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ATTRITION ISSUES AMONG TECHNICAL FEMALE GRADUATES IN MALAYSIAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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Abstract:

Women in the construction industry struggle mostly with sexist attitudes, behaviours and perceptions in the workplace. The main concern is the inflexible working practices which often lead to problems regarding their work-life balance. Previous research indicated that women continue to take responsibility for household tasks and child-upbringing despite spending many hours working outside the house. Their job satisfaction decreases while their stress increases when there is a conflict between work and family roles. This will later turn the female workers to leave and quit the jobs. This research represents the finding of the attrition issues among technical female graduates in construction industry. The objective of the research is to provide a comprehensive review on the technical female graduates' leaving the construction industry and to analyse the factors contribute to attrition issues towards construction industry development. This research adopted quantitative approach of research methodology. Fifty (50) sets of questionnaires were distributed among female graduates who have technical backgrounds in either construction management, architecture, quantity surveying and civil engineering. Research finding shows that the main factors contribute to attrition issues are working environment, work family-lifestyle balance, high levels of stress, and better opportunity for promotion and career development.

Keywords: Attrition; Technical Graduate; Construction

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The construction industry has long been seen as having gender discrimination across cultures and nationalities, women remain under-represented (Galea et al., 2015; French and Strachan, 2015; Sang and Powell, 2012) and "gender stubbornly remains a marker of division" (Pickerill, 2014). The construction industry presents a major challenge for equal opportunities for women. According to the Construction Industry Training Board (2003), women only accounted for 9% of the construction work force. This means construction continues to be a male dominated industry. Women are not taken seriously as professionals in the construction industry. But, there are still number of women who work in the construction industry that choose technical career as their professional career and this research focused on four main professions in the construction industry namely, quantity surveying, construction management, architecture and civil engineering. It is found that women are confronted by a significant number of barriers, beginning with difficulties in joining the field of construction and as far as to capturing the most senior position in the organisation's hierarchy. Women in the construction industry struggle mostly with sexist attitudes, behaviours and perceptions in the workplace. Equal concern is the inflexible working practices which often lead to problems regarding their work-life balance (Worrall et al., 2010).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Goswami and Jha (2012) opined attrition as gradual reduction in membership or personnel through resignation, retirement or death. Apart from the unavoidable ones like resignation, retirement, disability or death, the causes are found to be varied and many. The employee gradually reduces his/her ties with the company than cribs about the underlying factors causing attrition. It is symptomatic of a much deeper malaise that cuts deeper into the innards of organizations. Many reasons describe why employees

withdraw from an organization especially in an economy where skills are relatively scarce and recruitment is costly, or where it takes several months to fill vacant positions. Employee attrition can be attributed to both push and pull factors (Ho et al.,2010). Push factors involve employee intentions to switch jobs as a result of situational elements and are usually related to job dissatisfaction. Pull factors, on the other hand, act as driving forces that attract an individual toward alternative work placements.

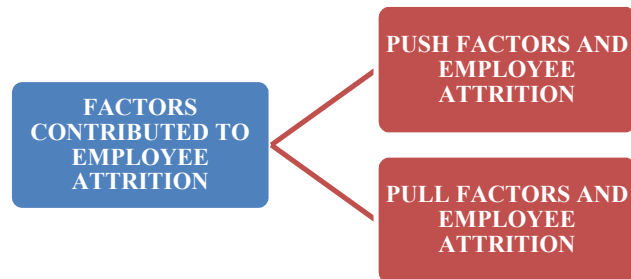


Figure 1 : Factors contributed to employee attrition

2.1 *Push Factors and Employee Attrition*

Push factors create conditions that influence an employee to withdraw from the work situation. Internal to the job, push factors evolve as a result of unhappiness, or employee mis-match with job requirements, interpersonal relationships or organizational values (Capelli and Hamori, 2006). In earlier studies, push factors had a negative effect on employee’s job satisfaction and eventually led to a decision to leave the work environment (Atchley, 1996). Push factors most commonly include perceived interference with work family-lifestyle balance, poor relations with co-workers, work stressors, unsatisfactory supervisory relationships and perceived inequity in remuneration or work assignments (Anderson, 2005).

2.2 *Pull Factors and Employee Attrition*

In contrast to push factors, pull factors are external conditions that attract employees away from their work, usually to another job, career or employer (Ho et al.,2010). Pull factors offer intrinsic or extrinsic rewards that become available if employees quit their current jobs. Pull factors most commonly include offers of better compensation, more interesting work, better opportunity for promotion, and/or a desire to return to academic studies.

