

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF THE MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE

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Abstract

Gender discrimination and disparity have been rampantly discussed at all levels of society, from household to education to government institutions. Without discounting the others' importance, this study is interested in discovering possible discrimination according to gender at the workplace. The authors believe this is an important area of study because a healthy workplace would lead to healthy employees and a more balanced household and nation. On the other hand, if employees are discriminated against by their genders, this would lead to lopsided work arrangements that might burden certain people over others. This study was conducted to discover whether gender discrimination exists in employment practices in the Malaysian public sector. Unfortunately, from the individual and focus group interviews that were done with public sector employees working in local authorities and the State Secretary of one state in Malaysia, it was found that gender biases continue to exist due to the lack of understanding and misconception of what constitutes gender discrimination. Therefore, this paper proposes four steps that could be taken by the public sector immediately to tackle this issue of gender discrimination in employment practices.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, gender disparity, employment practice, Malaysian civil service, public sector.

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Introduction

Over the years, there has been increasing interest and discussion over the issue of gender equality. Part of the debate has been regarding the need to reduce the gender gap at work. In more concrete terms, it is argued that females, making up half of the population, should also make up half of the number of employees. Emphasis should be put on bringing women into the workplace, and more importantly, keeping them at work by providing an opportunity for women to climb up the proverbial ladder.

Based on data from 2019, Malaysia has been making an encouraging stride in the representation of women in top positions in the corporate world (Ho, 2020). Malaysia is the best among Asian countries in terms of women's ratio in the top 100 public listed companies at 26.4 percent. Moreover, at 33 percent, Malaysia also has a higher-than-average ratio of women in senior management teams. However, when it comes to the decision-makers, female board members among public listed companies in Malaysia only account for 16.6 percent (Saieed, 2019). It shows that while women are relatively active in the workforce, they are still unrepresented where it matters most.

Overall, Malaysia has room to improve in terms of gender equality. Based on the 2020 Gender Global Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2019), Malaysia is ranked 104th out of 153 countries with a score of 0.677, which is considered moderate. A score of 0 indicates perfect inequality, whereas a score of 1 indicates perfect equality. At 0.677, Malaysia shows a marked improvement compared to 2006 when the country scored 0.651 during the first year that the World Economic Forum measured gender-based gaps. Nevertheless, when comparing Malaysia with its close neighbors in the region, Malaysia is faring worse than Singapore in the 54th position, followed by Thailand at 75th position, Indonesia at 85th position, and Brunei Darussalam 95th position. It shows that there is still much work to be done to reduce the gender gap in Malaysia further.

Malaysia received the highest educational attainment score at 0.989, which shows that there is almost perfect equality between the genders in education. With equal opportunity towards attaining education, logic would dictate that females should then be equally represented in the workforce following graduation. Alas, that is not the case. In the same report, Malaysia scored 0.639 in economic participation and opportunity. While this number is above average, there is still a pronounced score drop of 0.35 from educational attainment to economic participation. Where do female graduates go? Another peculiarity appeared when one realized Malaysia scored a paltry of 0.256 in women's participation as legislators, senior officials, and managers. In other words, only one in four senior officials in Malaysia is females.

If women are equally equipped as men when they left tertiary education to enter the labor market, what explains the discrepancy in the number of women holding influential positions? Were women discriminated against when employers were choosing who to hire, promote, develop, and retrenched? What can the government do to address this issue? What are the challenges faced with eradicating gender discrimination in the workplace?

In tackling these questions, this article looks at the Malaysian civil service as a case study to understand gender discrimination in the workplace. Following a short literature review in the next section, there will be a discussion on the structure of the public service and gender stereotypes in employment practices among the Malaysian civil service. Next is a discussion on the Malaysian government's experience in overcoming these challenges and suggestions for the government to implement in the near future. The conclusion will stress the importance of gender inclusivity in employment practices for a more conducive working environment.

Literature Review

Workplace gender discrimination

Gender discrimination in the workplace is a widely written issue in the literature. However, there are many strands to it. Scholars have been writing about

gender discrimination from an economic perspective (i.e., Oster, 1975), a sociological perspective (i.e., Bielby & Baron, 1986; Cohen & Huffman, 2003; Charles, 2011), and a law and governance perspective (i.e., Thornton, 2010; Mercat-Bruns, 2016). Based on the literature, gender discrimination at work can refer to labor market discrimination, gender-based wage discrimination, or even sexual harassment at the workplace. This issue is not unique to Malaysia as research has been done in other parts of the world.

