

## CAREER MOTIVATION OF MALAY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: A MALAYSIAN CASE

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### Introduction

Malaysian women have made remarkable advances in the economy over the past three decades, one of which is the participation in entrepreneurship. Specific to Malay women, this phenomenon has been the result of the intensification of Malay's involvement in the various sectors of the economy promoted during the New Economic Policy (NEP) (1971-1990) and post-NEP. There have been affirmative actions targeted to the segment of the population to transform their socio-economic status from a dependent community to one of an enterprising type. The positive changes towards making entrepreneurship as a career option for women have also been due to a new self-awareness and willingness among women to take risks in their economic lives as a result of their advancement in education (Maimunah, 1996). This study aims to examine other socio-economic factors motivating Malay women to choose entrepreneurship as a career.

### Materials and Methods

The data for the study were collected using in-depth interviews to selected women entrepreneurs. The informants were selected from the directory of women entrepreneurs of the Ministry of Entrepreneurs Development based on the following criteria: (1) they had been in entrepreneurship for at least five years; (2) the informants were *bona fide* owners and managers of the enterprise; and (3) the informants represented diverse type of businesses. All interviews were done at their working place. A major question posed in each interview was: "What motivated you to make decision to venture into an entrepreneurship?" An audiotape recorder was used in an interview, lasted for one to two hours. A transcription was done soon after each interview before another interview appointment was executed. Based on the above procedures a total of 16 women entrepreneurs were taken as the study informants. The constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was done for the formation of data categories pertaining to motivations of women's entry into entrepreneurship.

### Results and Discussion

Six major themes were generated relating to women's decision to venture into entrepreneurship. **Family background:** In each interview, the informants initially mentioned their family background that covers their childhood up to present

life. Informants repeatedly mentioned that business, even at a very small scale, was the job of their parents (either father or mother) when they were young. **Previous experience in work and business-related activities:** Informants felt that past experiences in work and business-related activities affected their decisions to venture into entrepreneurship. Informants revealed similar experiences that their past experiences in part-time business as direct selling agents motivated them to venture into their present enterprises. Previous experiences taught them to be opportunistic in business, innovative, adventurous, and brave. **National and religious values:** All informants mentioned that they started entrepreneurship as a result of their awareness that being a Malay in a multi-racial country of Malaysia, they should participate actively in the economy. A religious value commonly mentioned by informants was, "A Muslim must capitalise the fact that nine out of the ten sources of income in life are in business". **Gender awareness:** A consensus was reached that the informants started business as a result of their awareness to increase women's participation, particularly the Malays, in business. **Educational Experiences:** Education influences women's decision to choose entrepreneurship as their career particularly when their fields of specialisation are related to economics, business administration, hotel and catering, marketing and finance. **Opportunity:** The study revealed that opportunity was related to a time when the informants started their business coincident with other important events such as at the end of economic recession in 1988/89, when someone such as parents wanted to hand over business to one of their children, and husbands wanted to find partners in business.

### Conclusions

This analysis showed that women ventured into entrepreneurship were influenced by six inter-related motivational factors. Family background was important since it serves as role models on entrepreneurial interest and desirability. Educational experience was important in motivating women to start a business as career because tertiary education builds the cognitive and affective capacity of women (Maimunah, 1997). National and religious values, and opportunity were two dimensions of motivations peculiar to Malay business community in Malaysia (Maimunah, 1998).

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