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Gender Understanding and Awareness among Employees in Selected Government Agencies: A Qualitative Analysis

Wan Munira Wan Jaafar*, Nobaya Ahmad and Amna Md Noor

Department of Social and Development Sciences, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on understanding the level and awareness of gender equality concepts among civil servants in selected agencies under The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia (MWFCD). The paper is based on the findings made on a part of the study on knowledge of gender issues which was obtained through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) analysis. A total of 38 informants consisting of 15 officers from professional groups and 23 support groups of six government agencies were involved in the data collection process. The group division aimed to look at the differences in their views based on gender dissimilarity. The study found that most informants demonstrated moderate understanding on the meaning of gender but were able to distinguish between the concepts of 'gender' and 'sex' in terms of biological definition and social roles. Understanding level among the informants differs due to certain characteristics such as social background, service grade and the assigned department. In general, informants gave a high credential to the role and equal rights in between the sexes and showed great awareness on gender issues that arose. However, dissatisfaction related to men welfare issue was indicated by the male informants as they perceived that they were not enjoying the same privileges as women. Overall, the women's group informants among both professional and support staff showed a fair awareness of gender equality as compared to the men. In conclusion, informants in the study have demonstrated a good level of understanding and awareness on gender equality issues. However, some improvements in terms of training and practices are needed to ensure substantial execution of gender mainstreaming among all civil servants in Malaysia as recommended by "Corong

Model" introduced by the research at the end of the study.

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian government has formulated and implemented various social policies and programs to fulfil the vision and mission of upholding women status and narrowing gender gap in Malaysia. However, these efforts are expected to face significant challenges if they are not been supported by an effective implementation strategy. The concept of Gender Mainstreaming (GM) is expected to foster the process and practice of gender equality through the effective transformation of the organization. GM was born in the West with the initial purpose to fulfil feminism political agendas. By this, it was introduced to disseminate gender understanding throughout formal organisations in a way to combat gender-biases and injustice towards women (Woodford-Berger, 2004). GM became an international agenda when it was first coined and discussed in a serious manner in the 4th World Women Congress in Beijing in 1995. In 1997 the Report of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (1997) had recognised the concept as:

> *...the process of accessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.* (p. 2).

The definition has clearly stated the importance of GM in ensuring gender equality in every programmes and activities conducted in the participating countries. These include an effort made to strengthen skills and capacities of related institutions by integrating gender perspective in all programs and policies implemented especially those that work closely with the ground society. For instance, officers are required to take gender-related courses and trainings to ensure the familiarity of practices and requirements are being made available when dealing with different sex groups in the field duties.

GM has been implemented in many developed countries such as in the United States of America and in the United Kingdom as well as in some developing countries such as Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. These countries have introduced various approaches and strategies to successfully promote the GM mechanisms. New departments such as Office of the Status of Women (OSW) in Australia was set up to protect the right of the women in the county (Donaghy, 2003). 'Incrementalism'

approach was used as a guideline in gender-related policy and implementation practices in the US (Conway, 2005). In Cambodia, the government has created the Provincial Department of Women's Affairs (PDWA) in a way to support GM in the country (Kyoko, 2016). In Malaysia, GM was first introduced in the 3rd Malaysian Plan (RMK3) 1976-1980 that witnessed high encouragement for women to actively participate in various economic and development programmes. Gender agendas have become more important with the creation of National Women Policy in 1989 (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development [MWFCD], 2009).

The MWFCD was entrusted with the responsibility to promote and raise public perception on the importance of the role of women and family institution in contributing towards the development agenda of the nation. The Ministry is also responsible for the creation and promotion of community and social awareness programmes as well as the progression of the nation's social development objectives aspects especially those relating to social welfare, in line with the "Caring and Developed Society", emphasized in the nation's *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020). Gender agenda is without exemption. Despite various efforts that have been made for gender-awareness competency among the government servants especially those who are performing daily tasks with general society, the level of understanding in terms of gender equality has yet to be identified. This serves as a bigger challenge in a way for GM to be successfully

implemented in the organisation. Gender equality means accepting and valuing equally the differences between women and men and the diverse role play in society. Gender equality included the right to be different. This means taking into account the existing differences among women and men, which are related to class, political opinion, religion, ethnicity, race or sexual orientation. Gender equality means discussing how it is possible to go further, to change the structures in society which contribute to maintaining the unequal power relationships between women and men and to reach a better balance in the various female and male values and priorities.