Bielby and Baron (1986), for example, used data from 290 economic establishments in California from the years 1964 to 1979 to test whether different gender traits and turnover costs are the reasons for gender segregation within mixed occupations. It was found that gender discrimination does exist in the workplace, especially among men and women who hold the same occupation but work in different establishments or have different job titles within the same organization (p. 777). However, there are no efficient or rational differences in skills and turnover costs.

Oster (1975) argued that employer-based discrimination against women is unstable. Nevertheless, discrimination in the workplace is ongoing and prevalent because of employee discrimination. In other words, employers segregate workers based on gender due to discriminatory attitudes held by male employees. It was discovered that by minimizing women in the workplace, employers could maximize male workers' productivity. This finding is similar to findings by Miller (1997). From observations made within the United States army, it was concluded that sexual harassment happened because men felt threatened by women's presence in the barracks.

In a cross-national survey, Charles (2011) found that while the gender gap in institutions such as education and the labor market has indeed narrowed, the trajectory differs between vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (inter-occupation) discrimination. Developed countries have more women in managerial positions, which is following modernization theory. However, there is still gender segregation across different occupations. Based on neo-institutionalism, Charles (2011) argued that the state plays a vital role in addressing gender discrimination in the workplace.

Since some states are more conservative (North African countries) than others (Scandinavian countries), females still find themselves working in different occupations than males, despite holding similar managerial positions.

Workplace gender discrimination in Malaysia

In Malaysia's case, Othman and Othman (2015) discuss the forms of discrimination faced by women at work. While more women are part of senior officials and managers, jumping from 4.8 percent in 2000 to 5.4 percent in 2005, the number is still relatively low. The reason given for this slow development is that women are discriminated against from being promoted due to their gender (p. 27). Malaysian organizations practice a "male managerial model," whereby males are preferred for leadership roles. This discriminatory practice also explains the gender pay gap in the country.

If one is to look more specifically at the female board of directors in Malaysia, the situation is less sanguine. Using a sample of 250 public listed companies, Abd-Mutalib, Yahya, and Shaari (2018) examined females' proportion in the boardroom and their qualifications. It was found that despite the government's announcement to have private companies have at least 30 percent females in the boardroom, 38.4 percent of public listed companies still do not have even a single female in the boardroom.

Despite the gap, Goy and Johnes (2012) made another observation using a dataset from the Malaysian Population and Family Survey 2004. They found that the higher gender segregation in Malaysia, the less likely wages are to be unequal. They argued that women face less discrimination in female-centric occupations. It is in stark contrast to research by Cohen and Huffman (2003), which found in the US that females are penalized in terms of wages if they work in female-centric occupations. Nevertheless, the gender pay gap exists in Malaysia within the same occupation due to hierarchical segregation by gender, supporting Othman and Othman's finding.

While Goy and Johnes (2012)'s findings paint a better picture, there is still a general gender wage gap in Malaysia. Lim (2019) argued that this pay gap could not be explained by education as female adult literacy is almost universal, and females make up more than half of undergraduates in public universities. According to Lim (2019), this segregation can be explained as follows: females tend to major in the social sciences and arts, more likely to work part-time, and seldom negotiate for salary increments. All of these result in the lower pay of female workers compared to male workers in Malaysia.

Of course, females' burden is that they are usually more involved in care work such as taking care of the elderly and childcare that results in less time for market work and thus less income (Khazanah Research Institute, 2019). Unfortunately, since the Employment Act 1955 only covers minimum working conditions, work-life balance is not met across Malaysia's various industries, affecting women more because of their more 'traditional' role as the caregiver (Noor & Mohd Mahudin, 2015). Interestingly, Mustapa, Mohd Noor, and Abdul Mutalib (2018) argued that to some women, success is not based on her position in an organization, but when she has mastered the work-life balance between the office and home.

Finally, Kadiresan and Javed (2015) asked respondents from private organizations in Kuala Lumpur to identify demographic characteristics that cause discrimination at work. Using SPSS analysis, they discovered a .349 coefficient between gender and discrimination. While this is a moderate outcome, it shows that there is gender-based discrimination ongoing in Malaysian workplaces.

