

Urbanization and Women: A Case of Middle Class Malays In Shah Alam

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Abstract

This article is based on a sample survey of middle class Malay households in Shah Alam, Selangor. The main objective of the survey was to analyze the impact of urbanization on women's roles and child care patterns. Data shows that industrialization has altered women's roles where with more access to education, increasing numbers of women are joining the formal work force. The article concludes that social support systems are greatly needed for working women to contribute effectively to not only to the well-being of their families but also to the communities and nation at large.

Introduction

This article is written based on a sample survey done among middle class Malay households in Shah Alam. The study area covers sections 2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,17,18,19, 20 and 24. The sample of the study consists of 200 households living in the middle-class neighborhoods in Central Shah Alam. The data were gathered from the women who made up the sample. Information about the husbands or head of households was also collected. Other than the quantitative data, information is also gathered qualitatively through focus group discussion sessions.

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Urbanization

Throughout the history of human population, urbanization is an important phenomenon that has happened in the developed world and would continue to happen throughout the rest of the world. Davis (1965) states that urbanized societies represent a new and fundamental step in man's social evolution. In 1950, only 16.2 percent of the world's population lived in cities; by 1970 it was increased to 23.7 percent (Davis, 1973). In 1999, the urban population constitutes 46.5 percent of the world's population (UNDP, 2001).

There are various definitions and descriptions of urbanization stated by different scholars. Hauser (1965, pp.8-9) not only gives the demographic conception of urbanization, i.e. *"the proportion of the population resident in urban places"*, but also goes further to describe urbanization as *"a social process which has brought about great transformations in man's way of life"*. Davis (1965) views urbanization in economic terms. He states that, *"urbanization is a finite process, a cycle through which nations go in their transition from agrarian to industrial society"*. Based on the various descriptions of urbanization, it can be concluded that urbanization brought about changes in three different forms i.e. physical, economic and social.

The percentage of urban population in Malaysia has increased from 37.7 percent in 1975 to 53 percent in 1994 and 56.7 percent in 1999 (UNDP, 1997 and 2001). In the effort to achieve Vision 2020 and attaining a developed nation status, urbanization would certainly be an important agenda. Taking the rate of urbanization as the major indicator for a developed society, we have to raise the percentage of urban population from 56.7 percent in 1999 to about 78.7 percent (i.e. the average percentage of urban population in the industrialized countries).

In comparing the three major ethnic groups, the Chinese and Indians are more urbanized compared to the Malays. Nevertheless, the urban Malay population is also increasing. Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of population by ethnicity and stratum.

Table 1 : Percentage Distribution of Population by Ethnicity and Stratum, Malaysia, 1970,1980,1991 and 2000

Year	Malays		Chinese		Indians	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
1970	14.1	85.9	47.6	52.4	34.6	65.4
1980	25.4	74.6	56.0	44.0	41.4	58.6
1991	43.7	56.7	75.8	24.2	63.8	36.2
2000*	54.2	45.8	85.9	14.1	79.7	20.3

Source: Tey and Liaw (1995) pg 109

* Department of Statistics (2001)

As for the Malays in the study area, they are considered as urban population by virtue of living in Shah Alam, the capital city of Selangor. However, from the survey, it is found that the respondents and their husbands have a more varied background. 53.4 percent came from the villages and were brought up in a rural setting and currently, 61.9 percent of their parents still live in the rural areas. Table 2 summarizes the information on this aspect. The average length of stay in Shah Alam is 11.9 years. 26.6 percent of the respondents had stayed in Shah Alam between 10 to 14 years. (Refer to Table 3 on the next page).