In Malaysia, efforts towards gender equality especially to living up women's status as compared to their men's counterpart has been seen through various social initiatives at the national and international level. Since the formulation of Malaysian National Woman's Policy in 1989 (MWFCD, 2009), the government has taken active steps to have gender equality aspects incorporated in all areas of policy and at all levels. The introduction of National Cabinet Committee on Gender Equality, Advisory Council for Women (NACW) and National Council on Women and Family Development (NCWFD) in 1987, followed by restructuring of Women's Department to The Department of Women's Development in 2001 were seen as significant means of promoting the role and status of women in Malaysia. In 2005 Malaysia had been the main organizer for Non-aligned Movement (NAM) Ministerial Meeting on the Advancement of Women.

The results of the meeting brought about the creation of NAM Institute for the Empowerment of Women (NIEW) in Malaysia in 2006. Since NIEW, many more initiatives towards promoting GM in Malaysia have been done tremendously. These become a main pillar of the national strategy for co-operation on gender equality in all public sectors in the country.

As suggested by Waal (2006), many GM initiatives were not successfully implemented in certain countries due to inconsistency in the policy implementation and strategies. The general perception has demonstrated relatively weak to moderate level of understanding and awareness of gender equality concept and practice among all citizens. By definition, Giddens (1997), defined gender based on comparative perspective between 'sex' and 'gender'. According to Giddens, sex refers to the physical differences that exist between man and woman while gender focused more on the aspects of gender differences in psychological, social and cultural between the two sexes. Whereas, a previous study by Fulcher and Scott (2007) suggested that gender exhibited different roles between men and women. The influence of society has led to some gender roles and inequality legitimately practiced from time to time. For example, both sexes are physically able to learn to cook and sew, but the public determined that only women need to perform this task. Both men and women are capable of learning related to mechanical and technical but the work is usually given to men according to their natural physical factors.

Some other past studies were focused on the issue of gender equality. Lombardo et al. (2009), for instance, stated that there was no specific definition of gender equality, yet gender equality was discussed according to different scopes and perspectives. The European Union (EU) relates gender equality with injustice in competition; in the 1970s and 1980s the concept of gender equality adopted to address the unemployment problem and in 1990 the concept was promoted to support the knowledge-based economy. Lately, the concept of gender equality extends to oppose discrimination and celebrate diversity.

The top three issues facing gender equality concerning women globally are sexual harassment, sexual violence and physical violence (Ipsos, 2018). A recent report by Ipsos showed that Malaysians agreed with the same issues, with the exception of 'sexualisation of women and girls in the media', which is the third most important equality issue faced by women. Balancing work and caring responsibilities and gender stereotyping are more pressing issues for Malaysians compared to the global audience. Support for pregnant women/new mothers and the lack of women in leadership roles are still prevalent in Malaysia, as these issues are in the top 10 equality issues faced by women in the country. Katharine Davis, Managing Director of Ipsos (Ipsos, 2018) in Malaysia stated:

More and more people now understand the equality issues and the empowerment of women and girls is not just a goal in itself, but a key to sustainable development, economic growth, and peace and security. The study revealed that there is a sense of complacency that we've already come far enough, and it is important for Malaysians to be aware that there is still a long way to go. Where women are fully represented, societies are more peaceful and stable. Standing up for women's rights and development is standing up for the global good. (p. 4).