All the scenarios, as mentioned earlier, perhaps explain females' preference to work in the public sector due to perceived gender equality that is better guaranteed by government policies which ensures similar wages and promotion (Musa, Maulad Abdul Razak, Haris & Ab. Rahman, 2018; Noor & Mohd Mahudin, 2015). From a survey of female civil servants at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Musa et al. discovered there is a correlation between respondents' career choice and perception of gender equality. This study hopes to add to the

literature on gender issues in Malaysia's civil service by focusing on employees in a single state.

Structure of the public service in Malaysia

Although Malaysia practices federalism, the Malaysian government structure is replicable either at federal, state, or local levels. This is due to all three government levels following standardized employment practices set by the Public Service Department (PSD) at the federal level. Thus, these practices' effectiveness is of utmost importance as there are 1.71 million Malaysians employed by the government as of March 2019 (Abas, 2019).

Malaysia's civil service includes employees from diverse sectors such as teachers, doctors, and nurses, which are not usually included in other developed countries' civil service. Unlike the police and the army, these professions are generally filled with more females than males. However, there is no official data to corroborate this assumption. All of the above frontline occupations make up almost two-thirds of the country's civil servants (Yeap, 2019). The percentage of women in the public sector has increased from 18.8 percent in 2004 to 35.8 percent in 2016 (Kanyakumari, 2017). Based on available data from 2005, not including the police and armed forces, there are about 0.18 percent employees in top management, 21.2 percent in management and professional groups, and 78.6 percent in the support group (Centre for Public Policy Studies, 2017). Among the top level of management, women make up 35.6 percent or 1,419 of them (Bernama, 2017).

According to the 2019 World Bank report, Malaysia's civil service is 'over-centralized' as the central government has a high control level, especially in matters related to human resources (Malaysia Economic Monitor, 2019). Despite that, the state and local governments have leeway to determine certain aspects of employment, such as the appointment and selection of personnel as they are the paymaster for the civil servants at state and local levels.

This research identifies the dynamics of gender with four aspects of employment in civil service, namely: 1) hiring, 2) training, 3) promotion, and 4) termination of service. This study aims to discover how gender affects and influences women's and men's opportunities differently in these four aspects of employment. While sexual harassment is, without a doubt, a glaring problem at the workplace, we believe that it requires a separate study of its own. This study's finding was derived from in-depth interviews with 22 officers in civil service at state and local levels, both male and female. Despite the high percentage of female employees in civil service, as women make up half of the civil service population in Malaysia, traditional gender roles persist in the four employment areas mentioned above.

Gender biases in civil service

Gender bias in the recruitment process can be divided into two categories: 1) explicit and 2) implicit biases. Explicit conscious bias refers to individuals' awareness of their prejudices in the form of their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, which can be translated into physical, verbal, and psychological harassment or through exclusionary practices. Implicit bias is more subtle as one may not be aware of their own prejudices and can be in contradiction with their beliefs and value system. As such, implicit bias can seep through one's action and behavior without the person realizing it. This may affect the assessment, decision-making, and relationship between the superior and subordinates in the employment process.

Methodology

Research approach and design

This research is a cross-sectional study on gender discrimination in the four phases of employment practice, namely recruitment/hiring, promotion, self-development, and retrenchment, along with questions about treatment and interference. This study employs qualitative methods, more specifically focus groups and purposive semi-structured interviews.

Sample of the study

Overall, 22 individuals included professional officers in grade 41 and above in seven local authorities, the State Secretary, and the Mufti's Office of one state in Malaysia involved in this study. We do not divulge the information of the particular state to protect the state government and its employees' privacy.

Data gathering technique

The interviews and focus groups were conducted until the researchers reached data saturation, whereby the information gathered does not provide further insight into the research objectives (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This follows three months of data collection. During the final focus group with four participants, the researchers discovered that the answers given resemble data from previous focus groups and interviews.

Analysis technique

The results of the interviews were analyzed thematically based on the answers given by the officers. This study also analyses government circulars, especially by the Public Service Department, in public service employment practices for triangulation purposes. Salkind (2010) forwards that triangulation is particularly useful for qualitative research as it allows researchers to examine data from various sources such as interviews, focus groups, written archives, and government documents.

Findings

Gender stereotypes refer to "generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by or performed by women and men." (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.) These stereotypes can have detrimental effects on employment areas, especially in the recruitment process. It is derived from society's consensus on men's and

women's roles based on the distribution of men's and women's tasks at home and at work.