Table 2 : Urban-Rural Background

	Head of Household		Wife		Total		Parents	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Urban	95	47.7	91	45.5	186	46.6	138	38.1
Rural	104	52.3	109	54.5	213	53.4	224	61.9
Total	199	100.0	200	100.0	399	100.0	362	100.0

Table 3 : Length of Stay in Shah Alam

No. of Years	Number	Percent
Less than 5	28	14.9
5-9	41	21.8
10-14	50	26.6
15-19	40	21.3
20-24	21	11.2
25 and more	8	4.2
Total	188	100.0
Mean	11.9 years	
Median	11.0 years	

Table 4 below shows the place of origin of the respondents and their husbands (head of household). The majority of them were migrants from other states in Malaysia. Since Shah Alam is a planned new city, only 6.3 percent of the 398 respondents and husbands are Shah Alam residents. A further 25 percent came from other parts of Selangor. The rest of the respondents and their husbands are all migrants from other states in Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak (2 persons) and Singapore (3 persons). People from all the states in Peninsular Malaysia made up the Shah Alam middle class population. From a total of 169 respondents and their husbands who state their place of origin, the three highest percentages of migrants are from Perak (21%), Kelantan (20%) and Johor (18%).

Table 4 : Place of Origin of the Head of Household and Wife

Place of Origin	Head of Household		Wife (Respondents)		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Shah Alam	15	7.6	10	5.0	25	6.3
District of Petaling	5	2.5	6	3.0	11	2.8
Other districts in Selangor	49	24.8	38	19.0	87	21.8
Kuala Lumpur	2	1.0	2	1.0	4	1.0
Others states in Pen. Malaysia	85	42.9	84	42.0	169	42.5
Outside Selangor (place not stated)	41	20.7	58	29.0	99	24.8
Singapore	1	0.5	2	1.0	3	0.8
Total	198	100.0	200	100.0	398	100.0

The sample depicts precisely, the description of an urban area where its inhabitants came from different places, cultural backgrounds and walks of life. Wirth (1964, p.66) defines a city for sociological purposes as “a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals”.

Family, Career and Community

In terms of the women’s role, Moser (1993) had divided it into three types of work. First is the reproductive role “which comprises the childbearing / rearing responsibilities and domestic tasks undertaken by women, required to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force”. Second is the productive role which “comprise work done by both women and men for payment in cash or kind” and finally the community managing role which is defined as “the work undertaken at the community level, around the allocation, provisioning and managing of items of collective consumption”.

Industrialization and economic prosperity has changed the women’s role tremendously. In Malaysia, the literacy rate of the female population has increased from 77.5 percent in 1994 to 82.8 percent in 1999 (UNDP, 1997 and 2001). More and more girls are getting better education and more and more women are joining the formal employment sector. Labour force participation rate for women has increased from 35 percent in 1988 to 44.6 percent in 1999 (Department of Statistics, 2000).

From the sample, 64.5 percent of the women are working. Labour force participation rate of the Malay women in the middle class urban households are therefore, much higher than the national rate of 44.6 percent in 1999. Only 71 respondents (35.5 percent) are full time mothers and homemakers. Table 5 shows the occupation of the respondents and their husbands. More than 70 percent of the sample works as professionals, semi-

professionals, administrators and managers. The average monthly income of the respondents is RM 2,400, the average income of the head of household is RM 3,900 per month and the average household income is RM 5,500 per month.

Table 5 : Types of Occupation

Occupation	Head of the Household		Wife (Respondents)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Professional, technical and related workers	86	48.6	77	64.2
Administrative and Managerial Workers	62	35.0	19	15.8
Clerical and related workers	5	2.8	19	15.8
Sales workers	9	5.1	3	2.5
Service workers	7	4.0	0	0.0
Agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry workers, fishermen and hunters	0	0.0	0	0.0
Production and related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers	2	1.1	0	0.0
Others	6	3.4	2	1.7
Total	177	100.0	120	100.0

When asked their opinion about whether a women should work, respondents in the focus group discussion sessions have mixed reactions. There are some women who say they need to work in order to supplement the household income. Below are the quotations from the focus group discussions:

Saya bekerja untuk membantulah....Sebab anak-anak I kecil-kecil lagi....empat orang. Kalau tak bantu maknanya terlampau membebankan sangat dia. Laki-laki, pengalaman saya, bila dia rasa terbeban sangat, dia punya pressure lain macam, temperature naik atas..... kita kena saling membantu.