Recent academic researches on women and gender equality in the development perspective have shown that significant efforts need to be put in place since gender equality is still as of much concern in Malaysia. Several gender equality issues concerning women in Malaysia are in legal and policy aspect (Musa, 2018), women in digital age (Ismail, 2008), women in leadership (Hong et. al., 2018) and women's in rural areas (Aziz et. al., 2018).

Rapoport et al. (2002) stated that gendered organization was not supporting the advancement of women because of their policies was based on traditional gender stereotypes role. The women are often barred from entering areas that are dominated by men and believes that the presence of women would reduce the value of their wages. The involvement of women in careers is seen as adding to the burden of work to men (Padavic & Reskin, 2002). Study of Padavic & Reskin (2002) found that gender stereotypes in the organization led to many women holding lower post in the management. This situation prevented them from advancing themselves to be comparable to men. The women were also seen trying to get involved in work at a higher level and qualification, but they were often facing many obstacles and challenges. Gendered organizational culture and the widespread perception mentioned that women were not qualified to hold high positions in organizations (Padavic & Reskin, 2002).

In less-developed countries, Diane (2005) found that gender awareness was still at a low level. This is because of the lack of respect for women in careers or as housewives. Women are always thought to be illiterate, lack of awareness, lack of knowledge and possesed low self-confidence and skills. Low confidence level causes women not to have power and feel underappreciated. Parveen's study (2007) supported the statement by stating that gender awareness in underdeveloped countries, especially in rural areas such as in Bangladesh was low because inequality and cultural factors were still strong perceptions. The women in Bangladesh maintained their traditional beliefs such as their life was based on the imagination of their parents, husbands and sons.

According to the study by Andersson et al. (2012), cultural differences cause gender awareness among men and women

to be different. This is due to the belief held in every culture which is different to each other. The study also concluded that the level of gender stereotypes among men was higher than the women. This study involved respondents from individuals who were working with many people. The findings showed that male officers behaved more stereotyped if a customer was of the opposite sex. The male stereotype attitude is due to the lack of knowledge on gender issues and feelings of doubt about something that would establish the occurrence of gender equality.

In this regard, a study is needed to review the extent of gender equality understanding among government servants in Malaysia. The findings will chart further action on important strategy to ensure equality among sexes to be embraced in every practice and implementation of government social-related programmes in Malaysia. In addition, the results will contribute to the establishment of basic mechanisms, strategies and action plans for GM to be disseminated among all civil servants.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study primarily used a mixed method approach to gain data from staffs of six government agencies in Peninsular Malaysia. Quantitative research had been done by surveying 2,656 respondents online whilst qualitative research involved two other methods; Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and In-depth Interview. This paper discusses the results based on the qualitative data gathered through FGD from officers

and support staff in 6 selected government agencies (Department of Social Welfare, Department of Women Development, National Population and Family Development Board, Malaysian Social Institute, NAM Institute for Empowerment Women Malaysia and National Welfare Foundation) under the Ministry of Women, Family and Social Development Malaysia.

Samples for FGD informants were obtained randomly from two major groups namely the Management and Professional staffs (Grade 41- 48) and Support staff (Grade 17-32). Sampling process was done based on the mentioned grade and sex characteristics of the informants. Invitations were sent to the respective departments and the appointment was based on voluntary participation or nomination by the Head of Department. Table 1 showed the number of informants for two service categories with three different sessions (Male, Female and Mixed) for each category.

For this study, a set of FGD guidelines known as FGD protocol was used as a research tool in order to obtain the necessary data. Questions for FGD were formulated based on the objectives and past researches. Ethically, informants were given a consent form to ensure that they were willing to take part in the research. They were convinced of the anonymity and had been informed that all information would be used only for research purposes.

The analysis of data commenced as soon as the FGD was completed. Data analysis was done based on an analysis of FGD verbatim theme (thematic analysis).