The first stage of the employment process is recruitment, which involves identifying the vacant position, reviewing and selecting rightful candidates to fill the organization's position. Gender bias can occur in the employment process as early as during the recruitment stage. Recruiters might be influenced by gender stereotypes, especially when it comes to specific job skills. The perception of women performing better than men in specific job skills and vice versa may influence recruitment's final decision.

This study discovers that gender stereotypes are still prevalent in the Malaysian civil service recruitment stage, especially when it comes to technical and administrative jobs. Women are perceived to be more competent and suitable for administrative and desk work. In contrast, for positions that require technical knowledge and face harsher work conditions such as shifts and on-site jobs, male candidates are given preferences. Below are examples from interviews whereby gender bias is observed in these responses.

“I think [I prefer] men. Because of several aspects. For example, depending on their position, job scope, if [I have] male subordinates, they can go to the site at 10pm at night. If women, they have to ask permission from their husbands, and it feels inappropriate. But if in the operation division they have women, I am not sure.”

(Participant A)

“If for jobs that require deskwork, I prefer women because they are tidier, more detailed, [and they] are more punctual compared to men. But for heavy tasks [that] requires a lot of physical strength, I prefer men.”

(Participant B)

Not only is women unemployment in Malaysia higher by 18 percent than their male counterpart, more worryingly is the trend that the more educated women are (with tertiary education), the more likely they are to be unemployed at 4.3 percent (Khazanah Research Institute, 2017, p. 5). Our interview data support the quantitative data as we can deduce that females are more appreciated for lower-level

jobs. In contrast, men are preferred for more technical jobs during recruitment despite the fact that both may possess the same qualification.

Apart from gender stereotypes of male and female abilities at the workplace, it is also applied to generalized characteristics attributed to men and women. Khazanah Research Institute (2018) also found that when women are employed in the Malaysian workforce, 29.2 percent are employed in services and sales, 19.8 percent are professionals, 18 percent are clerical support workers, and on the opposite end, only 3.1 percent are managers (p. 102). There is no doubt that gender segregation does exist between the genders. In addition to that, women's participation as decision-makers in the public sector is still limited, as the public sector still functions as a male-dominant organization. Therefore, there are continuous obstacles for drastic institutional reforms to include women's voices in the decision-making process (Sharifah Syahirah, Norfarhanis & Mohd Faizal, 2016).

Women are seen as emotional and less competent than men, who possess more masculine traits that are more attractive at the workplace, such as being charismatic, intelligent, and in control of their emotions.

“[I prefer to have] Men because working at this unit, women do not like to receive reports and have to investigate.”

(Participant C)

“There are two situations...if she is the only candidate, she will be selected. [But] I will not recommend women because I know their intellectual and physical limitations.”

(Participant D)

“To me, I will talk about my unit, I prefer men. Sometimes [men] they are problematic also when they have their ‘menstruation’, they are lazy but easier to be scolded. If women, they will have talk back.”

(Participant E)

“During the interview, [I] have already aimed for male candidate. However, during the interview session, there was a female candidate who is excellent and had better experience, and skills.”

(Participant F)

Based on the study's findings, women have to overcome the gender stereotypes associated with them as early as during the recruitment phase. Because of the lack of preference by superiors to have more women in their unit, especially in areas considered having harsher and more challenging working conditions, women have to overcome invisible barriers.

Gender stereotypes also are harmful to female civil servants in the promotion exercise. As highlighted earlier, female civil servants occupy half of the public service population in Malaysia at the federal level. The percentage may differ for state and local governments due to the nature of Malaysia's federal system. However, the presence of women as civil servants is prominent regardless of the governmental levels. The study discovers that despite the absence of systematic and institutionalized gender discrimination practices, gender stereotypes influence decision-makers at the stage of promotion due to the belief that men have better leadership qualities compared to women. The traditional gender role that men hold the responsibilities to be the primary breadwinner of the family also resulted in a preference for men to be promoted.

“There was an opening for new branch’s managerial position...that I am eligible[for]. However, the opportunity was given to Senior B (man) who is not really a senior. In the end, there were more men given the offers. I was curious about the reasons. It is true [that promotion exercise was not done objectively].”

