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*Women and Career Advancement in Brunei Darussalam:
A Case Study of Women Working in Brunei Government
Sectors*

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Abstract

Brunei Darussalam society offers a unique and interesting aspect to do in-depth study on women. From outside perspective, Brunei seems to be a patriarchal society but at closer look, the women of Brunei are seen to be working their way up to higher positions in the workforce. Thus, career advancement plays a significant role in women's career life because career life reflects their productivity at work and serves significant meaning to their career life apart from their role as a mother, wife and daughter. The problem is that, the representation of women at the top-level positions in Brunei government sectors remains low despite the outnumbering of females over males in the managerial pipelines.

The purpose of this study is to show that further improvements are required to improve women's career advancement. This study was done through interview-based qualitative research to examine the factors that facilitate and hinder women's career advancement from the perspectives of women working in Brunei government sectors. The interview revealed that societal, organizational and individual factors significantly influence women's career advancement. The organizations that the women worked with had created an empowering environment for them to advance in their career life through the practice of equal opportunities in promotion based on merit, skills and work experiences. This became incentives for women of Brunei to develop high aspiration to pursue further progress in their career. The data also revealed that women's family obligations had also influence their career progress. This paper showed that Brunei government had implemented good foundations for women in their workplaces to empower them to pursue career advancement but women desire for more improvements to help women succeed and manage their roles in both family and work institutions efficiently including flexible working hours, improvement on availability of facilities such as nursery and breastfeeding room in the workplace as well as to open up more opportunities for women to participate in discussions and decision-making processes especially for those at the lower levels.

Keywords: Career advancement, facilitators, barriers, Brunei, women, empowerment

1. Introduction

The progression of women in all aspects of life has taken place at a rapid phase and this is evident in the context of economics. Globally, women's participation in paid labour market has increased over the years with more women entering what was once male-dominated sphere of work (Tharshini, Kumar and Rathnasekara, 2016). Their progression has been remarkable to the extent that the world is witnessing the rise in number of female in positions of authority, leadership and female breadwinners. Brunei government acknowledged that empowering women to be involved in public service is significant to Brunei's economy and national development because women in Brunei make up almost half of the population with 48.1 percent of total population (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2016). Furthermore, women can bring in different perspectives and diversity into their workplaces especially in decision-making, communication, leadership styles and management of the organization, which could contribute to overall improvements in the performance of organizations (OECD, 2009). Having more women in the workforce allows the workplace environment to be gender-friendly whereby men and women can cooperate to drive the organization towards achieving its goals and milestone. Thus career advancement is significant to women's career life because having more women leaders in organizations help in ensuring other women have more opportunities to enhance their capabilities in the workplace. However, women could only go as far as senior officers (Division Two) while key positions in most of Brunei government sectors are still held by men.

2. Problem statement

Women remain underrepresented at top-level, Division One, positions across all Brunei government sectors despite the increase in educated females, women's higher level of achievements in comparison to male and their continuous investment in human capital. Large number of women in Brunei government sectors remained stuck in managerial pipeline while the top-level positions remained dominated mainly by male. Women only occupy 31.9 percent of positions in Division One where as men occupy 68.1 percent (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2016).

a. Research Objectives

This research aims to explore the perspectives of women working with Brunei government sectors on career advancement as well as their perception on factors facilitating and hindering their career advancement. This study could address the limited research on women and gender studies in Brunei. It could also serve as a guideline for policymakers to improve their existing policy for women in the workplace.

b. Research Questions

This paper aims to examine the factors that influencing women's career advancement by questioning:

- What are the existing factors that facilitate and hinder women's career advancement?