Saya kerja nak bantu suami.....lepas tu, saya penat training dua tahun setengah, penat !.....sebab tu kerja.....

Saya bekerja untuk membantu menambahkan pendapatan.

Saya bekerja memang untuk membantulah. Dulu saya kerja lapan-limasuami saya suruh berhenti sebab masalah anak....dalam tempoh empat bulan, saya hadapi masalah kewangan, terus terang saya cakap.....So, saya buat kerja sambil jaga anak.....saya kerja, walaupun pendapatan tak banyak, tapi membantu.

Some say they just have to work, there is no choice, not only for the income, but also for some other reasons, like the voices below:

Kalau macam I, memang kena.....sebab kalau duduk dekat town ni, kalau seorang saja yang bekerja, tak boleh.....Tak cukup!

If you are talking about income, yes! You memang kena..... You have to!

What I can say is terpaksa.....everything means money.

Banyak kerja rumah ni, you use energy...letih !..... and then takes up all of your time, letih ! Dan last sekali you end up nak tidur dulu lah.... Kita makin lama makin tua, makin letih. So, I think in that sense, you probably have to work to get out of that situation. I have to get out of that situation to meet people, in order to talk to people. That's why besides the money, the social aspect.....why I choose to work..... and I think I need to work.

Patut (bekerja).....sebab tenaga dia, kemahiran dia ada, kena guna pakailah kemahiran kita kan?

Besides the money, is also the thinking. When you work, your mind works.

However, there are respondents who would prefer to stay home if they have the choice. Below are some voices from them:

Kalau saya diberi pilihan, saya tak nak kerja. Kalau boleh saya nak jaga anak-anak saya.....Dan apa pengetahuan yang saya ada, saya nak cuba ajar dia.....Saya lebih suka, saya buat sendiri. Dan terus terang cakap, kalau ada chance, saya nak berhenti kerja. That's my opinion.....Itu yang kadang rasa terpaksa.

So, for me, kalau diberi kesempatan, memang I duduk rumah, take care of my family.

Reproductive Role Versus Productive Role

Even though majority of the women are performing productive work, just like the men, they are still responsible for the reproductive work at home. From this study, the total fertility rate (TFR) of the middle class Malay women in the sample is (3.5), However, looking at TFR for women over 40 years old, the rate of 4.2 is higher than the national rate for Malay women in 1996 which is 3.9. TFR for the Chinese and Indian are 2.5 and 2.7 respectively and the TFR for Peninsular Malaysia is 3.3 in 1996 (NPFDB, 1999). For the developed countries, TFR is 1.7 in 2000 (UNDP, 2001). Data on the number of children for all the respondents is shown in Table 6. Almost half of the households have three or four children.

Table 6 : Number of Children

Number of Children	Number	Percent
0	7	3.6
1	23	11.7
2	21	10.7
3	42	21.3
4	52	26.4
5	28	14.2
6	18	9.1
7 and more	6	3.0
Total	197	100.0
Mean	3.5 children	
Median	4.0 children	

When asked about the ideal number of children among the couples, on the average they state that four is ideal. Table 7 depicts the data on ideal number of children. The ideal number of children from this study does not vary much from earlier studies. A study done by Fatimah (1994) on Middle Class Malay in Kuala Lumpur showed that 70 percent of the respondents would like to have three and more children. Abdul Rahman (1999) who studied Middle Class Malay in Kota Bahru, Kuala Terengganu and Klang Valley, found that the overall mean for the total preferred number of children among his respondents was 4.9. It is expected that the fertility trends among the Malay women would not change much in the future, especially with the greater influence of Islamic values on present day lifestyle. Malay women would continue to have more children. Leete (1996, pp. 119-120) noted that "...despite an increasingly educated female population, increased rates of urbanization, modern sector employment and greatly increased infant and child survival, there has not been widespread adoption of a small family norm among the Malays".

