



WOMEN AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM:  
A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN WORKING IN BRUNEI  
GOVERNMENT SECTORS

BY

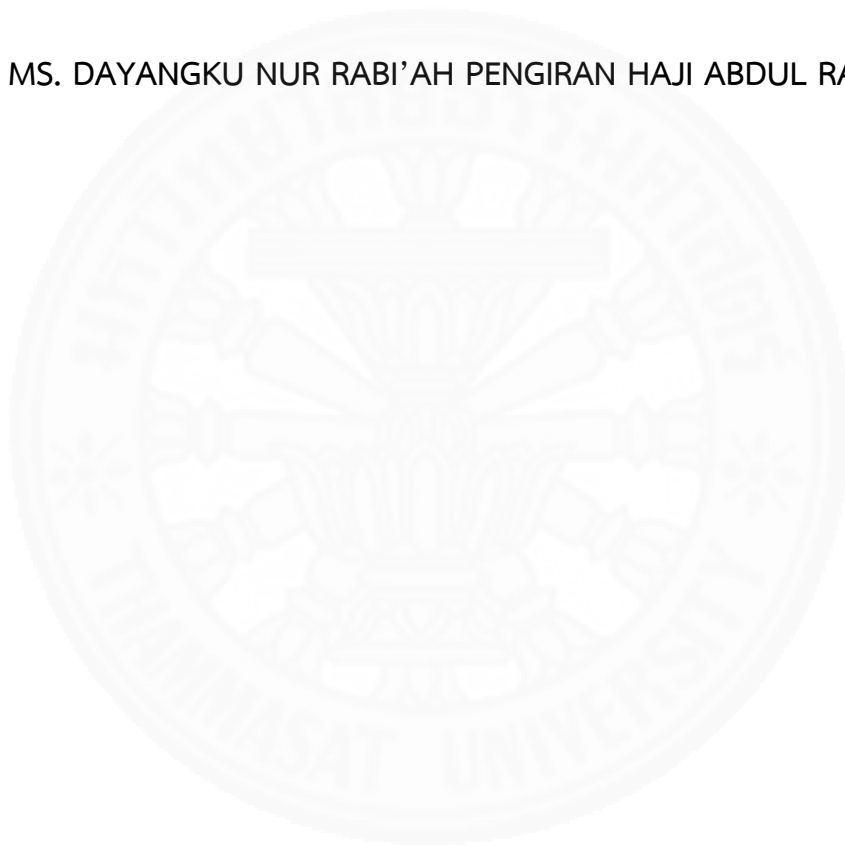
MS. DAYANGKU NUR RABI'AH PENGIRAN HAJI ABDUL RAHMAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
(ASIA PACIFIC STUDIES)  
COLLEGE OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES  
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2017  
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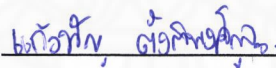
ENTITLED

WOMEN AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM;  
A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN WORKING IN BRUNEI GOVERNMENT SECTORS

was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts (Asia-Pacific Studies)

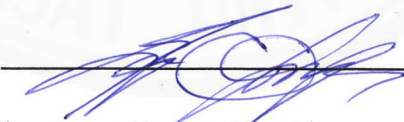
on 4 January, 2018

Chairman



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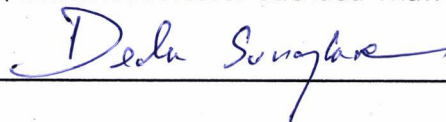
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Thesis Title	WOMEN AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN WORKING IN BRUNEI GOVERNMENT SECTORS
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Academic Year	2017

## 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 aim of this research was to show that further improvements were 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

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Syukur Alhamdulillah* to first and foremost Allah S.W.T. The Almighty for the strength, patience, motivation, health, ideas and passion He has blessed upon me throughout my journey in completing this thesis and throughout my journey in completing my Master's Degree.

Secondly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my kind and respectable Advisor Dr. Kosum Omphornuwat, Director of MA Program in Women, Gender and Sexuality who has always been supportive and patience with my progress. I am forever grateful and honored to be under her supervision and able to exchange ideas. Her expertise, excellent guidance, endless and inspiring effort has significantly made this thesis journey a success and meaningful. In addition, I would also like to extend my thank you to my Chairwoman, Assistant Professor Dr. Kaewkwan Tangtipongkul and my committee, Assistant Professor Suchada Thaweedit for their advise and guidance in enhancing the quality of this thesis.

Thirdly, to my key informants from Brunei government sectors who provided this thesis with valuable information. Their cooperation and willingness to spare their time for interview is highly appreciated. Without them, this thesis would not be able to be completed.

Fourthly, I would like to thank the Founder and Director of Master of Arts in Asia-Pacific Studies (MAPS) program of Thammasat University, Dr. Suphat Supachalasai, as well as professors of MAPS for choosing me as one of Thammasat University's scholarship recipient and to be part of this program. It has been a great honor to study under experts in Asia-Pacific region. MAPS program has equipped me with valuable knowledge, self-enrichment and the drive to continuously challenge and enhance my competencies. I would also like to thank MAPS staffs for making the learning process run smoothly.