3. Literature Review

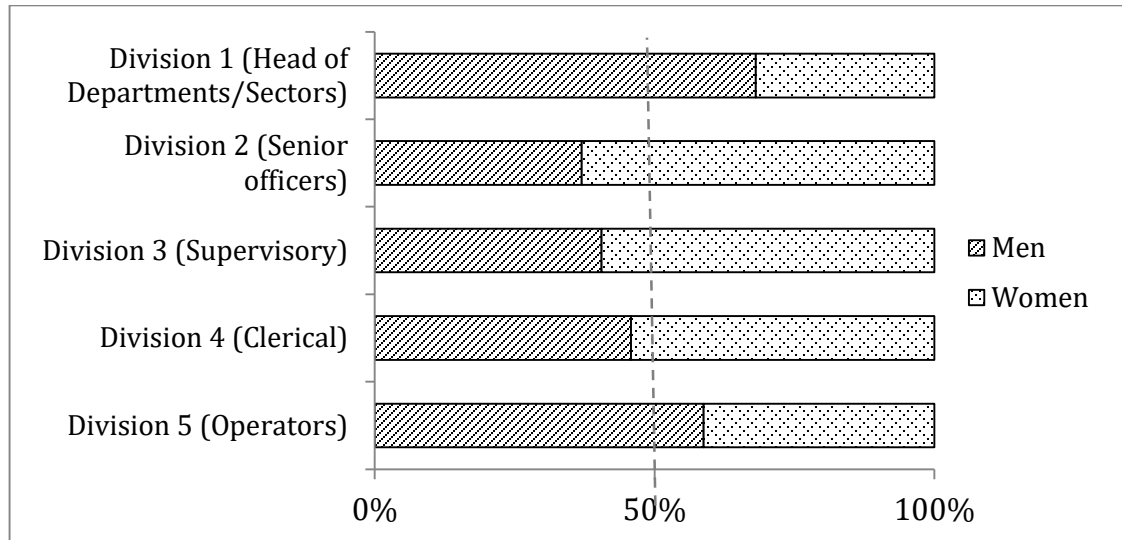
a. Background of Brunei

Brunei is a small country located on the island of Borneo that has been blessed with oil wealth that contributed to the development and improved the welfare system of the country. As a welfare state, Brunei has invested its wealth in free education and healthcare, accessible to both male and female citizens. Economic growth had also led to the expansion of public sectors, which required more labour participation. Furthermore, Brunei has developed a long-term development plan that included strategies to diversify its economy. In order to accomplish this, the government needed the females to be engaged in the labour market thus the increase in demand for female workforce participation in the country.

Apart from providing equal access for females to attain higher education, other incentives from the government to attract more females into the workforce also included equal practices in terms of hiring, promotion, trainings and skill development. The government also extended maternity leave from 56 days to 105 days to support women's work-life balance as well as to promote gender equity in employment. As a result, more women are aspired and motivated to pursue career advancement. According to statistics, female labour force in the country has gradually and consistently increased from 42.1 percent in 2011 to 43.2 percent

in 2014. Females have also outnumbered males in educational achievements and in most of the levels of Division in Brunei government sectors except those in Division One and Division Five.

Figure 3.1 Ratio of male and female participation in the workforce according to different Divisions in year 2015



Source: Brunei Darussalam Statistical Yearbook 2016

The chart above shows that women seem to have moved up the levels of Division with ease yet, over time, their progression to the highest Division remain slow and seem to have been hindered. Thus this study will examine the factors that influence their career advancement from the perspective of women working with Brunei government sectors.

b. Women and career advancement

Career advancement is generally defined as individual's access to promotion opportunities as well as their ability to move up managerial ranks and ability to acquire higher pay (Miner, Chen and Yu, 1991). In the context of Brunei Darussalam, employees are eligible for promotion regardless of gender and that promotion or career progress take place within three to eight years, provided that they meet the standard requirements for promotion; quality of work performance, work experience, succeed in written and interview tests (Prime Minister's Office of Brunei Darussalam, 2012). Although organizational policies clearly states that both men and

women have equal access to promotions, there seem to be an invisible barrier or ‘glass ceiling’ effect that hinder women from moving higher to Division One in Brunei government sectors. Most literatures on women’s career advancement suggest that women’s career is influenced by external and internal factors. External factor include societal and organizational factors whereby internal factors focus on individual or personal factor.