2.3 *Impact of Attrition*

The attrition of employees has a lasting impact on the firm’s bottom line. Attrition is not always bad if it happens in a controlled manner. Some attrition is always desirable and necessary for organizational growth and development. The only concern is how organisations differentiate “good attrition” from “bad attrition” (Goswami and Jha, 2012). The term “healthy attrition” or “good attrition” signifies the importance of less productive employees voluntarily leaving the organisation (Goswami and Jha, 2012). This means if the ones who have left fall in the category of low performers, the attrition is considered as being healthy. But, if the ones who have left fall in the category of high performers then attrition is considered as bad attrition. Table 1 signifies the impact of attrition.

Table 1 : Impact of Attrition

Positive Impact	Advantages of new knowledge, Introduction of new ideas, Lesser negative impact of groupism, Advantage of new technology, Reduction in surplus staff, Chances of bringing in creativity & innovation, Creation of a healthy and competitive environment in the organization
Negative Impact	Increased work load, Low Morale, Productivity, Management Frustration, Poor Performance, Costs

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research adopted quantitative approach of research methodology. A total number of fifty (50) sets of questionnaires were distributed to the targeted respondents staff. Thus, technical ranging from Architects, Engineers, quantity surveyors and construction management female graduates can air their views regarding the factors that contribute to attrition issues and the impacts of attrition issues towards construction industry development. This was due to the fact that these respondents were believed to have the relevant knowledge on the study topic. The questionnaire was divided into four sections with 31 questions. It includes Likert scale measurement questions, close-ended questions and 1 open-ended question. Before answering, respondents were informed about the detail of survey purpose and answer method. The chosen places were at the construction firm in Klang Valley. Self-administered questionnaire has been chosen where the questionnaires were sent directly to the respondents and the researcher waited for their responses. From 50 sets of questionnaires distributed, only 33 sets were successfully collected back by the researcher. Once the data is collected, it is then transferred to a data analyzing tool, IBM SPSS Statistics 21.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Respondent's Profile: Age

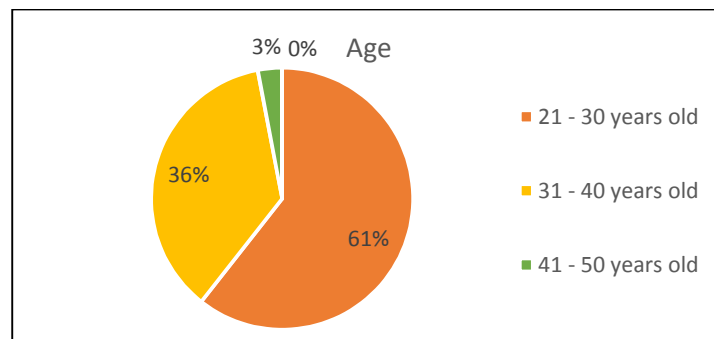


Figure 2 : Respondent Profile: Age

The pie chart shows the range of age for technical female graduates in Malaysian construction industry who participate in this study. It is clear that the most popular age range lies in the age group of 21 – 30 years old that is about 61%. It is followed by the age group of 31-40 years old age group which is about 36% while the lowest number of respondents come from the 41-45 years old age group with only 3% of the total respondents. There is no participation of respondent from 50 years old and above age group.

4.2 Respondent's Profile: Work type

The slices of the pie chart compare the four-main work type of technical female graduates in Malaysian construction industry. The majority respondents are of quantity surveyors which have the largest percentage of 40%. Next, the second largest percentage goes to engineers with 33%. Generally, 15% of the respondents are architects while the lowest number of respondents are construction managers with only 12%.

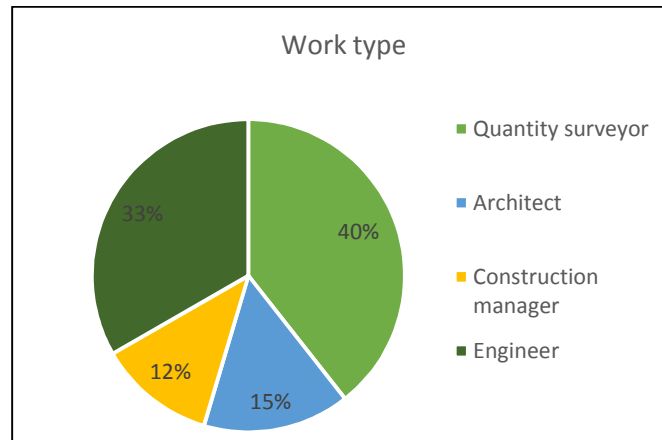


Figure 3 : Respondent Profile: Work Type

4.3 Factors Contribute to Attrition Issues: Push factor

Table 2: Attrition Issues: Push Factors

No	Question	Mean respondent	Rate of agreement	Rank
1.	Work family-lifestyle balance	4.09	Agree	2
2.	Working Environment	4.12	Agree	1
3.	High Level of Stress	3.91	Agree	3
4.	Unsatisfactory relationship with supervisors and co-workers	3.70	Agree	5
5.	Employee's Skills and the Job	3.58	Agree	6
6.	Inadequate Training and Ineffective Management	3.79	Agree	4
7.	Image of the Industry	3.45	Neutral	7