Fifthly, to my MAPS 2016/2017 comrades for the wonderful journey we venture together through ups and downs. Despite of our contrasting personalities and background, we have strong teamwork and support system, making our learning

experience more interesting. Through these incredible and highly motivated individuals, I learn valuable life lessons as well as academics.

Last but not least, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the backbone of my success, my family. To the two individuals whom I would like to dedicate my whole achievements to, my father, Pg. Haji Abdul Rahman bin Pg. Haji Aliuddin and to my mother, Hajah Aisah binti Jikeria for their endless support and motivation to empower me to complete my Master's program. It has been through their inspiration, constant emphasis on the importance of knowledge and wisdom that has driven me to achieve this far. Without them, this would not have been possible. To my siblings, Dk. Nur Rafidah, Dk. Nur Razanah and Dk. Nur Radhiah, let's continue striving for success, never give up on hopes and dreams and let's do whatever it takes make our parents proud! To my beloved nephews, Mohamad Abdul Raziq and Mohamad Abdul Raqeeb, I pray that you will both grow up with wisdom, kindness, in health and success in *dunia* and *akhirat*. To my late grandparents who raised their children to be inspiring and highly responsible individuals have significantly shaped my aspiration to write this thesis thus completing my Master's program. And to the person who always believed in me more than I do, Mohammad Azeem Shah, thank you for accompanying me throughout my studies, supplying me with inspiring words, belief and patience. It has been through your company and endless encouragement that I managed to go through obstacles and be where I am today.

“Limitations only lie within one's own perception.”

Ms. Dayangku Nur Rabi'ah Pengiran Haji Abdul Rahman

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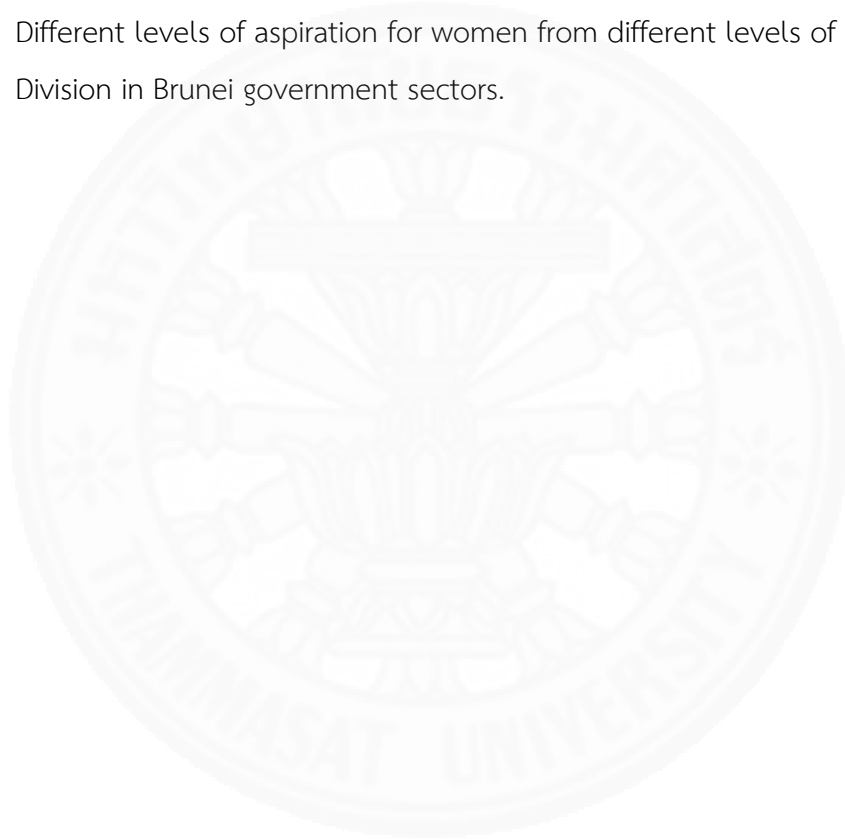
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

Participation of women in the global workforce has increased bringing huge economic and social changes. Brunei has not been exempted from this phenomenon.

Since the discovery of major offshore oil reserves in the early 1960s, Brunei experienced economic bloom as a result of revenue from oil and gas sector (Duraman, 2003). The government was able to increase and expand its welfare. The government was able to provide free education for all young children and to ensure the people enjoy equal share of the revenue, the government provided free healthcare for the locals. Education was made more accessible and equally available to both male and female. Currently, due to Brunei government's recent economic policy aiming to diversify its economy to reduce reliance on oil and gas sectors together with the expansion of tertiary sectors, the demand for more efficient and productive workforce is increasing more than ever.

The roles and contributions of women to the economy and national development became increasingly significant. Today women make up of half of Brunei's population. As women began to become more educated, the government discovered that women are a potential valuable resource to the development of economy and nation building (Borneo Bulletin, 2015).

