



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**CAREER PROGRESSION AMONG WOMEN: A CASE STUDY IN
SABAH HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY**

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**CAREER PROGRESSION AMONG WOMEN: A CASE STUDY IN
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PINKY THOMAS

This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
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The project entitled 'Career Progression among Women: A Case Study in Sabah Hospitality Industry' was prepared by Pinky Thomas and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Human Resource Development)

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ABSTRACT

CAREER PROGRESSION AMONG WOMEN EMPLOYEES: A CASE STUDY IN SABAH'S HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

PINKY THOMAS

This study aims to identify the factors that contributed towards women employees' career progression in Sabah's hospitality industry. The hotels involved were Cititel Express, Kinabalu Daya Hotel and Imperial International Hotel. One of the objectives of this research was to identify the level of women's career progression in Sabah's hotels whether it is low, moderate or high. There were five hypotheses generated which are to examine the relationship between organizational climate, network access, gender stereotypes, family support, work-family balance and women's career progression. This study also aimed to identify the most dominant factor that contributed towards women's career progression in Sabah's hotels. The data were collected using questionnaires in which the questions had been adapted from previous researches. Pilot study was carried out in two Sabah's hotels which are The Palace Hotel and Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Beach Resort & Spa before the actual study was conducted. The data were analyzed using Pearson Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regressions Analysis. The findings of this research indicated that organizational climate, network access, family support and work-family balance were the factors that had contributed towards women's career progression in Sabah's hotels. However, gender stereotypes did not have a significant relationship with women's career progression in Sabah's hotels. Meanwhile, the result of the Multiple Regression Analysis showed that organizational climate was the most dominant factor that had contributed towards women's career progression in Sabah's hotels. Few recommendations had been made especially to the Human Resource Practitioners in order for them to ensure that women employees have equal opportunities like men in terms of career progression in the hotels. In addition, few recommendations had been made for future research.

ABSTRAK

KEMAJUAN KERJAYA DALAM KALANGAN WANITA: KAJIAN KES DI INDUSTRI PERHOTELAN SABAH

PINKY THOMAS

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada kemajuan kerjaya dalam kalangan wanita di industri perhotelan Sabah. Hotel-hotel yang terlibat dalam kajian ini adalah Cititel Express, Kinabalu Daya Hotel dan Imperial International Hotel. Satu daripada objektif spesifik kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan tahap kemajuan kerjaya wanita di hotel-hotel Sabah sama ada ianya adalah rendah, sederhana atau tinggi. Terdapat lima hipotesis dalam kajian ini iaitu untuk menyelidik hubungan antara budaya organisasi, rangkaian hubungan, stereotaip jantina, sokongan keluarga, keseimbangan hidup bekerja dan kemajuan kerjaya dalam kalangan wanita. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti faktor dominan yang menyumbang kepada kemajuan kerjaya wanita di hotel-hotel Sabah. Borang soal selidik digunakan untuk pengumpulan data di mana soalan-soalan dalam borang soal selidik ini diadaptasi daripada kajian-kajian terdahulu. Sebelum kajian yang sebenar dijalankan, kajian rintis dilakukan di dua hotel iaitu The Palace Hotel dan Shangri-La's Tanjung Aru Beach Resort & Spa. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis korelasi Pearson dan analisis Regresi Berganda. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa budaya organisasi, rangkaian hubungan, sokongan keluarga dan keseimbangan hidup bekerja adalah faktor-faktor yang telah menyumbang kepada kemajuan kerjaya wanita di tiga hotel berkenaan. Namun begitu, stereotaip jantina tidak mempunyai hubungan dengan kemajuan kerjaya wanita. Manakala, keputusan analisis Regresi Berganda menunjukkan bahawa budaya organisasi merupakan faktor dominan yang telah menyumbang kepada kemajuan kerjaya wanita. Beberapa cadangan telah diutarakan terutamanya kepada pihak sumber manusia bagi memastikan wanita mendapat peluang yang sama rata seperti pekerja lelaki dalam hal kemajuan kerjaya. Selain itu, cadangan untuk kajian masa hadapan juga telah dibuat.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of ten sections. In the first section a brief analysis of the background of the study is examined. The second section highlights the statement of the problem and followed by the research objectives in the third section. The fourth section states the research questions. This is then followed by research hypothesis in the fifth section, conceptual framework and research schedule in the sixth section, and significance of the study in the seventh section. In section eight the limitations and scope of the study is discussed. In section ninth the definitions of terms is discussed and lastly the summary of the first chapter.

