

**EMPLOYMENT, OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY AND EARNINGS  
OF WOMEN IN THE KUCHING URBAN LABOUR MARKET**



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## **Abstract**

In Malaysia, research pertaining to the employment status and earnings of women has been scanty and often not readily available to the public and women themselves. This study was therefore conceptualized to fill the gap, by looking at the urban women workers in the manufacturing sector in Kuching. Three aspects of women status i.e. employment structure, pattern of occupational mobility and earnings of women vis-à-vis earnings of men were examined through a questionnaire survey.

The results indicate that female workers were highly concentrated in the electrical and electronic industry, wood based industry and food and beverages industry. These workers were generally younger and more educated than their male counterparts. However, they were confined primarily to the unskilled jobs, even if they had the same educational attainments as men.

In terms of occupational mobility, most of the women moved downward the occupational ladder as they changed jobs. The analysis of vertical mobility also indicates that women had limited experience to move upward occupational mobility than men.

As a result of crowding into semi-skilled and unskilled production work in the manufacturing sector, women workers with the same educational attainments as men received significantly lower earnings than their male counterparts even within the same occupational category with the exception of clerical workers. Nevertheless, women's earnings increased with the level of education.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The United Nations declared 1975 as 'The International Women's year'. The period 1976-1985 was also declared as the 'Decade for Women'. These declarations signify the first official, global determination to eliminate entrenched discrimination against women and restore their rights to an equal footing with men. The main objective of this declaration was to instil in all countries the need to value the role and upgrade the status of women in society. Since then, there has been a spate of development projects aimed at women by the development agencies to 'integrate women into development'. This has resulted in the setting up of women bureaux, women's departments within the ministries of labour, social welfare or social security in many countries.

In response to the inspiration of the international community, the Malaysian government has taken various efforts to integrate women into the development process of the country. For instance, the National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women In Development (NACIWID) was formed in 1976. NACIWID functions as the main advisory and consultative body for the government, and as liaison between the government and the non-government organisations on women-related matters in both the planning and implementation of development. In 1983, the Women's Affairs Division (HAWA, *Hal Ehwat Wanita*) was established. Since 1987 it has served as the NACIWID

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

Over the last three decades, much interest has developed concerning the analysis of the male-female wage differentials. The gender pay gap has traditionally been a central focus for economists concerned with the economics of gender.

Two distinct approaches to the analysis of the gender wage differentials have evolved in the economics literature. The first approach, based upon human capital theory, lays its emphasis upon the lifetime voluntary choices of participants in the workforce as determinants of occupational and remunerative differences. The second approach, which may be classified as theories of labour market discrimination, explains salary differentials in terms of unequal treatment meted out to individuals who have equivalent qualifications, occupations and differing personal characteristics.

Although the approaches used to study wage differential have been varied, the intent of each study has been similar, i.e., to ascertain what proportion of the observed wage gap can be attributed to sets of economic factors.

Since various factors have been found to affect earnings, it seems appropriate to review the literature pertinent to the determinants of earnings differentials.