On the other hand, as women began to focus on getting employed in formal sector, this caused a shift in 'gender order' (Connell, 1987) as a result of the changes in women's roles from being isolated in the household production to inclusion into the public sphere. As stated by Holter (1971), changes in the requirements of economic system caused shifts in sex roles or changes in the status of women. As the economy continues to grow, women need to achieve balance between work and life. Despite of their significant contributions in the economy, they remain the vital backbone of the family. Thus the government of Brunei has been

trying to accommodate women's dual roles through various action plans such as strengthening family institution, balancing work and family, economy, women's legal right, access to healthcare and education and mechanisms to empower women and simultaneously encourage them to pursue career advancement (Borneo Bulletin, 2016).

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

Until now, the government has been successful in giving equal access and opportunities in the government sector thanks to the late Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III's long-lasting education system that emphasized on the equal access and opportunities for male and female to pursue higher education.

Table 1.1 Comparison between males and females in school enrollments

Level of Education and Sex	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Pre-Primary</b>	<b>13, 053</b>	<b>13, 095</b>	<b>13, 034</b>	<b>13, 376</b>	<b>13, 301</b>
Male	6, 620	6, 718	6, 624	6, 871	6, 805
Female	6, 433	6, 377	6, 410	6, 505	6, 496
<b>Primary</b>	<b>43, 767</b>	<b>42, 753</b>	<b>42, 090</b>	<b>41, 078</b>	<b>40, 397</b>
Male	22, 594	22, 066	21, 649	21, 093	20, 808
Female	21, 173	20, 687	20, 441	19, 985	19, 589
<b>Secondary</b>	<b>40, 334</b>	<b>40, 025</b>	<b>38, 329</b>	<b>37, 769</b>	<b>36, 677</b>
Male	21, 342	21, 352	20, 297	19, 922	19, 112
Female	18, 992	18, 673	18, 032	17, 847	17, 565
<b>Sixth Form</b>	<b>5, 576</b>	<b>6, 407</b>	<b>6, 548</b>	<b>5, 618</b>	<b>5, 058</b>
Male	2, 342	2, 640	2, 659	2, 358	2, 180
Female	3, 234	3, 767	3, 889	3, 260	2, 878
<b>Technical/ Vocational</b>	<b>4, 006</b>	<b>5, 964</b>	<b>6, 693</b>	<b>5, 622</b>	<b>5, 514</b>
Male	2, 195	3, 005	3, 546	3, 141	3, 114
Female	1, 811	2, 959	3, 147	2, 481	2, 400
<b>Tertiary</b>	<b>7, 136</b>	<b>9, 042</b>	<b>9, 561</b>	<b>12, 705</b>	<b>13, 040</b>
Male	2, 769	3, 499	3, 636	5, 040	5, 253
Female	4, 367	5, 543	5, 925	7, 665	7, 787
<b>Total</b>	<b>113, 872</b>	<b>117, 286</b>	<b>116, 255</b>	<b>116, 168</b>	<b>113, 987</b>
<b>Male</b>	<b>57, 862</b>	<b>59, 280</b>	<b>58, 411</b>	<b>58, 425</b>	<b>57, 272</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>56, 010</b>	<b>58, 006</b>	<b>57, 844</b>	<b>57, 743</b>	<b>56, 715</b>

Source: Brunei Darussalam Statistical Yearbook 2016



Over the decade, Brunei has witnessed a phenomenon whereby female students have outnumbered male students in education and continues to increase as shown in the table above. This resulted to increased female participation in the workforce, especially in the formal sector particularly the civil service. Based on women's higher level of achievement and their motivation to invest more in their human capital market, it is assumed that women would outnumber men in the middle management level and eventually more women would occupy the top level positions. However in reality, this is not the case. Majority of educated women remained mostly at the middle management while the top-level positions remained dominated by men.

Table 1.2 Ratio of male and female participation in the workforce according to different Divisions

	Division	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Division I <i>(Heads of Departments/ Sectors)</i>	Division I	<b>941</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>906</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>1, 004</b>
	Male	668	625	629	648	684
	Female	273	261	277	288	320
Division II <i>(Senior officers)</i>	Division II	<b>9, 588</b>	<b>9, 531</b>	<b>9, 792</b>	<b>10, 033</b>	<b>10, 352</b>
	Male	3, 812	3, 695	3, 728	3, 737	3, 831
	Female	5, 776	5, 836	6, 064	6, 296	6, 521
Division III <i>(Supervisory)</i>	Division III	<b>11, 693</b>	<b>11, 409</b>	<b>11, 665</b>	<b>11, 771</b>	<b>12, 112</b>
	Male	5, 035	4, 820	4, 828	4, 797	4, 908
	Female	6, 658	6, 589	6, 837	6, 974	7, 204
Division IV <i>Clerical</i>	Division IV	<b>12, 535</b>	<b>12, 255</b>	<b>12, 585</b>	<b>12, 729</b>	<b>12, 638</b>
	Male	6, 002	5, 802	5, 904	5, 908	5, 787
	Female	6, 533	6, 453	6, 681	6, 821	6, 851
Division V <i>(Operators)</i>	Division V	<b>14, 141</b>	<b>14, 064</b>	<b>14, 558</b>	<b>14, 646</b>	<b>14, 631</b>
	Male	8, 473	8, 378	8, 675	8, 630	8, 603
	Female	5, 668	5, 686	5, 883	6, 016	6, 028
	<b>Total</b>	<b>48, 898</b>	<b>48, 145</b>	<b>49, 506</b>	<b>50, 115</b>	<b>50, 737</b>
	Male	23, 990	23, 320	23, 764	23, 720	23, 813
	Female	24, 908	24, 825	25, 742	26, 395	26, 924

