

# Research on women leaders in Sarawak

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**KUCHING:** The National University of Malaysia (UKM) Tun Fatimah Hashim Women's Leadership Centre will collaborate with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) to conduct an extensive research on leadership among women in Sarawak.

The research's primary objective is to study the current situation of women holding leadership positions in the public and private sectors.

"This research will be carried out prior to a public lecture on 'Lost Leaders' by UKM Tun Fatimah Hashim Women's Leadership Centre chair-holder in women's leadership Professor Louise Morley in April next year," said Minister of Welfare, Women and Family Development Datuk Fatimah Abdullah at a press conference here yesterday.

"When we talk about women at decision-making level, this does not only apply to those in politics, but also those in the public and



**WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP:** Fatimah (seated centre) browsing the book 'Sarawak Women in Politics'. With her are Morley (seated left), Rosey (seated right), Berma (left), Norjanah (centre) and Zabariah (right). — Photo by Jeffrey Mostapa

private sectors, and from various professions."

She added that findings from the research would enable Morley to see, in the right context, the issue of women leadership in urban and rural Sarawak.

Fatimah said although women

labour in the state was slightly higher than the national average at 53.2 per cent and 46.9 per cent respectively, there were only 12 per cent of women at decision-making level, compared to 32 per cent in the peninsula.

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enrolment at tertiary level or at higher learning institutions, the percentage is more than men. However, when we compare it with job employment, it doesn't seem to be congruent," she said, and suggested that this issue be looked into during the research as well.

Meanwhile, UKM Tun Fatimah Hashim Women's Leadership Centre director Professor Madya Dr Madeline Berma said women labour in the country is among the lowest when compared to those in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.

"We are the only country where we experience a single peak pattern for women in the workforce.

"This means that most of our women graduates will work immediately after graduation,

but at a certain point of their life they will leave the workforce due to family commitments," she explained.

This, she added, was unlike the situation in many other countries, where most working women returned to the workforce after instances such as maternity leave.

"I think this is something we should look into (during the research), such as what kind of facilities we have and what kind of incentives to give to enable them to return to work and contribute to the economy," opined Berma.

Sharing the same sentiment as Berma, Morley, who is also Professor of Education and Director of the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) at the University of Sussex, UK, said there was

currently a gender pay gap of between 17 and 20 per cent globally.

"The number of women entering higher education across the globe has since increased six times compared to the sixties.

"However, this is not following through into opportunities in the labour market where men and women are getting employed, but with different salary scale."

In view of this, Morley remarked that the research would go behind the statistics provided by Fatimah's ministry, and also include interviews with women throughout Sarawak on their perspective towards women leadership positions.

"We will try to get as much contextual data as possible before we have the public lecture next year."

Also present were Assistant Minister of Early Childhood Education and Family Development Rosey Yunus, Sarawak Women's Bureau director Norjanah Razali and Islamic Information Centre chief executive officer Zabariah Matali.