c. Factors influencing women’s career advancement

i. Societal expectations of women’s roles

Women’s involvement in the workforce has caused a shift in ‘gender order’ in terms of gender roles (Connell, 1987) and the traditional family system as a whole. Women’s roles were no longer limited to household activities but had extended to the role as one of the contributors to household income in a dual-earner family. Even with the growing importance and the active role of women in the public sphere, women are still expected to perform the cultural expectation of their gender roles. West and Zimmerman (1987) argued, the social construction of gender created differences in gender roles and expectations. This meant that regardless of women’s position in the workplace, they needed to fulfill the socially constructed concept of ‘womanhood’ through the role as a wife, daughter and mother. In addition to that, family commitments remained the primary responsibility of women. This affects women’s career life because the society still expects women to prioritize their family more than their career. Firestone (1972) argued that women’s biological functioning impede women from attaining key positions in society. They were chained to carry out their reproductive function, making them primarily responsible for childcare and family welfare. The persistence of this socio-cultural value is evident in Southeast Asian countries, particularly in Malay society. Malay society is described as highly patriarchal where men dominate the positions of authority and power. Radical feminism also argued that the position of men in a patriarchal society allows men to exploit women into doing unpaid work at home. Women also unconsciously accepted this due to socialization that boxed them into socially constructed ‘femininity’ rather than to challenge male domination (Schaefer, 2012). This creates inequality in division of work that put more burdens and responsibilities on women (Haralambos and Holborn, 1990).

This caused women to experience role strain and role overload in order to meet the demands from the two 'greedy institutions' of home and work (Coser, 1974). Thus, women need to constantly negotiate their dual roles in order to allow them to succeed in their career without neglecting their family responsibilities.

ii. Organizational factor

1. Work-life balance

The conflict between work and life is often the main reason women choose not to desire for career progression for fear of threatening the balance of work and life (Murniati, 2012). The role of organizations is significant in empowering and helping women manage their conflicting demands from both home and work institutions, which could be done through organization's policies and programs (Lim *et al.*, 2013). This balance could help enhance their career progression, mobility and job satisfaction.

2. Organizational structural theory

Organizational structure could affect women's career advancement. On one hand, according to Kanter (1977), the organizations could help women climb to higher positions by providing equal access to social and human capital accumulation to improve their productivity and efficiency at work through mentoring, networking, trainings and development of skills. On the other hand, organizations could also prevent women from climbing the corporate ladder through invisible barriers termed as 'glass ceiling' effect. Acker (1990) argued that leadership positions were often reserved for employees who were fully committed to their work whereas employees with divided commitments were placed at the lower positions. This stereotype in the workplace indicated that men were usually preferred to occupy leadership positions rather than women. The reason was that women were not seen as committed as a result of career interruptions that they often experience due to their multiple responsibilities at home and at work. Furthermore, the concept of 'career success' was constructed based on male model of hierarchical mobility (Gallos, 1989; O'Neil,

Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2008) through promotions, increase in salary and improved in socioeconomic in the workplace (Abele *et. al.*, 2011). Women, however, experienced maze-like route to attain top-level positions, which may take longer journey than males due to their career interruptions.

Lack of support from organizations also affects women's productivity and efficiency at work. Kargwell (2008) and Broadbridge (2008) argued that absence or lack of available facilities that could help women balance their dual responsibilities could contribute to the problem of scarcity of women at the top levels. Kargwell (2008) further argued that some organizations were unwilling to invest in facilities such as childcare provision that could help women manage and succeed in their dual responsibilities at home and at work, and at the same time improve their work performance. Furthermore, lack of female mentors contributed to slower mobility of women to achieve key positions in the company. Colley (2002) stated that male leaders often preferred to assist male than female to leadership positions to reserve those positions as male-dominated.

iii. Personal factor

Vianen and Fischer (2002) argued that the lack of progress among women to top-level positions was due to their tendency to 'self-stereotype'. Women often compare their personal traits as to that of males' leadership styles. This resulted from the socialization process that reinforces traditional concept of gender roles and gender stereotype that females were best suited for the role in household production whereas men's primary role was in work sphere. This created a culture of low self-esteem, lack of confidence, motivation and career aspirations (Leach, 1988). Women also found it difficult to meet the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) due to time constraint resulting from multiple responsibilities thus hindering them from progressing in their career. On the other hand, women who managed to occupy top-level positions had to assume male style of leadership - assertive, decisive, assume more responsibilities and less emotional in their professional life (Murniati, 2012). This caused women to experience struggle in balancing their dual identities.

4. Research methodology

a. Sample

The target respondents of this research were women from each of the five Divisions in Brunei government civil or public sectors. In total, 22 women had been interviewed. Two from Division One, twelve from Division Two, four from Division Three, two from Division Four and two from Division Five. The reason for more respondents from Division Two in this study was that, these respondents were at the level, ready to advance to Division One, the highest position in Brunei government sector yet they appeared to be stuck at Division Two. Thus their perspective on career advancement is significant for this study.