Source: Brunei Darussalam Statistical Yearbook 2016

Based on the table above, majority of the Divisions<sup>1</sup> in Brunei government sector have been accessible and dominated by women. However, according to 2015 statistics, the highest level that majority of the educated female could occupy was the Division II whereas, only a few occupied the Division I (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2016). In Division I, women only occupied 31.9 per cent (320 females) compared to 68.1 per cent (684 males) of the positions (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2016).

### 1.3 Rationale of Study

Despite the large number of women attaining higher education and occupying the middle management level, the number of females in Division I remain low when in other Divisions they managed to outnumber the males. Kalkowski and Fritz (2004) argued that this phenomenon is influenced by work-life conflict as well as society's perception on women in leadership position.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The main research question for this paper is:

1. What are the factors that facilitate and hinder women's career advancement?
2. What further improvements are needed to promote women's career advancement?

---

<sup>1</sup> Brunei government Civil Service are divided into five main divisions,  
Division I - Heads of Department/Sections  
Division II - Senior Officers  
Division III - Supervisory  
Division IV - Clerical  
Division V - Operators

## 1.5 Research Objectives

This paper aims to explore women working with Brunei government sectors' perspective on the possibilities of how they could be motivated to accomplish their career goals and what kind of support do they need in order to achieve this. This research will also examine the roles of women in home institution, such as roles as daughter, wife and mother, as well as their role in their workplace to understand the relationship between Brunei urban women's career progress and their expected roles at home and in the workplace.

## 1.6 Scope of Study

This study will only focus on women working in Brunei government sectors. The author chose Brunei as the case study due to its distinct effort to encourage women to work. While in some Muslim countries, particularly countries that impose Shari'a Law the societies were more likely to perceive women's participation in the workforce as a deviant behavior. The situation is different in Brunei whereby the society encourages women to work as this brings more benefit to the family and society in terms of household production and economic development. Time frame of research will be from 2011 to 2016. The reason for this is that, there is a constant increase in the number of women outnumbering males in most of the Divisions in the Brunei government sectors yet the top-level positions remain male-dominated positions. The research will then focus on the contemporary issues faced by women working in Brunei Government sectors.

## 1.7 Hypothesis

Brunei's policies to empower women in the workplace need to be expanded to cover all of women's needs especially in helping working mothers to balance their dual roles hence women need more support from organizations to achieve this balance and simultaneously improve their work productivity.

### 1.8 Significance of Study

The significance of this study is to make the society aware that women's contribution to paid work matters as the men's contribution because they help contribute back to the economy almost as equal as their male counterpart. Women also help their family improve their standard of living and raise educated children. Hence women participation in the labor force is significant and should be encouraged. Furthermore, majority of literatures on women's career advancement are explained in the context of Western culture. Although there is an increase in scholars studying women's career advancement in Southeast Asian context, lack of studies have been done on Brunei women. For this reason, the author feels inspired and obliged to study women mobility in the context of Brunei to contribute to the limited literatures on women studies in Brunei. This study could therefore be a guideline for policymakers to consider when designing a policy for women in the workplace.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview on how structural and social constraints plays a role in limiting women's career progression and how personal agency provides women with alternative action to allow them to advance in their career life. Next, the chapter will focus on review of literatures on women's career advancement by other various researchers, authors and scholars. This literature review explains that women's career advancement is influenced by three factors. The first, societal factor which explains that cultural and traditional expectations on women's roles serve as a barrier to women's career advancement. Second, organizational factors which explains that at one hand, women are more likely to pursue career advancement when the organizations implement policies and programs that help empower women at work and help them achieve work-life balance. On the other hand, organizational practices and attitude discriminate women from employment opportunities and advancement. Third, personal factors which determines women's attitude towards work.

#### 2.2 Theories and Concepts on Structure and Agency

##### 2.2.1 The Influence of Structure and Gendered Institutions on Women's Career Life

Karam and Afiouni's (2014) framework of Career Success and Karam *et al.*'s Parameters of Balance (2013), drawn from Institutional and Structuration theorists such as Scott (2004) and Giddens (1984) suggested that women's professional lives are influenced by structure and agency. Fraser (1992) defined structure as women's restricted capability to act against external forces beyond individual's control including social norm, traditions and culture, whereas agency refers to the acts that resist against those constraints. Institutional theorists such as

Bjork (2004) and Scott (2004) argued that institutional structures impose different sets of gender role expectations and responsibilities to males and females of which these gender differentiations create different 'scripted' patterned behavior outcome that prevails as part of social norm. While men are socialized to be a breadwinner and succeed in the workplace, women on the other hand are socialized to conform to their socially constructed and expected gender roles and responsibilities associated with their biological functioning that hinder them from pursuing career advancement (Firestone, 1972; Karam *et al.*, 2014).