(Participant G)

“My perception has changed and when I investigate and discuss [with people who were involved], the woman who was supposed to get the post was not offered even though the position was held by a [female] officer who manages events. Why do superiors have to be male and subordinates, female? The correct criteria selection for employees was not carried out correctly. The decision to promote someone can be influenced by others”

(Participant H)

“The first time I was interviewed, my name was on the highest in the list of candidates and Mr. Z were number two. However, Mr. Z was given the position because I am a woman. The [problem] exists. I inquired on the reasons I did not get the position and when there is another vacancy, they immediately [put forward] my name. If among the superiors they want men, if we fought back, we as women must have our own stance why we want to be leaders.”

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More than mere perception, a study by Khazanah Research Institute (2019, pp. 11-12) also acknowledges that while males and females are working almost similar hours and bringing in similar income between the ages of 25 and 29, there is a definite shift in gender gap during childbearing age of 30 and 39. Women are allowed back into the workforce later in their careers after taking time off to care for children. It would result in a wage penalty whereby women would make less than their male counterparts who were their equals a few years prior.

Apart from gender bias due to gender stereotypes, female employees are also seen as a burden to the organization due to their biological function primarily related to their mothers' reproductive role. At times, superiors see married female employees as a burden instead of an asset for the organization. This is due to their main role as caretakers of the family, which is not shared equally by their male partners from the perspective of their superiors. In the report by Khazanah Research Institute (2019), it was found that 60.3 percent of women work outside the labor force due to housework and family responsibilities, while 31.5 percent of women are underemployed. Women's biological nature and their reproductive role as mothers are viewed as troublesome for their immediate superior and colleagues. The responses below show superiors' negative perceptions towards their female subordinates who have to take leave after giving birth.

“When they give birth, [they are] unproductive, three months before and after. [We] lost six months in total... we cannot let them go to site.”

(Participant H)

“If [they go for] maternity leave, now I have one, it is already like I lost a leg.”

(Participant I)

Women in the public sector also were found to have low levels of well-being as they reported high levels of stress due to their dual responsibilities at work and home. In a survey conducted by Sharifah Syahirah et al., 74.8 percent of the respondents consists of women in the public sector experience work-family conflict, and 58.6 percent opine that the higher management does not understand their situation regarding family commitment (Sharifah Syahirah et al., 2015).

A common theme derived from this study is that traditional gender roles attached by society play a significant role in limiting women's advancement in their careers in public service. It is observed that strong gender stereotypes have resulted in implicit gender bias manifested in attitudes and beliefs that men and women's ability in the workplace is dependent on their gender. Civil service has already pioneered gender empowerment practices by introducing several initiatives such as Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA). However, the policy's introduction may result in the reinforcement of traditional gender roles for women to work from home rather than empowering men and women. The rigidity of employment practices also is seen as a hindrance for women to be recognized as equal to their male counterparts. This has resulted in feminine traits, especially matters related to their reproductive roles, to be seen as burdensome instead of beneficial for the state and society.

Discussion and Recommendations

Governments across countries have become the determined champion in gender equality through programs and policy strategies. In some countries, the government

is more proactive in providing legal protection and taking preventive actions, including enacting a gender equality act that guarantees equal legal work rights for all. Similarly, the Malaysian government is committed to eliminating any forms of discrimination, especially gender discrimination, in the workplace. This initiative can be seen through the proposed amendment of Employment Act 1955 to tackle discrimination issues in the workplace more comprehensively. Such an initiative is crucial to safeguard employees' rights in different employment practices.

Malaysia is among a few developing countries that have undertaken many encouraging steps to promote gender equality. Chronologically, this can be seen through the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. The government is committed to advancing women's rights in all aspects through a series of forums, declarations, and initiatives at national and international levels. Over the years, a series of initiatives were implemented through the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (MWFCDD). This is in line with article (8) of the Federal Constitution that prohibits discrimination based on gender. For instance, in 2003, the government had established a cabinet committee on Gender Equality. Next, in 2004, the government introduced a policy of at least 30 percent involvement of women at the public sector's decision-making levels. This was followed by a women's financial initiatives program to enhance women's skills and capability in 2005 and gender budget projects, which were introduced in 2006.

The government has embraced this contemporary reform paradigm that centered on the gender equality agenda. However, none of these initiatives were truly meant to address discrimination in employment practices. Recently, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have renewed calls for the government to propose and implement a gender equality act. The ministry of human resources agreed to revise the employment act of 1955 to ensure more comprehensive measures to tackle discrimination at workplaces. This is equally important for those who are working in the private as well as public sectors. Legislative amendment is vital to ascertain gender equality in the workplace and minimize gender discrimination in public and private employment practices.