The preferred criteria for respondents in this research included:

- Females working with or retired from Brunei government
- Married and have children
- Age range between 25 to 65 years old

b. Methods of data collection

4.2.1 Primary data

The author conducted fieldwork research in July and August 2017 to obtain in-depth and rich data from each respondent for this research. The fieldwork was carried out in Brunei, within the compound of Brunei government sectors. The author used qualitative method by conducting interviews on women working in Brunei government sectors. Interview is the best method for this research for its strength to capture women's voices firsthand.

Through purposive sampling, the author interviewed a total of 22 women from five Divisions in Brunei government sectors. The author used two sets of questionnaires; one set was specifically designed for management levels, from Division One to Division Three. Another set of questionnaire was designed for operational level, from Division Four to Division Five. The author conducted the interviews using both Malay and English as medium for communication, which later on were translated into English during transcribing process.

4.2.2 Secondary Data

The sources for the secondary data were obtained through texts and documents analysis on Brunei statistics and Brunei government policies mainly from Brunei Government National Development Plan and Government of Brunei Darussalam Statistical Yearbook.

5. Findings and discussion

The interviews with women working with Brunei government's public sector highlighted the importance of having career as part of their life and identity. Their career advancement was indeed influenced by societal, organizational and individual factors. Societal factors have indirect influence to organizational structure. Organizational factors have direct influence to women's career advancement and their career life overall whereas individual factors are influenced by both societal and organizational factors. The findings will be organized in the same pattern as the literature review. The author will first analyze the environment that respondents in this study were exposed to at societal level, then analyze women's organizational environment and lastly, analyze respondents' personal motivation and aspiration.

i. *Societal factors*

The findings of this study revealed that Brunei women were given equal opportunity to participate in the public sphere. This explained the constant increase in the number of female participation in the workforce. Respondents also explained that career life had significant role in shaping their identity. Women in this study did not just want to succeed in their domestic role but also in public sphere. This challenged the traditional structural-functionalist view on social arrangements in terms of gender differences. Structural-functionalist argued that men and women should specialize in two different domains to maximize the function of the society (Hattery, 2001). Men were expected to specialize in the sphere of work hence they should develop skills to help them succeed at work. Whereas women were expected to specialize in home sphere therefore they should develop skills to allow them to succeed at home (ibid). Hence, respondents did not just

want to specialize and develop skills in their roles at home but also wanted to specialize in skills that would allow them to succeed at work simultaneously.

One of the major findings in this study was the role of extended family on respondents' career life. On one hand, family hindered their career progress but on the other, family was also a factor that influenced women to pursue career advancement. Respondents stated that their extended family provided them with assistance and support in terms of childcare and motivation to pursue achievements in their career life. Respondents also stated that their family also empowered and assisted them in challenging patriarchal norm and express their own potential and capabilities in the public sphere. Hence these women displayed high commitment and determination to achieve their goals in their career life.

However, based on the response from the respondents, cultural bias still persisted despite the influence of Western ideologies in the society. According to women in this study, the reason for the low representation of women in leadership positions were first, women's entrance to the workforce was a new phenomenon thus the representation of women at the top still seemed low. Second, Brunei was governed by its national philosophy of Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) that served as a form of social protocol in the society whereby leadership positions were mainly reserved for men thus reinforced the image of Brunei as a patriarchal society. This is evident when it comes to religious events or national events where men were placed in a more privileged position of power and authority in social, cultural and economic context (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos and Kirkby, 2003). In reference to this study, the author observed that respondents accepted this and opted to negotiate with patriarchy rather than to challenge it because not only that patriarchy existed in cultural context but also in Brunei, it had somehow been upheld at formal national ideology. Thus undermining women's involvement and capabilities in the public sphere.

Culture also had strong influence in women's adulthood, decision-making and life choices particularly relative to marriage and career (Gallos, 1989). The findings of this study

revealed that respondents, being born and raised in Malay customs and culture, were socialized to have strong preference towards family rather than career or else they would be subjected to moral sanction while men were still expected to occupy the position of authority. Respondents also noted that society still held high expectation on women's role at home and at work and that they were still expected to be primarily responsible for family welfare and management. Based on author's observation, it is evident here that Brunei Malay culture had strong influence in respondents' decision and life choices that affect their career life. This meant that regardless of the respondents' position in the workplace, they had to fulfill their 'feminine' role in order to fit into the social concept of 'womanhood'.