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender, as an institution, is socially constructed and encrypted through processes of socialization in individuals' daily interactions and behavior. Individuals "do gender" by reinforcing the traditional concept of gender, differentiated by the concept of masculinity and femininity. For women, regardless of their educational attainment and status in the workplace, they are still expected to fulfill, manage and perform their feminine roles efficiently in order to fit into socially accepted concept of womanhood.

Since gender institutions are mainly influenced by patriarchal norms and values, radical feminism argued that women were denied to achieve the position of power due to male dominance in the patriarchal society. Patriarchy benefits men as it allows men to exploit women into doing unpaid work at home such as doing housework and childcare thus creating inequality in division of work that put more burdens on women (Haralambos and Holborn, 1990). Women are often caught between two "greedy institutions" of home and work (Coser, 1974) that demands most of women's time, leading to women experiencing role strain and role overload (Strong, DeVault and Sayad (1998). Women's unpaid work was also not appreciated thus women were underrepresented in the society. Women also unconsciously accept their subordination due to socialization that boxed them into socially constructed "femininity" rather than to challenge male domination (Schaefer, 2012). Marxist and socialist feminism argue that women's subordination was due to capitalism whereby male took the position of power. Marxist feminists put more emphasis on women's lack of power in the workplace as a result of lack of ownership in production means. Thus women are kept at the lower positions in the workplace in order to maintain male's power and domination.

Furthermore, gender ideologies, according to Halpern and Cheung (2008), are often used by culture to define and constrain men and women into different expectations of their roles whereby masculine traits are often favoured in social context. Culture also defines the opportunities that are available for men and women on the basis of their gender (ibid). Regardless of women's increase involvement in the workforce, they are still expected to fulfill their family obligations. If they disobey, they are subjected to moral and social sanctions (Karam *et al.*, 2014). Such structural constraint remains a powerful influence on women's career choices, decisions and success.

### **2.2.2 Personal Agency and Modifications to Structured Gender Norm**

Walby's (1997) gender theory stated that gender is an ongoing process subject to differential outcomes as a result of changes in human practices and agency. Walby argued that gender transformation is influenced by the academic achievements of girls and women which have impacts on female gender movement from domestic to public sphere. These changes are highly visible in the movement of female labour force participation as a result of educational attainment.

Although the structured sociocultural values and norm continue to persist in anchoring women to fulfill and act in accordance to their traditional gender roles, women, through their agency, can still achieve success in their career life. Giddens' (1984) Structuration theory suggests that individual agency can act as navigation and means to achieve balance between work and family responsibilities. Uppalury and Racherla (2014) also argued that agency provided women with a platform to modify their gender roles and responsibilities, causing changes in certain social structure. 'Agency' is a term introduced by Anthony Giddens (1984), which refers to individual's ability and freedom to make choices whereas agentic processes, which involves the interaction between structure and agency, refers to the ability to act, make decisions and negotiate with the constraints that derives from social structure as well as cultural constraints (Loyal and Barnes, 2001). Parsons (1937) added that individuals often experience contestation between the need to meet cultural expectations and their own desires. He believed that during socialization, individuals internalize the shared norms and values of the society and try to provide alternative action that can meet both ends-own desire and internalized norms.

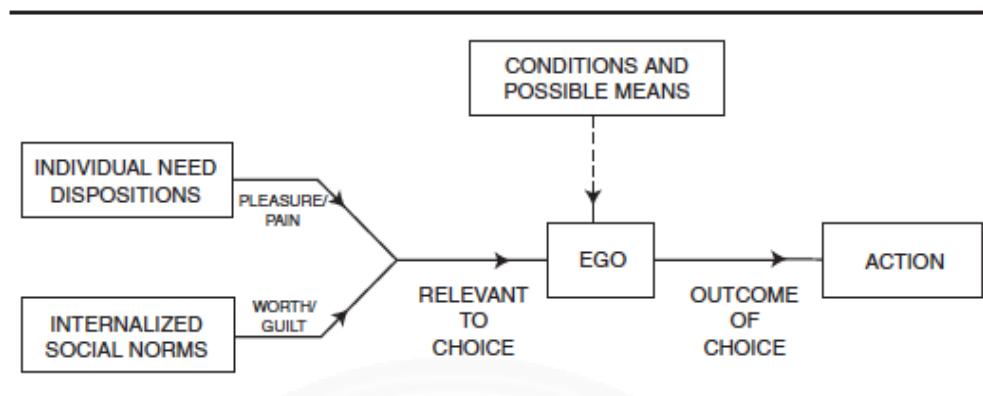


Figure 2.1 Process of integrating individual desire with internalized social norms thus influencing individual's actions.

Source: Loyal and Barnes (2001). "Agency" as a Red Herring in Social Theory. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 31(4), p. 511.