1. Work family-lifestyle balance

Out of 33 numbers of respondents, 6 are neutral, 18 agreed and 9 of them strongly agreed that this is a push factor. The mean respondent for work family-lifestyle balance is 4.09 which is classified as agree.

2. Working environment

Out of 33 respondents, 2 of them disagreed, 4 of them are neutral, 15 people agreed and the other 12 respondents strongly agreed that working environment as the push factor. The mean respondent for working environment is 4.12 which is classified as agree.

3. High level of stress

Out of 33 number of respondents, 2 of them disagreed, 10 are neutral, 10 people agreed and 11 respondents strongly agreed. The mean respondent for high level of stress is 3.91 which is classified as agree.

4. Unsatisfactory relationship with supervisors and co-workers

Out of 33 number of respondents, 4 of them disagreed, 9 are neutral, 13 people agreed and 7 respondents strongly agreed. The mean respondent for unsatisfactory relationship with supervisors and co-workers is 3.70 which is classified as agree.

5. Employee's skills and the job

Out of 33 number of respondents, only 1 disagreed, 16 respondents are neutral, 12 of them agreed and the other 4 strongly agreed that this one of the push factors. The mean respondent for employee's skills and the job is 3.58 which is classified as agree.

6. Inadequate training and ineffective management

Out of 33 number of respondents, 2 of them disagreed, 12 people are neutral, 10 respondents agreed and the remaining 9 strongly agreed with this push factor. The mean respondent for inadequate training and ineffective management is 3.79 which is classified as agree.

7. Image of the Industry

Out of 33 number of respondents, only 1 person strongly disagreed, 5 of them disagreed, 10 respondents are neutral, 12 of them agreed and the other 5 respondents strongly agreed that this is one of the push factors. The mean respondent for employee's skills and the job is 3.45 which is classified as neutral.

4.4 Factors Contribute to Attrition Issues: Pull factor

Table 3: Attrition Issues: Pull Factors

No	Question	Mean respondent	Rate of agreement	Rank
1.	Compensation package	4.27	Agree	2
2.	Interesting work	4.12	Agree	3
3.	Better opportunity for promotion and career development	4.33	Agree	1
4.	Fringe Benefits	3.97	Agree	4
5.	Return to academic studies	3.30	Neutral	5

1. Compensation package

Out of 33 number of respondents, 6 of them are neutral, 12 people agreed and 15 respondents strongly agreed that this is a pull factor. The mean respondent for compensation package is 4.27 which is classified as agree.

2. Interesting work

Out of 33 number of respondents, 6 respondents are neutral, 17 other respondents agreed and the other 10 people strongly agreed that interesting job is one of the pull factors. The mean respondent for interesting work is 4.12 which is classified as agree.

3. Better opportunity for promotion and career development

Out of 33 number of respondents, 2 of them disagreed, 12 people are neutral, 10 more agreed and 9 of them strongly agreed that this is another attractive reason. The mean respondent for inadequate training and ineffective management is 3.79 which is classified as agree.

4. Fringe benefits

Out of 33 number of respondents, 5 of them are neutral, 12 people agreed and the other 16 respondents have chosen strongly agreed with this pull factor. The mean respondent for fringe benefits is 4.33 which is classified as agree.

5. Return to academic studies

Out of 33 number of respondents, 1 person strongly disagreed, 7 of them disagreed, 12 respondents are neutral, 7 of them agreed and the other 6 respondents strongly agreed with this reason. The mean respondent for return to academic studies is 3.30 which is classified as neutral.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Employee attrition has become a big problem among the organisations to retain the number of employees in the organisation despite the changes in the external environment. From the survey, there are various factors contribute to the attrition issues among female technical graduates. The impact of the high attrition rate causes a high employee turnover in an organisation, reducing quantity and quality of an organization's manpower. The attrition of employees has a lasting impact on the firm's bottom line. Attrition is not always bad if it happens in a controlled manner. Some attrition is always desirable and necessary for organizational growth and development. Working environment has a positive relationship with job satisfaction and productivity. Since construction environment is dynamic and challenging and as the competition has increased, different organisations have to operate up to their maximum potential besides ensuring that their employees are working in a friendly and conducive environment.

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