Table 1

Actual number of FGD informants

Group	Session	Informants
Grade 41-48 (Management and Professional Staffs)	Male (PL)	6
	Female (PW)	5
	Mixed (PC)	4
Grade 17-32 (Support Staffs)	Male (SL)	10
	Female (SW)	7
	Mixed (SC)	6
TOTAL		38

The flexible nature of thematic analysis allowed the researcher to determine themes and prevalence in a number of ways. However, based upon the research direction and needs, the analysis of data had been done with particular considerations. As the research orientation tended to be more deductive than inductive, the themes or patterns within data were identified in a theoretical or deductive or "top down" approach. In brief, a "theoretical" thematic analysis used in this research was driven by selected theoretical or analytic interest in the research areas which are: understanding and awareness of gender (Buveni, 1999). Therefore, the nature of theoretical thematic analysis is more explicitly analyst-driven. Furthermore this form of analysis tends to provide less of a rich description of the data overall, but a more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data which are useful to help answer the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Understanding of Gender

Generally, informants have a better understanding on the general concept of gender. This can be seen from the answers provided by the informants, especially from the Management and Professional staffs. Most informants stated that gender was related to the roles played by men and women.

> *"Gender related to men and women ... but also related to the role." (PL)*
> *"Gender is related to ... like male and female." (PW)*
> *"The role of men and women, no difference." (PW)*
> *"It used to be gender differences, but not it is irrelevant." (PC)*

However, understanding the term gender from the views of Support staffs is more focused on biological characteristics of the male and female.

> *"Gender is sexes. Sexes and matters connected therewith." (SL)*
> *"Gender is sexes. Differentiate between men and women." (SW).*

This result was expected since most Management and Professional staff under the Ministry have been exposed to many courses and workshops related to gender. Hence, the officers have a better understanding compared to the support staff. This is expected since the more common understanding on the difference between gender and sex as a term is similar to the understanding of the support staff.

Gender Awareness

Awareness on gender issue has been evaluated based on four dimensions namely; (i) awareness of identification of roles and rights, (ii) dissatisfaction, (iii) discrimination issue and, (iv) gender equality (Buvenic', 1999). All four components were related to personal opinion of individuals or groups and perceptions towards their participation in social and professional contexts.

Identification of Roles and Rights. Identification of role and rights of informants focuses on the views of social roles men and women embraced in their daily life activities. Attitude towards gender roles is now more egalitarian (Gurin, 1985), meaning society is more favourable towards women working outside the home, combining jobs with motherhood and participating in the public arena such as politics. This witnesses the impressive changes of family life and the role of women and men within and outside the family over the past 30 years especially in the Western context. The questions posed to the respondents in this research were on the differences or similarities that existed between the sexes particularly in performing daily tasks and how they personally accepted the situation. Acceptance role and equal rights between the sexes show strong awareness on gender issues. For instance, men who feel that women can also do men's work are viewed as embracing high gender awareness.

The Role of Gender. The analysis found that female informants showed an attitude of 'proud' achievement and status. They viewed women's position in both private and government sectors today as equivalent to men; though previously it had been regarded as highly dominated by men. The result indicated that women participants from both Professional and Support groups were sensible to their identification of roles and rights in both employment and social sectors.

> *"Most people assume the top management is held by men. I once involved in the research which found that achievement of women in top management is much higher."* (PW)

> *"Past and present had huge difference. Last time the job of a mother are babysitting and cooking. Dad worked outside. Now husband and wife asked for equality. There are husbands became housewives, while the wives out for work. Nowadays, things become the same. A lot of professionals such as architect and engineer are women. There are also things that women*

can do better, while men don't."
(SW)

"30% of the women make decisions at the highest level." (PW)

"Women play several roles in social sector." (PC)

Management team members of our agency are mostly women. Directors are women, top decision makers are mostly women." (PW)

Male informants admitted that there were some changes that occured in the role of both genders. Nowadays, it is normal for men to replace women's role in doing domestic works such as babysitting. Generally, there was agreement made from both sides (men and women) regarding the equal status and roles of both genders.