Agency can be recognized as a form of empowerment. It allows women to develop internal motivation as a driving force in their pursuit of career advancement and help shape their perception of career success. McClelland's (1966) theory<sup>1</sup> could help explain women's personal motivation and decision on their career. He argued that human motivations are influenced by three needs such as the need for power, to achieve and to affiliate with others. Motivation theory is thus, an integral part in understanding women's career aspiration, whether or not they desire to accomplish more, less or to remain in their current position in the workplace (Kalkowski and Fritz, 2004). Hence, women's personal agency and career aspiration differs from one women to another, depending on their priority of needs that they want to satisfy, of which, these different levels of needs are influenced by their socioeconomic status as well as human and social capital accumulation. Maslow's (1943) "hierarchy of needs" explains that every individual has his or her own basic needs or desire that he or she wants to satisfy. This theory could help explain why

<sup>1</sup> As cited in Kalkowski and Fritz (2004) in 'A Survey of Gender-Related Motivation Studies: Subordinate Status, Roles, and Stereotyping'.



many of the Bruneian women's career progress is stalled at the middle management and how can this situation be improved.

Halpern and Cheung (2008) argued that women could still be at the top of their game at work and still lead a successful family life. At organizational level, collective action of the organizations can help develop women's agency and enhance their personal motivation (Maton and Salem, 1995). Through their agency, women can take advantage opportunities to advance in their career life. According to organizational structural theory, human and social capital accumulation can help reduce gender stereotype associated with their motherhood in order to attain authority in the workplace. Human capital accumulation involves accumulation of trainings, skill developments and improvements of knowledge as means to increase work productivity in which the reward is higher pay and status (Becker, 1975). Whereas social capital theory provides women with a platform to widen their network in informal and formal settings that influence women's career development and aspiration (Metz and Tharenou, 2001).

At private domain, women can negotiate with the social constraint associated with their expected gender roles and responsibilities in order to pursue career advancement. One of the strategies is to outsource responsibilities that do not require personal attention and utilize available resources that could help with work-life balance and provide more time to focus on career (Halpern and Cheung, 2008). This is similar to studies done by Luke (1998) who argued that the presence of a live-in maid helped women balance the demand from both work and domestic responsibilities. As argued by Ford *et al.* (2007), when a woman outsource her domestic duties and childcare, it provided them with more free hours to be fully engaged and focus on the other domain (career life). Hiring a domestic worker is more common among middle and upper class families. Since they have resources to afford domestic helpers, they are able to break free from structural, social and cultural constraints of their expected gender role to focus on career advancement. If a woman could not afford to hire domestic helpers, they often seek childcare assistance from family, relatives or close friends. Literatures on women's career advancement suggest that there are three main factors that influence career advancement: societal, organizational and personality.

## 2.3 Women in the Workforce in Literature: Factors Influencing Women's Career Advancement

### 2.3.1 Societal Factors-Influence of Cultural Bias on Women's Career Advancement

Majority of scholarly literature on women's career advancement such as Madsen (2008) and Turner (2007), suggested that regardless of the type of career that women chose, family responsibilities and commitment remains to be the main obstacle for women who wish to pursue advancement in their career life. In the context of Brunei, the society still put more expectations on women's gender roles. Despite the level of career commitment and the success women have achieved at work, the society still expect them to be the primary caretaker of the family especially on responsibilities relating to child-rearing and home-making. Furthermore, unlike men, women experience dual demands from two "greedy institutions" (Coser, 1974) of home and work that was to fulfill the demands of socially constructed ideology of motherhood as well as being an ideal worker (Acker, 1990). Both of which, required most of women's time at the same time. This led to women, especially those with dependent children to experience role conflict and role overload because women needed to put maximum effort to perform and meet the demands of their dual roles efficiently. This caused women to have the tendency to experience fatigue and exhaustion. In the context of Brunei, in which the society is highly embedded in traditional concept of womanhood, women are bounded and expected to perform their biological nature and function. Thus women need to constantly negotiate their roles at work and at home to meet the demand of being a mother and to advance in their career.

According to Halpern and Cheung (2008), the reason for low representation of women at top-level positions is that every women with children have two main tracks that they needed to manage and maintain throughout their life those are the "mommy track" and the career track while men's role are only socially and culturally expected to focus on their career track. These two tracks have been proven to be difficult to maintain for women to achieve without losing out on

the other. When they choose to get married and have children, it means that they are informally agreeing to sacrifice their career and the investment they had made to achieve their current position in their career life, including the years they spent in education, the experience they have accumulated in the workplace and the skills they had learnt in order to attend to their role as a mother, wife and daughter.

Furthermore, the increasing participation of female in the workforce had led to a visible change in 'gender order' (Connell, 1987) especially in family structure. The traditional concept of women's roles as a daughter, wife and mother had extended to include the role as a career woman. Their increasing involvement had resulted to increasing number of dual-earner families (Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity, 2009). This caused a shift in gender roles particularly in the traditional family system of traditional male breadwinner. This globalized era has witnessed increasing number of female breadwinners in some families and gender roles within the household became more egalitarian as men were more willing to share housework particularly becoming more involved in childcare. Despite of this, family commitments remain the primary responsibility of women despite of their career status and educational level.