This affected their career development because women often experience career interruptions to fulfill their family obligations and responsibilities (Schwartz, 1989). Among the Divisions, Division Two's respondents were more likely to experienced role strain because most of them were at a phase of life whereby family required more of their attention and that motherhood was quite a struggle that needed to be constantly managed. Based on the interviews, four respondents from Division Two and one from Division Four mentioned that their family commitment slowed down their career progress. One respondent from Division Two captured the changes and adjustments she had made as she transitioned into the new world of motherhood. She noted that her priorities changed when she had her child. She developed high tendency to put off her pursuit for career advancement to give more room to focus on her child until she grew more independent. The findings also found that when work and family obligations overlapped, respondents had to take time off work, come in late to work late or leave work early, causing them difficulty in completing the standard number of working hours. This created the stereotype that women were seen as not committed to work as well as minimizing their opportunities to take higher positions in their workplace (Anker, 1997). Hence, this study also examined how well the respondents were integrated in their workplaces and how it influenced their career advancement.

ii. *Organizational factors*

Overall, the findings show that the respondents' workplaces have implemented work policies and practices that promote gender equity in recruitment, promotion and training. Respondents from different public sectors added that promotions were based on quality of work performance and merit. Apart from their qualifications, their work experience and skills on the job also facilitated their advancement. Those who managed to get to the highest position in their workplaces stated that hard work, determination, competency on the job and patience had contributed to their success at work and at the same time balance their dual roles.

Although the government had created an empowering environment to encourage women to succeed in their dual roles through access to education as well as organizational policies and practices, the problem identified in this study was that organizational structure was still socially constructed based on male model. The traditional belief that men were better leaders than women still existed in the organization. The subtle and unconscious effect of gender stereotype still influenced people's perception towards having female leaders in the workplace. This meant that cultural bias that favoured men over women at societal level was also reinforced at the organizational level. Furthermore, since promotion to the top-level positions was based on recommendation, there could be bias against females. Women in managerial levels were often subjected to questionable work commitment, leadership capabilities and decision-making quality. Correll, Bernard and Park (2007) argued that working mothers often experienced 'motherhood ceiling' that hinder them from advancing further in their career. They further argued that due to societal and cultural expectations on women's role, women were seen as less committed to their work especially when their family obligations interrupted their time at work thus, their affecting their career advancement. Although respondents in this study rejected the existence of glass ceiling, gender stereotype still lingered within their workplaces. Based on the findings, women's biological function and their gender roles could also influence people's perception towards having females in leadership positions. One respondent from Division One explained the possible reason women were less favoured for leadership

position. She said that women were considered as a liability to an organization when they give birth. The reason was that when a female leader was absent from work for her maternity leaves, it would be detrimental to the organization because the organization could not run without a leader. Hence, according to respondents from Division One, they had to perform masculine traits such as being assertive leader and work hard to retain their value at work and to be recognized for their competency, credibility and capabilities at work.

On the other hand, respondents from lower, operational levels experienced 'sticky floor' phenomenon that hindered them from progressing further in their career. Berheide (1992) argued that women at such levels were most likely to be trapped in low-mobility jobs. This is aligned with the findings in this study. Respondents at the operational levels described the nature of their tasks as less motivating. In addition to that, they were not exposed to decision-making tasks and were often sidelined in decision-making processes in the workplace. Thus their voices were often silenced which again, reinforces the nature of their less motivating and less challenging jobs.

Another problem that had been identified with organizational culture was that majority of the respondents' workplaces lacked the facilities that could help them balance and meet the demands their dual responsibilities mainly on childcare provisions and mothers' or breastfeeding room. Although majority of these women outsourced their household duties to domestic helpers and seek help from others such as family and friends with childcare, respondents, particularly those at lower operational levels, who could not afford to hire domestic helper, were more likely to experience role strain in managing their dual roles. Furthermore, having these facilities could help women improve their work productivity and give their best at work knowing that their children were nearby. Breastfeeding or mothers' room could greatly help women meet the demands of motherhood.