1.1 Background of study

The trend of women entering into the workforce is increasing rapidly. Wentling (2003) claimed that the increasing number of women in the workforce is a global trend (as cited in Jamali, Safieddine, & Daouk, 2006). These days, women were no longer staying at home like in the olden days, but they are now entering the workforce like men do. The high cost of living forced women to seek for employment to support income for their spouses and well being of their families. There may be other educated and qualified women who would like to pursue their career while others may just want to contribute to their country.

Although the number of women in the workforce is increasing rapidly, Netto (2010) stated that of the total workforce, women only accounts for 45 per cent. It means that 55 per cent of the total workforce was dominated by men. Meanwhile, as stated in the New Straits Times (2009), statistically, 44 to 47 per cent of Malaysian women had participated in the workforce in this particular year. An opposition parliamentarian, Chong Eng, mentioned that women are often working for less pay for the same work than men (Netto, 2010).

The Malaysian government had introduced the 10th Malaysian Plan (2011-2015) this year. One of the key points of this plan was to build a progressive and more inclusive society (Bernama, 2010). In order to achieve this objective, new alternatives need to be taken. One of the alternatives was to give empowerment to women by increasing their number and participation in decision making, labour force, and support for widows, single mothers and low-income women. Another alternative was by eliminating all forms of discrimination against women' (Bernama, 2010).

In Malaysia, hotel industry is one of the most promising industries. It plays a major role in the growth of Malaysian economy (Khairil Wahidin Awang, Nor Khomar Ishak, Salleh Mohd Radzi, & Azni Zarina Taha, 2008).

Hotel industry falls under the services sector. Employment opportunities, provision of alternative and added income for the rural population, supporting growth of secondary activities such as material and equipment supplier, and complementing the expansion of both domestic and inbound tourism are the contributions that hotel industry had made to the national economy (Khairil Wahidin Awang, Nor Khomar Ishak, Salleh Mohd Radzi, & Azni Zarina Taha, 2008).

In this study, the researcher examined the women's career progression in Sabah hospitality industry. Career progression refers to women's progress towards reaching the top level profession (Maimunah Ismail, Roziyah Mohd Rosdi & Nor Wahiza Abdul Wahat, 2005). The hotel industry is characterized by long-hours, shift work and a predominately part-time or temporary workforce (Dowling, n.d.). As far as it is concern, hotels operate 24-hours, seven days a week service to the customer. During the twenty-first century, hotels remain labour intensive, fragmented, and multi-faceted service organizations (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). The question is how many are there female CEO's or even Operations VP's of significant Hospitality Companies? Fortunately, those who managed to be in the top position are normally those who come from family enterprise. However, there are only few women who managed to climb up the career ladder in the organization's hierarchy.

Diaz and Umbreit (1995) stated that, due to the increasing number of women that chose a career in the hospitality industry, women's status is of more concern than ever (as cited in Yan, 2006). Yet, there was still a phenomenon known as "glass ceiling" that had been one of the challenges that women workers faced that prevents them to move up in the management hierarchy. The glass ceiling phenomenon had been affecting women's career progression in the past few decades. This is supported by Coughlan (2002) who stated that glass ceiling was one of the reasons that caused women accountants to leave their profession (as cited in Zubaidah Zainal Abidin, Penafort, Kamaruzaman Jusoff, & Marzlin Marzuki, 2008). Furthermore, the jobs of

women in the hospitality industry were seen to be in the lowest status and the most undesirable one (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; as cited in Mooney & Ryan, 2009).

Glass ceiling can be defined as a transparent barrier that applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing or progressing to higher positions simply because they are female (Lan & Wang, 2001). The term was popularized in the 1980s in the United States when it became an important concept in the workplace. Yan (2006) added that glass ceiling occurred when women tend to be overrepresented in the lower levels of an industry. In contrast, they are underrepresented at senior levels. The word “ceiling” refers to the existence of boundary to how far someone can climb the career ladder while “glass” refers to transparent, real and not obvious to the observer (Wallace, 2010).