This is especially true in Southeast Asian context. Hofstede and Bond (1988) described Asian cultures as "collective and familial". Most of Southeast Asian social structure is categorized as highly patriarchal society and these societies are deeply rooted in their culture and traditions where traditional concept and cultural expectations of gender roles remain to persist over the century as a result of socialization despite of globalization and modernization. Furthermore, compared to western culture, Southeast Asian cultures are collective rather than individualistic.

The persistence of this socio-cultural value is evident in Zuraini Jamil's (2015) research on how Malay women managed and balance their needs to pursue career and fulfill their commitment at home. Her study found that in Malay patriarchal society, women were still confined to their gendered cultural ideology of being an ideal woman and that Malay women perceived that child rearing and domestic work must not be ignored. Thus women used different strategies to enable them to progress in both family and career by delegating and dividing household

work either to husband, children, maids or part-time helpers. Jamil (2015) also found that despite of these Malay women's involvement in the workforce, they still perceive that it was their domestic work such as cooking and childcare remain their primary responsibility, as they want to achieve the roles of perfect wives and mothers.

This shows that regardless of women's increasing importance in public sphere, their traditional and gendered status persist as part of their identity. Thus Hochschild (1989) argued that due to women involvement in the labor force as a result of demand from economic development, women now have to engage in "second shift" work at home and in their workplace. According to Hochschild, working mothers experience the dual burden of paid and unpaid work in a dual-earner household. The burden later increases as a child was born (Sayer *et. al*, 2009).

However, Rosli (2016) argued that this is not the case in the context of Brunei. Her qualitative research proved that working mothers in Brunei did not term their roles at home or "the second shift" as "work" but rather view them as their obligation and responsibility and thus part of their identity. Based on her findings, she found that this view was shaped as a result of socialization, influenced highly by the beliefs and societal norms in Brunei Darussalam.

### **2.3.2 Organizational Factors**

#### **2.3.2.1 Work-Life Balance**

The conflict of work and life is often the main reason women chose to not to desire for further achievements in the workplace to prevent work from threatening the balance of work and life (Murniati, 2012) thus demanding for more improvements and support in the workplace. The work-life balance could benefit women and organizations as it would act as a solution to help female employees balance work and life. The benefits of work-life balance could be achieved through policies and programs that help empower women and assist women in managing the conflicting demands of home and work institutions (Lim *et al.*, 2013). By helping women in achieving this balance will enhance their career advancement, improve women's mobility to leadership positions but also increase their job satisfaction. The problem in organizations that cause women mobility and career position to be stalled at middle management levels in civil service is the lack

of facilities and support from the organizations. The research on Brunei women and labour supply by Anaman and Kassim (2006) also highlighted that government assistance is required to increase married women's labor supply on which this depended highly on human capital and employment. They stated that in order to improve women's employment and retention, the government should increase work flexibility and enhance women's benefits in terms of maternity leave and childcare facilities expansion.

### **2.3.2.2 Organizational Structure, Culture and Practices**

According to Kanter (1977) career advancement can only be achieved through individual's access to networking, mentoring as well as support from peers or in other words, women's access to social capital. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) argued that mentoring significantly help women towards career advancement. Since women initially lack of access to power structures in the organizations, having a mentor greatly facilitate their upward career mobility as it provides higher chances to promotions and simultaneously help develop career aspiration through this support system. Therefore, mentorship is a powerful form of career strategy for women's advancement (Ehrich, 1995; Hopkins et al., 2006; Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2009). Women's access to trainings can also help women develop their skill on the job. However, the question is, are these programs and trainings available to women?

One of the problems with organizational structure is that hierarchies in organizational structure were highly gendered and gender stereotyped. Kochanowski (2010) argued that women in the workforce are still hindered by social and structural constraints that prevent them from achieving their potential in pursuit of career advancement. Glass ceiling still exist in organizational culture and practices that hinder women from getting to top management. Organizational structure still contain 'hidden biases' to prevent women from entering the 'old boy network' (Oakley, 2002). Leadership positions were preserved only for those who are fully committed to their work whereas those with divided commitment occupy low-level positions (Acker, 1990). Such discrimination and stereotype most often occurs against mothers who faced penalties associated with motherhood, known as 'maternal wall' (Williams, 2000) or 'motherhood ceiling' (Correll, Bernard and Park, 2007). Working

mother are often subjected to stereotype in the workplace whereby they are seen as less committed and lack of competency to lead thus hindering women from achieving career success or advancement.

In addition, the definition of “success” is also revolved around the male’s concept of success and career development (Gallos, 1989). Male often define “success” in the workplace as hierarchical like climbing a ladder (O’Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2008). In reality however, the career path for women to achieve career advancement is different from their male counterparts. This is due to women having more responsibilities than males especially with regard to home institutions. At home, women are the primary caretakers. Apart from physical housework, women also have to engage in emotional needs of the family and her own. As a result, women often choose a maze-like route to attain high level positions in the workplace and that their journey may take longer than males.