Table 7 : Ideal Number of Children

Ideal Number of Children	Husband		Wife	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2	8	4.8	13	7.5
3	12	7.3	16	9.2
4	76	46.1	82	47.1
5	43	26.1	42	24.1
6	21	12.7	17	9.8
7 and more	5	3.0	4	2.3
Total	165	100.0	174	100.0
Mean	4.5 children		4.3 children	
Median	4 children		4 children	

All the advances that women have made and their contribution to economic growth and nation building have not relieved them from their traditional or reproductive role. Women still shoulder the burden of housework and childcare even if they are in full-time employment. A study done by Fatimah (1994) on middle class Malay households states that “.....It is still the working wives / women in such families who bear the main burden of conducting and managing the household”. Data from the sample also reflects the same situation. However, the data shows greater involvement from the men with regard to playing with children, teaching them and in sending / fetching them to and from school. (Refer to Table 8)

Table 8 : Frequency of Husband Involvement in Household Chores

	Often	Seldom	Never
Cooking	15.2	52.2	32.6
Washing	26.0	47.5	26.5
Ironing	19.5	50.3	30.2
Baby care	30.4	47.4	22.2
Teaching children	59.2	31.6	9.2
Sending and fetching children from school	67.3	22.6	10.1
Playing with children	80.8	15.9	3.3

The day-to-day chores of housework and childcare are still mainly the women's responsibility. This often results in conflicts, tension and stress as stated by Feinstein (1979), “The clash of traditional mores and attitudes, which assign homemaking and childrearing responsibilities to wives, with increased labour force participation by women has placed an enormous physical and emotional burden on female workers with families”. Difficulties in getting the husband's involvement is brought up by some respondents in the focus group discussions. A young nurse with a baby has this to say:

Kerjanya (housework) tak susah. At least kita kerja, dia jaga anak. Tolong sidai kain pun boleh. Kita buat kerja, dia pun buat kerja.... Bukan kita duduk relax, dia buat kerja. Kalau kita masak, dia tolong jaga anak.... lipat kain ke ...macam tu. Jangan kita kena suruh, baru dia nak buat dua kerja dalam satu masa.....

A 47, year-old administrative assistant with four grown up children has this to say about her husband:

I, kalau nak kira agaknya, satu peratus sahaja (husband's help). I tak nampak mana dia tolong. Biasalah, kalau basuh kereta tu, dia basuhlah....tapi kalau housework ke, jaga anak ke, NO ! My husband even dia tak buat air sendiri pun, tak pernah seduk nasi sendiri. I feel so upset, geram, tapi dia selalu kata, kalau kita tak hidang nasi, tak layan, nanti suami lari....so, always gertak kita taubeing (an east coast state) punya husband memang pemalas. They are very lazy.....yang rajin ada juga, tapi rare, memang jarang....

A 45 year-old midwife with 3 children aged 6-17 finds difficulty in moulding the children and has this to say :

Ini ada kaitan dengan suami juga, kadang-kadang I kena force my kids, my boys juga..... Kadang I blame my husband...character dia...because dia sendiri tak help.....macam mana anak-anak nak ikut. I always blame my husband sebab my husband kata I don't discipline them. Macam mana nak disiplin, sebab bapak dia pun tak menolong, I kata saja macam tu.

To many women, whether working or not, family is the priority. A 35 year-old Engineering lecturer with five children, aged 1-11 sums it up:

But then, family is priority. Anak sakit, meeting cancell! Anak is everything.

Many women experience tensions and conflicts. For those working, balancing the two roles (productive and reproductive roles) are the greatest challenge, while for those not working, finding time for their own self proves difficult. Some of the voices gathered through the focus group discussions are as follows:

I pula, kadang-kadang kena pandai cari masa...curi-curi masa.....kita minat buat sesuatu benda kan...kadang-kadang rasa nak menjerit pun ada,...Kadang-kadang kita nak buat perkara yang kita suka, contohnya saya suka menjahit.... Bila kita pegang benang, anak kita semua datang. (37 year-old housewife with five children aged 4-14)