In addition, Yuan and Kleiner (1999) also added that women had a great difficulty in breaking through the “glass ceiling” since management was traditionally viewed as a male occupation. In the past, men are seen to be people that have a higher status than women. Apart from that, gender discrimination, gender stereotyping and cultural conflict are also the factors that contribute to the existence of the glass ceiling (Kattara, 2005). However, in this proposed research, gender discrimination and cultural conflict were not going to be tested. In this research, the independent variables were organizational climate (Jamali, Safieddine & Daouk, 2006), network access (Lan & Wang, 2001), gender stereotypes (Kattara, 2005), family support (Lan & Wang, 2001) and work-family balance (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2002). Meanwhile, career progression (Kattara, 2005) was the dependent variable of this study.

Jamali, Safieddine and Daouk (2006) had conducted a research in the Lebanese banking sector to see whether or not the organizational climate is a barrier to women’s advancement. As stated by Jackson (2001), organizational

climate referred to existing corporate perceptions of women's professional capabilities and commitment to their careers (as cited in Jamali, Safieddine & Daouk, 2006). Organizational climate falls under corporate culture which was also similar to organizational culture. Knuston and Schmidgall (1999) stated that it included attitudes towards women which are unsupportive and discouraging work environments (as cited in Jamali, Safieddine & Daouk, 2006). It is where people in the organization do not support and encourage women in developing their career by ignoring or discounting women's ideas, scrutinizing their actions and questioning their participation, contribution, commitment and capabilities (Jamali, Safieddine & Daouk, 2006). Organizations that practise this kind of attitudes towards women employees will affect their career progression in the company. It could hinder women employees from showing their real capabilities in managing their tasks.

Based on previous researches, network access was crucial for women to have if they wanted to reach a higher position in an organization. Network access could be old-boys network, business network, professional network and social network. Old-boys network referred to man club. According to Oakley (2000), old-boys network was an unofficial male system that stretches within and across organisations that excludes both less powerful males and all women from its ranks (as cited in Mooney, 2008). Business network was external network for developing business contacts. On the other hand, professional network refers to women's association, conferences and exhibitions. Meanwhile, social network was referring to the informal relationship between women and men. Networking was a very useful way for a person to build professional knowledge, discover solutions to problems and generate new business (Chen, 2009). They need to have connections or links with others because having more networks means that the person was able to gain more information that would be beneficial to the company.

Stereotypes can be defined as socially shared beliefs regarding the characteristics of men and women in general that influence one's perceptions of individual men and women (Cleveland, Stockdale & Murphy, 2000, as cited in Thanacoody, Bartam, Barker & Jacobs, 2006). According to Powell (1990), based on the traditional stereotypes, 'males were indicated as persons who have masculine behaviour that are characterized by aggressiveness, competitiveness, self-reliance and decisiveness. In contrast, females tended to show more feminine behaviour that are characterized by gentleness, a sympathetic approach, shyness and sensitivity to the needs of others' (as cited in Boon, 2009). Due to the stereotypes, women were seen to be people who were incapable in holding a higher position in the management hierarchy.

Nevertheless, women need support from their family so that they can climb the career ladder like men do. Throughout women's progress in their career and lives, the source of support may change over time. Lan and Wang (2001) had discovered from their study in Singapore's hotels that the lack of family support had contributed to the existence of glass ceiling phenomenon which plays a great part in impeding female managers' career progression. Therefore, management need to consider this matter and should not simply underestimate women's capabilities in performing their job.

Normally, women were the people that are most closely related with family-duties especially those who were married. Women were seen as being keepers of the home, rather than the workplace. Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1994) described four categories of tangible and emotional support which were informational support, instrumental support, emotional support and appraisal support (as cited in Lirio, Lituchy, Monserrat, Olivas-Lujan, Duffy, Fox, Gregory, Punnett, & Santos, 2007). Examples of informational are information, advice or suggestions. For instrumental support, it would be in terms of financial and time. Meanwhile, emotional support refers to trust and affection. Last but not least appraisal support refers to feedback and affirmation.

Basically, working women tend to have problems in balancing their time for work and family life especially those who were married. They had to take care of their children and spouse. At the same time, they need to take care of their elders too. Achieving work-family balance was not easy. One must be able to manage his/ her time for both domains. Work-family balance can be defined as achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains in which it required personal resources such as energy, time and commitment to be well distributed across domains (Kirchmeyer, 2000, as cited in Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2002).