However, regardless of the social and cultural limitations as well as enabling environment created in the workplaces, women's agency had a significant influence in determining

women's career advancement; how they internalized social norm or cultural expectations of their roles and their balance them with their own desire. The next part of this paper will explore the respondents' personal or individual motivation relative to their career.

iii. Personal factor

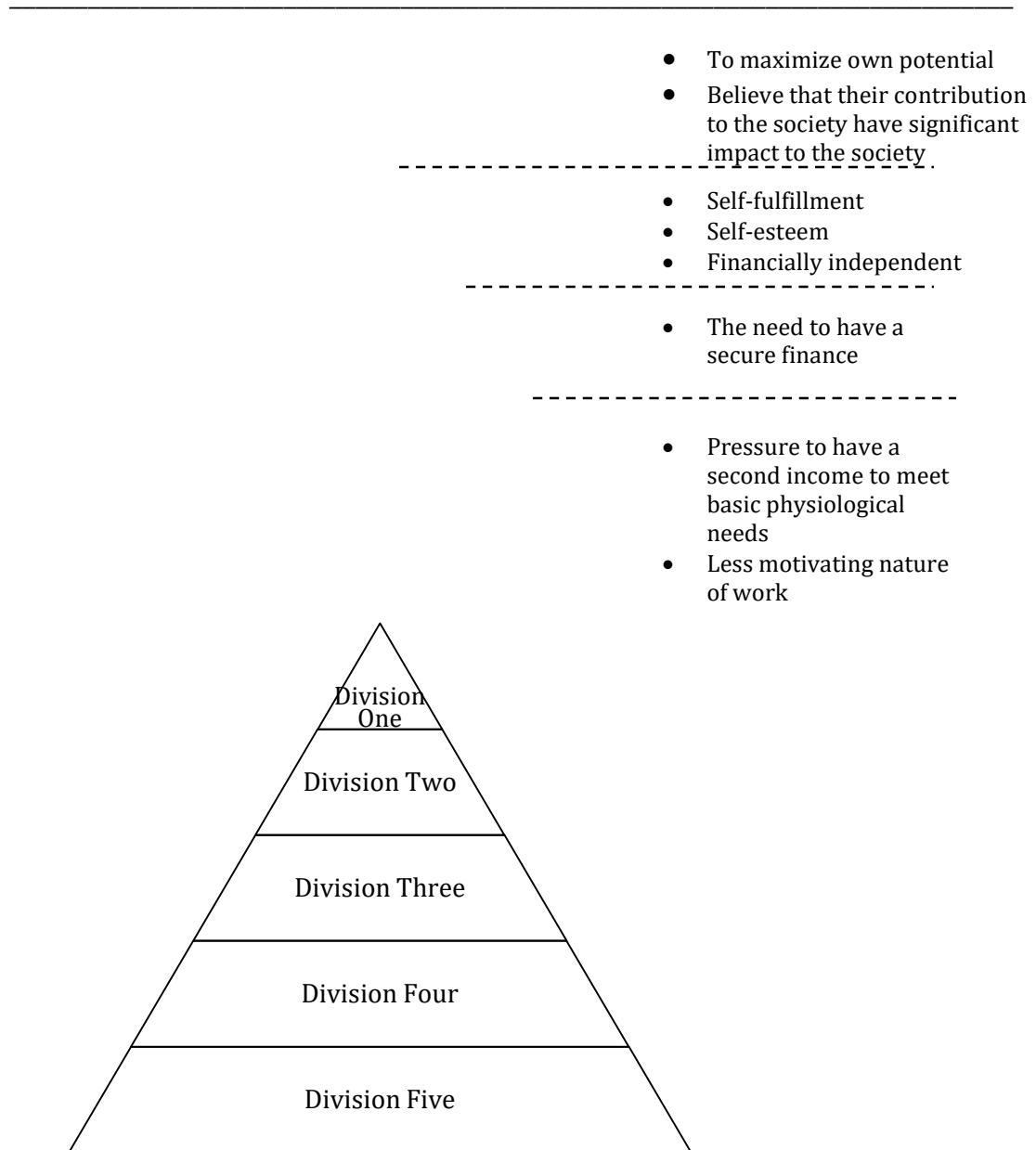
When comparing with women in other Malay Muslim majority country such as Malaysia, the author saw a striking difference that made Brunei women unique. Like any other Malay Muslim countries, Brunei society is highly conservative whereby the importance of Islamic values are placed at the top priority and practiced in every aspect of life; women were expected to perform their traditional roles, socialized to prioritize their family and obey their husband. However, regardless of the restrains that the structure and culture, including family obligations that constantly demand their attention, had on limiting Brunei women's capacity to be involved in the public sphere, Brunei women show high level of independence. Upon observation, the author found a compelling and unique essence among women in this study. These respondents shared the belief that structural and cultural limitations were just a perception. By changing the perception on their roles in public, helped shape their career aspiration. Furthermore, they used their achievements in career as a medium for them to express their independence from traditional roles and that their contribution to the society was more than just reproductive function. Through their achievements in career they could elevate their socioeconomic status to be alongside men. This also influenced a culture of respect towards women in Brunei society. This supports Marie-Sybille de Vienne's (2015) analysis in her book *"Brunei: From the Age of Commerce to the 21st Century"*. Based on her analysis, mass education was a new phenomenon as means to form modern intellectual elites in Brunei. However, the formation of intellectual elites took a surprising outcome whereby the new elites were dominantly females despite the resistance they had met in accessing education in the early days. Today, women's aspiration to succeed in the public sphere continuously persists and workforce is one of the means to express their capabilities and potential.