Role Identification. Identification of role reflects recognition of shared values and interests that turns a category into a collectivity. For example, solidarity theories stress the motivational importance of members' awareness of common feelings, value and interests. When members share a strong identity and have strong bonds to others in the category, recruitment, mobilization and organization are more easily achieved. The analysis indicated that apart from showing greater awareness on gender roles, the informants also shared the same view about identification of roles played by different sexes. Although most of the participants agreed that women were increasingly dominating the role

that was previously performed by men, they suggested that women were less suited to certain men's position such as chairing an organization. The informants argued that women were more emotional, not professional, vengeful, demanding and at times shrewish. In contrast, the informants believed that men were more charismatic, visionary, not emotional, give clear instructions and are more relax. These views were also supported by women informants from both Professional and Support staffs. They perpetually associated the role of men as a leader from the Islamic viewpoint.

"Global gender perception thinks that women are more emotional." (PL)

"Women have their limitations." (PW)

"Generally, women are emotional" (SL)

"It varies. Age factor is also important. The male boss can settle problem himself. I prefer a male boss." (SW)

"Female boss: more structured, follow the rules, picky." (PL)

"Women are a regular, orderly, particular, sometimes up to trouble us." (PL)

"Women care more about jobs, but they cannot handle stress." (PL)

"Men are not emotionally and give clear instructions." (PL)

"Men are more relaxed." (PL)

"As for the position of Prime Minister, women are better to be a deputy or spine only." (PW)

"Women still have to think about family, while men not really think about it." (PW)

"Maybe if a woman works as the Deputy Minister, then will be check-and-balance." (PW)

"If it involves the community, men will be better. They are more thoughtful. "(PW)

"Back to the Islamic faith. But at some levels, women are still appropriate, only the highest position such as Prime Minister is better to be held by men."(PW)

"Women are usually pushy and vindictive." (SL)

"I have experienced the same problem with the informant before. Female boss is pushy. "(SL)

"I agree that women like to revenge. I always stay back but my merit still been deducted. It stems from the conflicts of the past." (SL)

"If there is a conflict or a fight with the male boss ever in the past, the problem will go away (meaning to say won't bring old problems to the future)." (SL)

"Usually women take care of all the objects; while men are ready to promise, do not bother." (SW)

Overall the results showed a promising sign in gender awareness among all informant despite of the different positions they held in the respective organizations. Nevertheless one can relate the overall analysis with a rather moderate perception on gender understanding. This in line with Diane (2005) findings that suggested gender awareness was still low especially amongst society in developing countries. Diane created an assumption that this was due to lack of respect and appreciation to the women. Society perceives women as weak creature, less educated and accumulate only least skills. Cultural and traditional beliefs have bound women in many developing regions into the lowest power. Women were seen defeated by their men counterpart.

Dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is a component associated with individual's feelings and perceptions about their membership in a social category. Dissatisfaction or discontent of one individual and/or group reflects the central concern of relative deprivation theories. For instance, group consciousness (e.g. women's group) and the emergence of collective action relate to the inter-category or intergroup connections that people make with those of dissimilar status or between those in their category and an outgroup (e.g. men's group).

The analysis indicated significant issues on dissatisfaction that had been voiced out by focus group informants from both Professional and Support staffs; men and women. For instance, there was an intense discussion on the issue of men who were acclaimed to have less privileged as compared to women. Almost all informants

were aware on the attention that needs to be given to women in Malaysia, particularly the unfortunate groups such as–single mothers. Nevertheless, informants from the male Professional group (PL) and mixed Professional groups (PC) imposed a different point of view. PL group found that the over attention given to unfortunate women's group would cause the men's counterpart to be fully ignored. The informants suggested that equal attention needed to be given to men especially a single father who also faced the same difficulties in managing children and household while they were struggling with works and emotional distract.