They proposed three components of work-family balance which were time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance. Besides that, it can either be positive or negative balance. Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2002) stated that positive balance occurred when there is equal high level of satisfaction with work and family role. In contrast, negative balance occurred when there is equal low level of satisfaction with each role. When there is an imbalance between work and family roles, for instance when time devoted for family is more than work; it would affect the performance of women in the workplace. On the other hand, if they devote too much time for work, it could cause work-family conflict. Therefore, it is assumed that by having high work-family balance, women's career progression would also be high because they would be able to focus on their work without worrying that they did not allocate sufficient time for their family.

There were few researches regarding women's career progression that had been conducted in Malaysia. Zubaidah Zainal Abidin, Azwan Abdul Rashid and Kamaruzaman Jusoff (2009) stated that there were 48 per cent of women in Malaysia worked in both public and private sector. They aimed to identify the range and nature of barriers to women accountant's career advancement (Zubaidah Zainal Abidin *et al.*, 2009). Meanwhile, a research done by Maimunah Ismail, Roziah Rasdi and Nor Wahiza Abdul Wahat (2005) aimed to focus on women's progression towards reaching a higher position in

academia where there are only few women compared to men can in any case expect to reach. Their research involved women that represent the successful ones who have managed to break through the glass ceiling.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Although many women obtained good education and experience, there are still cases where they failed to move into the ranks of senior management (Burke, 1994). In Malaysia, although there are many highly educated women, they are still being under represented in senior management and leadership in both private and public sector (The Women Summit, 2009). The glass ceiling is said to be an old issue. However, there were still evidences from previous researches that this phenomenon still exist in today's era which affect women's career progression. This phenomenon plays a major role in affecting women's career progression. This study is aimed to identify whether or not this phenomenon still occurs in Malaysia or specifically in Sabah hospitality industry.

Zhong and Couch (2007) stated that gender discrimination, lack of role models, organizational culture and work-family conflict were considered as barriers to the career advancement of women (as cited in Boon, 2009). In another studies, Lan and Wang (2001) highlighted three most dominant factors that led to the existence of glass ceiling; work-family conflict, the lack of network access and the lack of family support. Due to that matter, the female managers in their studies faced difficulties in achieving career advancement. Previous researchers had conducted several studies to identify the most dominant factor that contributes towards women's career progression. However, the results are not consistent as there are different dominant factor that had been identified from different studies such as work-family conflict (Lan & Wang, 2001) and network access (Sandhu & Mehta, 2007). Therefore, the dominant factor might not be the same in different country and different organizations.

Most of the previous researches related with women's career progression or career advancement were conducted in the western country such as Boon (2009), Sandhu and Mehta (2007), Jamali, Safieddine and Daouk (2006) and Thanacoody *et al.*, (2006). Only few have been made in Malaysia, such as Zubaidah Zainal Abidin *et al.*, (2009) and Maimunah Ismail, Roziah Mohd Rasdi & Nor Wahiza Abdul Wahat (2005). The western and Malaysian cultures are different. Hence, the results of the studies from western countries might not be applicable in the Malaysian context. Therefore, this study is important in order to investigate this issue and add more evidence in the context of Malaysia.

Basically, different organization consisted of different people and therefore the climate would be different as well. Organizational climate was not a factor to women's career advancement in the Lebanese banking sector (Jamali, Safieddine & Daouk, 2005). However, the result might be different if it is tested in a different industry. For instance, in this study the industry involved was hospitality industry. If it happened that the climate in a particular company was unsupportive and discouraging, it would hindered women employees to improve their career growth. For example, if the manager of a woman employee was a male and he was not being supportive in terms of assisting the woman employee in completing her task, it would be difficult for her to finish her task. Hence, the manager might look down on the woman employee for not being able to complete her task and this would affect the intentions of the top management to give her a promotion.

McRae (2005) claimed that participation of women in networking activities after working hours were influenced by family responsibilities, for instance, taking care of children (as cited in Boon, 2009). Networking was important as it helps employees to gain information from others from outside of the organization that may help in contributing the performance of the company they are working for. Apart from that, there are not many researches on network access in relation with women's career progression in the past.