Kadang-kadang bila geram sangat, I pukul anak-anak I sebab dia orang degil. Tapi bila pukul tu, datanglah penyesalan.....sebab kita memang tak ada intention nak pukul dia orang... tapi sebab penat, terpukul lah! After sometime, dia orang dah dewasa, I start talking to them. (46 year-old executive, single mother with three children aged 18-23)

Anak I, kalau I naik angin, I ambil rotan ke, hanger baju ke, I pukul pintu. Bunyinya kuatlah..tapi tak apa, anak kita tak sakit. Dia tahu mama dia naik angin, so dia diamlah. I fikir, kalau kita pukul budak, dia tak akan serik..masa tu saja dia menangis, lepas tu dia buat lagi. Kita pun kesian dan sayang anak kita, kan?..... Macam saya anak empat orang laki-laki, saya kira anak rapat-rapatlah.....Cuma I cakap saja, kemudian bila dia degil, I ambil rotan, rotan dekat pintu....kemudian dia diamlahpukul tu, kena pukul jugalah. (40 year-old clerk with four children aged 12-20)

Involvement in Community Work

The study found that women's involvement in community work is very poor. Though the men are more involved compared to the women, the percentage of those involved is still low. Refer to Table 9.

Table 9 : Involvement in Community Work

Community Activities	Women (respondent)		Men (husbands)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
PTAs	30.2	69.8	38.9	61.1
Neighborhood Association	2.7	97.3	21.6	78.4
Local Surau	38.3	61.7	64.4	35.6
Usrah Group	26.2	73.8	25.5	74.5
Other community work	8.1	91.9	6.7	93.3

The general finding from the focus group discussion shows a negative attitude towards community work, such as the following quotations:

I malaseven PIBG, I tak join pun.

I, anak kecil-kecil lagi, I tak minatlah.

Kadang-kadang....macam PIBG, I rasa bagilah orang lain contribute. I have this kind of attitude..... I rasa, bila lagi I nak kat rumah, dahlah kerja!

Sekarang, saya mengajar mengaji Al-Quran saja di rumah, pagi sibuk dengan rumahtangga, persatuan ni saya tak berapa berminat.

Lagi satu, macam seksyen area, tak ada somebody yang betul-betul in-charge untuk ajak you. Macam dekat kampung-kampung, mak-mak kita ada WI kan, ada orang in-charge.

Tapi kat Bandar don't have. Kalau ada pun, datang rumah I, baca yasin.. That's it, tu saja, lepas tu habis dah.. buat hal masing-masing.

However, there also a few who are interested in community work, but are not able to spare the time.

Saya berminat, tapi always nak cari masa.

No, I tak involve in those things..... nantilah, bila anak-anak dah besar, maybe bolehlah.... At the moment. Tak ada.

It can thus be concluded that the main reason for this low involvement is due to lack of awareness and the support system to allow parents especially mothers some time to contribute to community work.

Types of Support

In terms of hiring maids to help out with housework and childcare, only 25.3 percent of the households are currently having maids. Based on 53 households who currently have maids, 80 percent of the maids are Indonesian. The various types of childcare that had been used by the respondents in this study are shown in Table 10 below. The most popular childcare is hiring maids, sending to child-minders or baby-sitters and sending to nurseries or daycare centers. 22.5 percent of the respondents had resort to sending their children to the kampungs to be cared for by their mother or mother-in-law. This arrangement may work out if the grandparents are healthy and able to care for the grandchildren, though it may weaken the parent-child relationship. Having parents, especially mother or mother-in-law coming over may provide short-term support for some of the families. Unlike the good old days, help from siblings and relatives are not easily available nowadays.