> *"More attention should be given to men who left behind." (PC)*
> *"Welfare workers always question on the ability of single fathers. For example, why they should asked for help? They can always go for work." (PC)*
> *"So when such things happen, the single father is not interested to apply anymore due to his own egos." (PC)*

Conversely, PC group insisted that the men's negative attitude hindered them from opulence of initiatives and welfare programmes that had been introduced by the welfare department. They argued that aids were opened to all and eligibility was normally based on individual's application. Single father is in the list of B40 risky group. Unfortunately, only few applications had been received from this risky group thus far. This has contributed to a significant increase in the statistics of women correspondingly.

> *"It's not a gender issue but the issue of who made the request." (PC)*
> *"It's always depending on the application." (PC)*
> *"More women apply for it." (PC)*
> *"Follow the eligibility of the application." (PC)*
> *"It is up to the individuals to apply." (PC)*
> *"That's not the issue of single mothers." (PC)*

The results of the current study echoed a previous study conducted by Andersson et al. (2012). Andersson suggested that culture had made significant differences in gender awareness between men and women. Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are crafted in the family, society and culture. It also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, attitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender roles and expectations are learnt. They can change over time and they vary within and between cultures. The study also concluded that male stereotype towards gender was relatively higher as compared to female. Men are found to be more sceptical than women especially in making a right decision. Based on these arguments, it is suggested that issue of dissatisfaction among informants in the current research was not truly immersed in the society as a whole but it was much influenced by stereotype attitude held by

many men towards government initiatives and programmes which was said to favour only women in the society.

Discrimination. The feelings of being discriminated emerge by the way members of a group (e.g. women) appraises the legitimacy of disparities. Disparity will not be experienced as deprivation unless members believe it springs from illegitimate forces. Group disparities may be considered fair and just if they are believed to develop legitimately from the inadequacies of individual category members. The same disparities will be judged unjust if they are believed to result from structural barriers that hold back category members.

Views on discrimination have been voiced out by more male Professionals (PL) as compared to the other groups. In general, the PL viewed both sexes; men and women as having an equal opportunities to be discriminated. However, none of discrimination issues had been associated with women. On the other hand, PL raises the issue of discrimination against men which secure only less attention in society. PL argued that domestic abuse also occurred among husbands. However, there was no official data about the affirmation which led to unawareness in the society. PL also highlighted the issue of female student ratio that was said to be much higher than male students in local universities as a result of positive discrimination. This influenced the rate of unemployment among men increased from time to time.

"Discrimination among gender has become normal." (PL)

"Men are now being discriminated instead." (PL)

"Male and female has equal chances." (PL)

"As compared to women, there is no statistic/data that showing abuse of men as it is lack of reports made." (PL)

"The ratio of the university Male (L): Female (P) = 30: 70." (PL)

"Engineering course: L: P = 40: 60." (PL)

"Discrimination still happening since it has become norms." (PL)

"Based on the unemployment figure, more men are unemployed as compared to women." (PL)

PC group whom mostly women informants have contested on the claim of discrimination at work. They viewed the division of tasks and work requirements for different sexes were executed based on their suitability to perform the task. They argued that there was no issue of discrimination but it was all depending on the cordial factor that emerged between the superior and co-workers irrespective of whether they were men or women.

The result indicated an opposite findings of many previous researches. Studies by Rapoport et al. (2002) and Padavic and Reskin (2002) for instance suggested that discrimination always occurred among

women as compared to their men counterpart in various social settings especially in a workplace. Gender stereotype has made women to hold only a low position in an organization. They are discriminated by receiving a low wage despite of carrying an equal task by the men co-workers. Conversely, new findings as revealed in the study indicated a bright sight in women progress in developing country such as Malaysia. However, careful analysis should be taken into account as male discrimination as suggested in the research might suggest a new ordeal of gender inequality across society.

Gender Equality. 'Gender gap' can be referred to the gap that exists between the sexes in access to social and economic opportunities. Schooling, participation in politics and works and earnings can be used to measure women's achievements in comparison with men's towards achieving 'gender equality'. There are biological as well as social differences between the sexes, but in the context, 'gender' refers to the latter. Biological differences between the sexes sometimes favour women, other times men. Gender differences instead generally favour men because they are the result of women's disadvantaged position in society (Buvenic', 1999). Achieving equality between women and men was one of the ten commitments agreed to by the heads of state at the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) and is a main priority of the international women's movement especially in developing countries where

the gaps are the largest and the challenges the greatest.