In reference to this study, the author argues that, women's agency, perception and attitude about work, played a bigger role in influencing their career advancement. Agency, according to Anthony Giddens refers to individual's freedom to act against or provide alternative action towards the constraints that derive from social structure and culture (Loyal and Barnes, 2001). Uppalury and Racherla (2014) also stated that agency allowed modification as well as changes in certain social structure. Agency in this study refers to how women constantly negotiate with the cultural expectations of their roles to allow them to succeed in their career life.

In this study, majority of the respondents believed that career benefitted them greatly because it can fulfill their needs. Thus they displayed high aspiration and determination with regard to their career life except for those in lower Divisions, mainly Division Five. This study revealed that respondents at different Divisions displayed different levels of career aspiration with respondents from Division One displayed higher level of aspiration compared to other respondents. The author used Maslow's pyramid model on human hierarchy of needs theory to understand the differences in their aspiration. Maslow explained that human needs are arranged in five levels of hierarchy of priorities, which differs for every individual. In this study, the priorities that the respondents want to fulfill influence their career decisions and shapes their career aspirations.

The basic layer of Maslow's pyramid for collectivist society such as Brunei is social belonging. The reason is that in a collectivist country, individual's identity is most often associated with their social system (Gambrel and Cianci, 2003). From the author's observation, sense of belonging is important in empowering women who chose to pursue fulfillment outside the private sphere because as more women succeed in their career life, more women will also be aspired to follow their path.

Figure 5.1 Different levels of aspiration for women from different levels of Division in Brunei government sectors



Source: Author's own analysis.

In reference to the pyramid model above, the study revealed that the underlying cause for low career aspiration among respondents from the lower operational Divisions were first, the intention that pulled them into labour market. Their motivation to work was only due to the pressure to have a second income for the family to provide adequate basic physiological needs, without resorting to debt. They also needed to contribute to household income to ensure that the family had extra savings to have better life chances. Second, the nature of work they were exposed to was less motivating. They only received orders from their authorities and were often sidelined from decision-making processes in the organization. Third, while the culture of 'self-stereotype' was less common at the upper managerial levels, it was found to be more common at these lower operational levels. The author found that this resulted from the environment that respondents from lower operational levels grew up in, and the socialization they were constantly exposed to, that reinforced the belief that they were not capable to be leaders. Thus explained their lack of career aspiration.

Respondents from managerial levels had higher needs than those in operational levels. Since their earning was higher, their income covered more than just the basic needs and deprivation from those needs. Respondents from Division Two said that their motivation was to seek security and safety. They needed to at least be financially independent from their husband or family and have freedom to choose the kind of lifestyle they want to live in. The author saw a similar pattern among those in managerial levels, especially in Division Two. Their career aspiration was not just to be recognized for their skills but also relate to their conspicuous consumption. From these respondents' perspectives, they seek progression in career because it was self-fulfilling. It gave them a sense of self-confidence, self-esteem, which is the second highest level in Maslow's pyramid model, and more control in their life when they were able to achieve their career goals. Furthermore, the respondents in Division Two and One had the habit of reflecting their achievements through luxury materials. To these women, it was fulfilling knowing that they could afford to have a lifestyle through their own hard work. Thus motivated them

to seek for more career advancement as long as they their career did not affect their work-life balance.