Table 10 : Childcare Arrangement

Types of Childcare	Duration (%)				Never (%)
	Less than 6 months	6-12 months	More than 12 months	Subtotal	
Maid	8.2	3.8	39.4	51.4	48.6
Child-minder/Baby-sitter	8.7	7.7	20.8	37.2	62.8
Nursery / Day-care center	5.5	9.8	13.7	29.0	71.0
Children sent to parents or in-laws in the kampungs	6.6	4.4	11.5	22.5	77.5
Mother or mother-in-law comes over to help	11.5	2.7	6.6	20.8	79.2
Female siblings come to help	4.4	1.1	1.6	7.1	92.9
Relatives come to help	3.8	1.1	1.1	6.0	94.0

The respondents were also asked about the various types of support from their employers. Based on Table 11, the majority of the employers are sympathetic to their workers only when they need to look after a sick child. 75% of the 125 respondents state that they will get time-off for this purpose. Setting up childcare centers at the workplace is still not being given priority by employers though the government has urged for this for a long time. Flexible working hours for both men and women would help ease the responsibilities at home, is only available to 32.4 percent of the respondents.

Table 11 : Support from Employers

Facilities / Benefit	Yes	No	Total
Childcare centers	19.8	80.2	100.0
Flexible working hours	32.4	67.6	100.0
Monetary assistance	35.6	64.4	100.0
Time-off to attend a sick child	75.2	24.8	100.0

Conclusion and Recommendations

Yahya (1995) discusses some social implications of urbanization that includes less cohesive relationships, greater individual freedom, breakdown of traditional values, problems of adjustment, differences in family relationship and increase in social distance. From the case study of the urban middle class Malay households in Shah Alam, it can be concluded that bringing up children in an urban setting is a great challenge for parents especially if both are working. The impersonal nature of social contacts in the urban areas deprived urban families of kinship support that rural families enjoy. Employers do not seem to pay much attention to the plight of their workers. Childcare means big business to nursery and daycare operators. Tuition centers and motivational courses for children are in great demand. Employment agencies are gaining profit by bringing in foreign maids.

Childrearing and children upbringing should not be taken lightly, since the success of Vision 2020 is in their hands. Parents of today are the ones responsible for moulding this future generation. Therefore, parents need to be equipped with proper skills and knowledge about parenting, so that the job would be manageable and becomes much easier. Cooperation from various governmental agencies, NGOs and the private sector is needed to provide the content, expertise and the training. To ensure success, these courses have to be affordable and easily accessible to the general public. Existing social facilities like community centers, schools, mosques and suraus can be adapted to become community training and resource centers to cater for the local residents. Employers may also provide these courses at the workplace. After completing certain modules, a certificate would be awarded. Incentives can be worked out in terms of income tax rebate or rewards in cash or kind for those participating in this program. It is timely to give the job of childrearing and children upbringing the recognition it deserves.

Professor Chiam (1992) in an inaugural lecture clearly states that, "the mental and economic status of the nation in the year 2000 and beyond depends on the children of today. They will be the ones responsible for building up Malaysia or pulling it down. Children are also the transmitters of social and moral values as well as the agents of change and custodians of continuity. In short, they are our future".

In the effort to improve social relations in urban neighborhoods, the spirit of community and neighbourliness of the rural areas has to be inculcated among the urban residents. In planning for new housing areas, particular emphasis should be given to the social aspect. Housing layout and design should promote acquaintance, interaction and encourage neighbourly spirit. In existing housing areas, awareness of community organization and efforts in community development should be introduced and encouraged.

The aim is to achieve greater cohesiveness so that the children are well taken care of. The local authority and the community should work together to establish a community resource center in every neighbourhood. This center should be equipped with reading materials, indoor games and ICT facilities, if possible and managed by the community themselves. The elderly and housewives can volunteer their time to be around the center and the older children and youth can spend their time there after school hours while their parents are out at work. As such, there is always an adult around that can keep an eye on the children.

With adequate social support system, parents including women can then have some relief, and can be successful at home, at work and in the community. Social aspects of development should be given greater emphasis if the vision of a developed society is to be realized. Mountjoy (1982, p. 234) noted that, what is becoming disturbingly clear is that while economic growth has been taking place (according to indicators such as GNP, per capita income etc.), the mass of the population in so many countries seems to have received few benefit. Economic growth alone is not development; social improvement in terms of education, health and welfare is an integral part of the modernization process.

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