Gender Equality in General. Assessment on gender equality in this research based on informants' views on the role and equal rights between the sexes showed an excessive awareness of gender equality. Neither men nor women, both sexes are in favour of equal treatment whenever they need it. The view of the importance of gender equality received different responses from the three groups of informants; Professional women group (PW), Support women group (SW) and Support male group (SL). The analysis indicated that informants of PW and SW showed a better awareness of gender equality than the SL counterparts. PW and SW see some aspects of the job, for instance, job that involved physical, domestic responsibilities and decision-making can be done by both genders. However, the views from SL informants suggested that the characteristics of traditional gender role have led to power and privilege of men as compared to women. For example, SL asserted that the task of man is to protect women. In addition, informants of SL group asserted that the decision must be made by men with the support of women. Obviously, SL informants demonstrated the nature of favourable sexist and found to have less awareness on the importance of gender equality between men and women.

> *"In terms of employment, men do manual labour works, women do not. But in fact women can also do. However, it is also considered physical." (PW)*

"Nowadays, there is no gap between men and women. Women can do what men do." (SW)

"In the context of marriage, men are protecting women." (SL)

"He became head of the family, but women can also take part in the decision. Perception, in fact equality should be practiced. "(PW)

"There are differences between men and women. The general role is different. But now there is equality between men and women. Each of them can carry the same responsibility. "(SW)

"The decision of men need some view from the women." (SL)

The reason why this analysis gained rather varied perceptions was due to the nature of the concept itself. Lombardo et al. (2009) suggested that there was no explicit definition of gender equality. Rather, it had been discussed based on different scopes and needs. For example, in 1960s, the European Union (EU) had associated the notion of gender equality with unfairness in economic competition. In 1970s and 1980s, the concept had been used to eradicate unemployment problem and in 1990s it had been promoted as a catalyst to support a knowledge-based economy. Just recently, the concept has been used to work against discrimination and to celebrate diversity amongst citizens. Various understanding on the principle of the concept may influence the way how people think and use it in different situations. Continuous exposure

to the concept should be made available to the people. In Malaysia, educating gender equality amongst the citizens might be taken placed in a manner of culture and religion since people are still strongly in tacked with everyday roles of men and women, mores and norms.

Equality in Terms of Programs, Policies and Application of Social Gender. Analysis on gender equality awareness was conducted on a selected special issue of state aid. The issue of state aid received criticism from both the male representatives of Professional groups (PL) and both Support groups, male and female (SL, SW). Analysis indicated that bias occurred in most programs, policies and application conducted by the state welfare agencies. In other words, the authorities were seen as failing to recognize difficulties experienced by the male group in Malaysia. PL had raised the issue of stigma and society's perceptions which inherently eluded the men from participating in the program. The absence of official statistical data on problems related to this group had alienated them in the written policy. Informants of SL suggested that a comprehensive study needed to be conducted on special issue of men in Malaysia. They argued that not all men were capable in managing the turmoil of economic downturns and domestic problems and thus, needed helps. For single father, assistance in managing children while they are away for work is more necessary than financial aid. Informants of SW echoed by

stating that women should be assisted but men cannot be left behind in the context of provision of assistance and protection.

