

Exploring the challenges faced by female executives in the Malaysian oil palm plantation industry: a qualitative study

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Article history:

Received: 1 September 2022

Received in revised form: 19 October 2022

Accepted: 21 August 2023

Available Online: 25 September 2023

Keywords:

Oil palm plantation,
Female executive,
Challenges,
Thematic analysis

DOI:

[https://doi.org/10.26656/fr.2017.7\(S2\).6](https://doi.org/10.26656/fr.2017.7(S2).6)

Abstract

Study regarding the life experiences of female executive planters in Malaysia's oil palm plantation sector is sparse. This gap is significant as Malaysia's plantation sector is beginning to hire more female employees, especially at the executive levels such as assistant manager and estate manager posts. Female employees account for 20-25% of the total plantation workforce in Malaysia, according to major palm oil companies. Despite their significant contribution and role in an oil palm plantation, females' efforts have been overshadowed by their male colleagues. This raises the question of why this situation occurs and how it affects female executive planters in Malaysian oil palm plantations. Hence, this research aimed to establish and assess the individual experiences of female executive planters. The focus will be on the current situation of female executives in the oil palm plantation industry, together with the challenges faced by female executives when working in the oil palm plantation industry. A qualitative study was conducted with eight female executive planters who participate in the oil palm plantation industry in Peninsular Malaysia to identify their life experiences, assess the current situation, and explore the challenges faced working as executive planters in the oil palm plantation industry in Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants using the snowball sampling method based on the availability of female executive planters in Peninsular Malaysia. The data were analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA) and categorized into six themes. The analysis revealed that their current situation and challenges were associated with job nature, acceptance, physical work, safety, managing worker, and stereotypes. These findings were expected to have significant information to add to the literature on female roles and their participation in the oil palm plantation industry. Thus, it can help to formulate plans to enhance the situation for the female executive planter in the oil palm plantation industry in the future.

1. Introduction

Malaysia's population was estimated at 32.7 million in 2020, an increase from 32.5 million in 2019, with a 0.4% yearly growth rate (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Males also outnumbered females by a significant margin. With 16.8 million males and 15.9 million females in 2020, in both the young and working-age categories, males outnumbered females. Moreover, females account for 1.2 million of the elderly population, while males account for just 1.1 million in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Department

of Statistics Malaysia (2020) also mentioned that the country's sex ratio maintained at 106 males for every 100 females.

At the national level, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of females in the second quarter of 2020 was 55%, a decline of 0.8% from the previous quarter. The highest female LFPR in the labour market was 72.6% for those aged 25 to 34, followed by 67.3% for those aged 35 to 44, and 58.8% for those aged 45 to 54. Although a married woman's labour supply fluctuates throughout her

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