Division One respondents were among those individuals who achieved self-actualization stage in Maslow's hierarchy. They said that even when they have succeeded in securing key positions in their workplaces, they had the desire to continuously expand their goals and achievements to further maximize their potential. They held the belief that their work performance and contribution have a significant impact in national development as well as to the society as a whole. As a woman, they could offer a different perspective to development and simultaneously they believed that they could be role models for other women to pursue advancement without neglecting their family responsibilities. According to them, although family obligation remained their first priority, they made certain adjustments and utilizing every resources they could including outsourcing their household responsibilities to allow them to succeed in their career life. Furthermore, these respondents were socialized in an empowering environment consisting of highly motivated individuals where they learnt and observed the strategies used by successful women to overcome the perceived barriers in the workplace and pave their way up to be one of them as well. Thus, the socialization process and the environment that the women were exposed to had strong influence in shaping women's career aspiration and how they perceive their limitations.

6. Conclusion

The study draws a major conclusion that women in Brunei show exceptional aspiration towards their career life and family. Even when the structure of the society, its cultural practices, as well as the structure of the organizations whereby subtle gender stereotype still exist that influences workers' perception towards female leaders thus hindering their mobility to the top positions, they did not view these limitations as a barrier that prevent them from having the desire to succeed in their career. Instead, majority of the women held a strong belief that limitations only lie within own perception. Women also use career life as means to negotiate with patriarchy, fulfill their needs and to justify that their significance in the society was not just limited to their

reproductive function. Thus, majority of the women continuously develop the desire to excel in their career regardless of certain social, cultural and organizational constraint. Family also assisted and encouraged women to tolerate the constraints they faced, provide support with childcare and challenge the norm of patriarchy through their career aspiration and expand their potential in the workplace. This shows that even though women are underrepresented at the top-level positions, they continuously develop high aspiration to succeed in their dual roles. With the encouragement, moral and practical assistance from their family, majority women believe that their role and contribution to their career life have a greater impact to national development. Brunei was thus a blessed country to have been filled with highly motivated women who are willing to succeed at their dual roles even at the expense of their time and energy. Hence further improvements in their workplaces would further help women in balancing their dual roles.

7. Recommendations from this research

The existing policies implemented by Brunei government in the workplace have been successful in empowering women in the workforce, which contributed to the number of women outnumbering men in the workplace. Further improvements in practices in the organizations could further help in empowering more women to take up key positions in the workplace thus address the imbalance of male and female in the top-level positions. Improvements that could be made include:

- 1) Enhancing the role of Human Resource Management. Human Resource Management could enhance their roles by providing more visible career planning and briefings that could help women and other employees to plan ahead their career and develop their own goals to achieve their desired positions. Human Resource Management could help women by offering strategies that could help women improve their efficiency, productivity and quality performance at work that could employees achieve their desired career goals. This would also increase their motivation and career aspiration.

- 2) Provide more competency-based leadership and work-life balance training programs. Development programs have known to be efficient in assisting women to develop their skills and improve their self-confidence. These training programs could also help women

build more support network whereby women can observe and learn from one another on strategies that successful women utilized to secure continuous advancement in their career life which led them to occupy key positions in the workplace. In addition, government sectors need to identify the skills that employees at different levels of Division need to improve such as computer and other technology-related skills as well as time management. By identifying the areas that needed improvements would help the overall performance and productivity of the whole department or government sector.

- 3) Establish or improve existing facilities that could significantly improve women's career advancement and work-life balance. Considering the difficulties that some working mothers experienced in juggling their domestic and career responsibilities, majority of respondents seek assistance from their family for childcare in order to help them progress in their career. Women also outsource their household duties by hiring domestic helpers to reduce the heavy workload of their multiple roles. However, this option was not always available for all women because some families could not afford to hire assistance. Thus, providing monitored, safe, quality and affordable child care services in the workplaces would help women focus on their work knowing that their children are in nearby and in good care. Also, to ensure this facility is greatly utilized, dissemination of information and knowledge regarding the quality and efficiency of the childcare services would be important. Providing mothers' room such as a room for breastfeeding in the workplace would also greatly help women in bridging their career and motherhood responsibilities. Thus improve her efficiency in managing dual roles and at the same time positively improve their job satisfaction and productivity.

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