> *"There are no statistics. Therefore, any program for the single fathers could not be executed because there is no strong data to support the issue." (PL)*

> *"Have to give help. Not all the men are able to face problems, especially health problems." (SL)*

> *"Just look at the story, sometimes men also left behind, not only women." (SW)*

> *"By law it is appropriate." (PL)*

> *"The perception of society kills their confident." (PL)*

> *"Support for single parents should not only be focusing on the economy, but on all aspects (health, liability)." (SL)*

> *"To care for children who work." (SL)*

> *"Help should be given to single fathers because not all men are capable." (SL)*

> *"To make a living, men is holding the post as head of the family regardless of working or not. Most housewives do not have income." (SW)*

> *"We have to struggle equally, but how about men?" (SW)*

The results showed a rather confusing assumption among all informant groups since equality issues in most government programmes and initiatives not only exist in Malaysia but also in many other countries in the world. Efforts in achieving gender equality through national policies and programmes were not new. It had literally became one of ten commitments that had been agreed by the national leaders all over the globe in the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) in 1995. Gender gap has been recognized as main hurdle to achieve progressive development in many developing countries especially the poor. Inequality issues involving women are seen to exist in almost sectors including education, political participation, work force and social status (Buvinic', 1999). Therefore, gender equality concept has been introduced especially to uplift the status of women in the society and to eradicate the gap between men and women in all aspects of social, economic and political development. The spirit has resulted many programmes were more intended to help women as compared to men. However this is not the intention to many governments since they have a valid data and justifications to favour women rather than men in many ways.

Policy Recommendations

Overall analysis indicated that gender understanding and awareness among employees in selected government agencies are still at the moderate level. Hannan (2000) suggested that a number of serious of misconception and lack of understanding around basic concepts such as 'gender' and 'gender equality' had developed among

staff in many organizations. These hamper effective implementation of the strategy to enhance adequate implementation such as gender mainstreaming in the organization. Nevertheless, the research has suggested three (3) strategies in a way to implementing suitable gender mainstreaming approach to the government servants in Malaysia as can be seen in the "*Corong* Model" in Figure 1. *Corong* Model implies basic initiatives to help increase gender understanding and awareness among government staffs. The three initiatives can be briefly describe as 1) to explain the definition of gender mainstreaming (GM) in Malaysian context; 2) to establish gender focal point (GFP) and 3) to strengthening all existing programmes and activities related to gender to all staffs through the role of GFP. Overall, GFP plays an important role in influencing those in decision-making positions to take gender experts and gender equality and women's empowerment seriously. The success of GFP's is key to making progress in this regard. It is hoped that by implementing the three strategies, understanding and awareness of gender among government servants in Malaysia will be increased towards a better service to the whole society.

CONCLUSION

Based on previous studies, the concept of gender has been variedly interpreted by different groups of societies. Because men and women perform different roles, they may have different experiences, knowledge, talents and needs. Gender analysis as done by this research helps examine women's and men's specific understanding and awareness about the world they are living in. By studying those who are working in the social-oriented organization such as MWFCD, the analysis explores these differences so policies, programmes and projects can identify and meet the different needs of men and women. Throughout the study, it is concluded that government servants who had participated in the research possessed a moderate level of understanding and awareness on gender issues. Therefore, it is suggested that more training and practical gender-related courses are needed in a way to accomplish gender mainstreaming practice
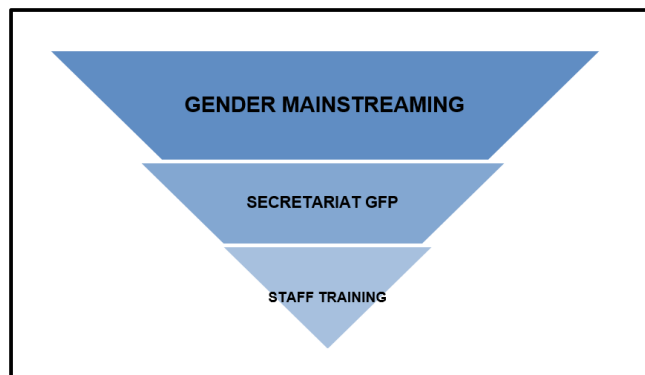

Figure 1. Corong Model

among all civil servants in the organization. The introduction of 'Model Corong' as a GM framework is expected to help the management team to carefully strategies the way of implementing suitable activities and programmes as well as to facilitate strategic use of distinctive knowledge and skills possessed by women and men as well the members of the organization in order to give better services to the society as a whole.

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