting. ZaintonKassim adheres to the principle of fairness and equality for all regardless of gender, race, religion and freedom of rights respectively.

- **Rohana Ariffin**

Company Manager at ACT Training & Team Management Systems in 2001-2002. He is also the President of the People's Committee for the People's Party of Malaysia (PRM) in 2011 to date.

- **Cecelia Ng**

He is among the feminist movement figures in Malaysia who have been active in writing. Among the books written by him is Feminism and The Women's Movement in Malaysia: An Unsung Revolution.

Professor Dr Kamil bin Abdul Majid also said "Actually the feminism movement only exists in the west because the women there are oppressed but this movement is brought into Malaysia. When women got married in the West, they will use the name of a husband and

no longer use the father's name. In addition, the rights imposed on women are unequal and the working women will earn less than men and not be promoted. From this environment is feminism born”.

## **2.2) Women’s freeing and equality**

To ponder equality, is to enlighten the senses to explore the possibilities of what is known, what needs to be done, and who or what is involved in seeking equality – it challenges the word as well as the people framed within it. Catharine MacKinnon states that “Feminism is the discovery that women do not live in this world, that the person occupying this realm is a man, so much more a man if he is white and wealthy” (367). With this in mind, feminist movements emphasize the importance of every woman’s position in social and political spaces. (Catherine MacKinnon, 1987)

Various feminist movements can be used to achieve equality. However, each perspective provides a different contribution in obtaining such equality. Feminist theories of the liberal, Marxist, radical, and post-colonial perspectives all cover certain aspects of inequality while limiting in the acknowledgement of another. The integration of these perspectives will allow for a truly beneficial equality for women. (Catharine MacKinnon, 1987)

## **2.3) Future Challenges for Women in Malaysia**

Women have been an important part of society in Malaysia. But as time flies, the development and achievement in this country also come with a few challenges. Women also have to face this new challenge as a way to adapt with fast-paced environment.

Some of the challenges are limited skills and knowledge of working women. This issue must be directed to empower them to take up new challenges and competition. Non - formal education and training for women should be adaptable to help them in various jobs they need to embrace. Policy makers, programme planners and implementer should have gender sensitivity that will enable them to plan non-formal education and training programme that are more inviting for working women.

Another challenge for women in the future is the absence of non-formal education programme for urban women. As the country moving forwards toward development, more women are living in big cities. Women from outside the urban areas have become part of the city's population as they move in to search for better jobs opportunity and a better living. It is important to address their needs to enable them to cope with the challenges of living in urban areas.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In order to examine the level of discrimination against women in Malaysia, this study relied on a web-based survey to collect data. This method of data collection is ideal for ensuring that the opinions of a wide range of respondents are considered. By targeting women in Malaysia, the data reflected the opinions of those who have had a direct encounter or had experienced the discrimination themselves. There are 488 respondents were involved in our surveys regarding discrimination against women in Malaysia. The information in this study obtained in the following way. For collecting data, this method will be focusing on the questionnaire that will be distribute to the respondents (Ridzuan, Ridzuan and Ridzuan, 2018). The questionnaire is divided into three parts which are part A, part B and part C. Part A will be focusing on the background or known as respondents' demographics. In section B, the researcher will focus on the questions on the need to implement feminism in Malaysia. Lastly, Part C, an important part where researches know the level of discrimination against women in Malaysia. There are 20 items to be answered by the respondents to find out the level of discrimination against women in Malaysia. Researchers also collect information from several articles on the websites. Some of the articles are *Why Feminism Still Matters to Young People* written by Kristin Aune on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2018. The author wrote this article for theconversation.com. Another article the researches refer to collect information is *The F-Word: Are You a Feminist?* (S.Indramalar,2015). Besides that, researches refer to a book titled *Introducing Communication Theory* by Richard West and Lynn H. Turner. The book was published in 2014 and it is the fifth of its edition. Researches referred to Chapter 30 of the book which is Feminist Standpoint Theory (Abdul Rauf Ridzuan et al., 2015).