In the case of the Malaysian public sector, personnel management is under the Public Service Department (PSD). Central policy planning is followed for personnel-related matters with some discretion cascaded down to state civil service. In general, recruitment and selection, an opportunity for training and development, promotion, and assessment is based on a merit system. Embedded in the Performance Management System (PMS), public personnel practices emphasize knowledge, skills, competency, merit, and performance. For instance, training and promotion are applicable for qualified based on stipulated criteria as outlined in the service circular (PSD Service Circular, No. 2, 2005; PSD service circular, No. 7, 2010).

Similarly, performance appraisal and salary increment are determined solely based on merit and job performance (PSD service circular, No. 2, 2009; PSD service circular, No. 4, 2002). This has been the highlight in recruitment, promotion, and performance appraisal. On this ground, gender discrimination could be avoided as much as possible as decisions shall not be made based on gender but preferably on the employee's merit. However, things could be different in practice. In the decision-making process, superiors' priority arguably manifested in some elements of gender discrimination without them realizing it like the examples from the previous section have shown.

The provision on gender equality in employment practices has been narrowly interpreted in practice in the public sector. The government has well-embraced gender equality as a concept, but the practice is not apparent on the ground. Considerable attention to gender equality issues is apparent as the government, through MWFCDC, has implemented different types of programs and initiatives throughout the years. However, such endeavors were less translated into employment practices. Employees are rarely held accountable for discrimination in employment practices.

As far as public personnel policy is concerned, no emphasis was made on gender equality aspects in all circulars related to personnel practices. Gender discrimination is not the focal point in personnel practices; hence, everything is enfolded in an employee's merit and performance. However, since the entire selection process, promotion, and performance appraisal must be endorsed and

verified by superiors, adequate knowledge on gender discrimination related matters is imperatively inevitable. Awareness of gender equality seems inadequate without practical knowledge. This somehow explains why awareness about gender equality is improving but not explicitly oriented in the workplace.

As revealed in the study, respondents believed that assigning tasks according to gender is not a sign of discrimination. Well, indeed, it is. Employees hardly distinguish an act of discrimination based on nature, credibility, and strength between men and women, especially in work assignments. So, what can be done to minimize gender discrimination in public employment practices in the future? These are some of the interventions:

- 1) Integrated gender awareness workshops need to be conducted. This is directed to upper management groups, especially those in the professional and management categories. Increasing awareness and knowledge among officers involved is essential as this could minimize unintended discrimination practices in employment practices.
- 2) To widen women's opportunities in the workplace, gender-based audit in recruitment and promotion for selected positions, especially in professional and management positions, must be conducted yearly. This would help to identify the gender gap in recruitment and promotion practices. Thus, this would enhance transparency and ensure that public personnel practices are free of gender biases.
- 3) Integrated gender-based policy in employment practices must be introduced. Gender equality provision should be adequately highlighted and integrated into all employment practices, including recruitment and selection, career development, promotion, and performance appraisal. Apart from merit, some related aspects of gender discrimination must be equally emphasized.
- 4) Proper monitoring systems need to be established by establishing a gender equality bureau at federal and state levels to oversee the entire process and implementation. A gender equality bureau is an administrative unit under the Public Service Department (PSD) or the Civil Service Commission (CSC) at state levels. Job applicants and civil servants have the right to lodge complaints on matters related to public personnel practices. This specific

body would supervise matters related to gender and other forms of discrimination that might occur in employment practices.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, as the study has shown, gender discrimination still prevails in employment practices among Malaysian civil servants, especially at the recruitment and promotion levels. However, gender discrimination is difficult to detect except for those who personally experience it, as these things happen outside of the system. Gender discrimination is just as accepted by the interviewees and, sadly, by all Malaysians as many view women and men as having naturally distinct characteristics and capabilities. They refuse to use the word 'discrimination' to describe the differences in their behavior towards men and women. However, they will try to justify their actions due to the 'nature' of gender differences.

It is sad to say that some civil servants consider gender to be a Western agenda that is incompatible with local Malaysian culture. One officer said, "Gender discrimination has never existed because it is ideologically Western. For the authors, the movement that calls this discrimination is actually 'feminism' and that does not follow the teachings of Islam." These views make it difficult to improve the employment practices among professionals in Malaysia. Therefore, the government needs to raise awareness among professionals about the importance of gender perspective in employment practices for the country's welfare and sustainability.

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