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1: Distribution of female respondents by Profile (n=488)**

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18 and below	47	9.7
19-25	427	87.7
26-33	12	2.5
34 and above	1	0.2
<b>Ethnic</b>		
Malay	413	84.8
Indian	20	4.1
Chinese	46	9.4
Others	8	1.6
<b>Occupation</b>		
Working at private sector	43	8.8
Working at government sector	22	4.5
Student	411	84.4
Unemployed	11	2.3
<b>Current Level of Education</b>		
Pre-Diploma/	45	9.2
Matriculation/	71	14.6
Foundation	367	75.4
Diploma	4	0.8
Degree		
Master/PhD		
<b>State</b>		
Northern Region : Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Perak	117	24
East Coast Region : Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang	33	6.8
Central Region : Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya	164	33.7
Southern Region : Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor	158	32.4
East Malaysia : Sabah, Sarawak	15	3.1

Table 1 above shows the profile of female respondents in Malaysia. Based from the findings, most of the respondents who answered the questionnaires are female aged between 19 – 25 (87.7%), Malay ethnic (84.8%), Student (84.4%), and currently degree students (75.4%). Most of the respondents also are from Central Region : Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya (33.7%).

### b) The Need to Implement Feminism in Malaysia

The data from table 2 below shows five items that studying the need to implement feminism in Malaysia. Based on the data, majority of female respondent admitted that all people are entitled to the same civil rights, liberties and opportunities regardless of gender (95.1%) and they think feminism generally is a good move for women (92.4%). In the meantime, they also agree that the feminist's movement today is focused on changes you want (84.8%). In addition, they believed that men and women should be social, political and economic equals (93.8%) and mostly half of them have ever done anything to help/support feminism (56.1%)

**Table 2: Society's Opinion Regarding Feminism**

Attitude	Yes	Percentage (%)
Do you agree that all people are entitled to the same civil rights, liberties and opportunities regardless of gender?	463	95.1
Do you think feminism generally is a good move for women?	450	92.4
Do you think the feminist's movement today is focused on changes you want?	413	84.8
Do you believe that men and women should be social, political and economic equals?	457	93.8
Have you ever done anything to help/support feminism?	273	56.1

### c) The Level of Discrimination of Women in Malaysia

In Malaysia, feminism's movement is seen as achieving unity among members of a multi-ethnic society that will further divided along class and religious lines. Based on table 3, respondents think that as women, being catcalled by a stranger is not considered as harassment. (M=2.35) and followed by the unfair of men and women receive different lengths of paid paternity/ maternity leave (up to a year for women and 2-3 weeks for men). (M=2.00). The lowest mean indicates that employers should employ a non-hijab woman than a woman with hijab. (M=0.21).

**Table 3: The Level of Discrimination of Women in Malaysia**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>
It is okay for women to receive lesser pay for performing similar work under similar conditions as men.	1.80
It is unfair that men and women receive different lengths of paid paternity/ maternity leave (up to a year for women and 2-3 weeks for men).	2.00
Society should blame the women who becomes the rape victim because of her clothes that can be considered as too revealing.	1.00
Employers should employ a non-hijab woman than a woman with hijab.	0.21
As women, being catcalled by a stranger is not considered as harassment.	<b>2.35</b>
Rape in marriage does not exist because basically husband owns the wife.	1.51
A marriage between an underage girl and an older man is acceptable.	1.53
A woman's opinion is invalid if she is not wearing hijab.	1.47
A beautiful woman is a woman that fulfill the society's beauty standard such as having fair skin, ideal weight, slim body  and dress according to the standard of the society.	1.45
Women cannot compete with men for an important role in the work place.	1.58
<b>Overall</b>	<b>1.49</b>

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the data, majority of female respondent admitted that all people are entitled to the same civil rights, liberties and opportunities regardless of gender (95.1%) and they think feminism generally is a good move for women (92.4%). In the meantime, they also agree that the feminist's movement today is focused on changes you want (84.8%). In addition, they believed that men and women should be social, political and economic equals (93.8%) and mostly half of them have ever done anything to help/support feminism (56.1%). Whilst, based on table 3, respondents think that as women, being catcalled by a stranger is not considered as harassment. (M=2.35) and followed by the unfair of men and women receive different lengths of paid paternity/ maternity leave (up to a year for women and 2-3 weeks for men). (M=2.00). The lowest mean indicates that employers should employ a non-hijab woman than a woman with hijab. (M=0.21).

In conclusion, this feminism movement was originally a movement that wanted to free women from oppression and discrimination. However, when the dignity of women was dictated by the struggle for feminism, they start demanding the right of freedom. In Malaysia, the feminist movement was most prominent through the establishment of Sister In Islam (SIS). There are also other organizations that fight for the virtues of women such as PERTIWI, WAO and AWAM but they did not support the feminist movement. The feminist movement in Malaysia demands the dissolution of a law that gives full freedom to women without being bound to anything including the Sharia law.

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