Lack of support from organizations is another factor that affects women’s productivity and work efficiency. Working women, especially mothers, struggle to balance their dual roles and often result to role conflict. Organizations also do not provide facilities that could help women improve their work performance (Kargwell, 2008; Broadbridge, 2008). Furthermore, in many departments, there is lack of mentors, especially female mentors, to assist women in their careers. Bias preference of male mentors to assist women is one of the factors that explains why there are only a few women could sit at the leadership positions. Colley (2002) stated that male leaders often choose to assist males to leadership positions rather than females to maintain the top position as belonging to male and that only male are eligible to occupy those positions. Any women who want to achieve their positions are often subjected to the stereotype that they cannot be at that level due to their multiple responsibilities. Such stereotype results to the lack of opportunities for social and cultural capital<sup>2</sup> for women in the workplace. Another

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<sup>2</sup>Termed by Bourdieu (1986), which stated that success can be achieved through individual’s knowledge and beliefs. Norms also have an effect on individual’s success.

possible reason that impedes women from career progress is their access to information on promotions and trainings.

Thus in this research, the author will examine whether or not the departments they work with have already provided the policy to empower women in the workplace such as work trainings, mentorship, networking, seminars and promotion programs. This research will also analyse whether or not the key respondents are aware of the availability of such programs, women's accessibility and how this access can be improved for working mothers.

### **2.3.3 Personal Factors**

Economic growth and increase in wages have further influenced women to participate in the labour force. Benería (2003) stated that women would rather replace leisure with work due the benefits of paid work outweighing the cost of staying at home. Furthermore, the time women spent at home can instead, be applied into full use at paid work to obtain income for the family. Having a career benefits women in many ways. It gives them more economic independence and more power in decision-making in the household. However, their motivation to pursue career advancement may be limited by their external and internal factors such as persistence of culture and women's attitudes toward work.

Socialization is one of the primary factors to explain the persistence of sociocultural values that affects women's personal motivation. Socialization consist of 'significant others' who have influential impact on individuals' behavior-how individuals project themselves in a society-such as their parents, siblings, husband or wife, peers and colleagues (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Socialization can reinforces the traditional concept of gender roles in socio-cultural values in every society that creates gender boundaries as well as gender stereotypes such as the role of a female is primarily at home whereas the primary role of male is the provider and protector of the family. As a result of this gender stereotype and socialization, females subconsciously accept and view their subordinate role as natural. This creates the culture of low self-esteem, lack of confidence, lack of motivation and aspirations among working women (Leach, 1988). Vianen and Fischer (2002) also explained that one of the reasons why fewer women made it to top positions in organizations is related to how women perceive themselves and women

have the tendency to “self stereotype”. Women often compare their personal traits as to that of males’ leadership styles.

Although women want to achieve higher position in the workplace, they are constraint by their duties and due to time constraint, women find difficulties to meet the ‘ideal worker’ Acker (1990). Furthermore, if women want to progress further in their career, they have to be strongly determined and work hard to achieve their career goals. They also have to face several challenges in order to secure their positions not only in the workplace but from balancing their roles at home. Working mothers face even more struggles especially when they just returned from maternity leaves. They have to care for their infants and at the same time catch up with work they had left. Thus causing them to choose to stay at their current position and the profession that does not limit or affect their time with her family.

Women personal traits and their identity clash also explain why only fewer women occupy the top positions. Traditionally, women only had one identity which was their role as homemakers and primary caregivers. However, when women choose to leaders they are required to adopt male leadership skills. Women have to become assertive in their behavior, assume more responsibilities, decisive, strong and less emotional causing women to struggle in balancing both identities (Murniati, 2012). This led to women experiencing ‘double bind’ (Oakley, 2000) whereby they are contested between the need to perform the societal expectation of their gender role as nurturer as well as the need to be assertive in their role as a leader in their workplace.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The data for this research were obtained through both primary and secondary data. The primary data involved the collection of qualitative data through one-to-one interviews on their perception on career advancement, the existing programs and policies that aim to boost women's career advancement and improvements that needed to be made to achieve this, as well as their personal motivations to pursue career advancement.

#### 3.2 Sample for Study

The target groups were women working in various Brunei government sectors to avoid being bias to favoring one government sector. The sample criteria for respondents were women, married women with various numbers of children, working in different Divisions in Brunei government civil service sectors. The aim of this was to study women's perception on career advancement, their challenges in the workplace and strategies that could help them to improve their productivity and development at work as well as balance their dual roles.

The author chose to focus only on Brunei government sectors rather than to incorporate private sectors because as the economy and tertiary sector in Brunei grew, the government sector absorbed more female labor force than private sector. According to statistics, the number of female participation in the workforce increased from 31.1 percent in the year 1981 to 59.9 percent in 2011 (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2016). The reason for the increase in the formal sector was that women gain benefits from working with the government in terms of welfare.

The respondents were divided into various levels of education<sup>1</sup>; and within the age range of 25 to 65 years old and above<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this was to analyze these groups' experiences on how they negotiate and balance their roles in order to progress in their career by exploring women of different Divisions' needs and conditions to progress further in their career differ from one another.

### 3.3 Profile of Respondents

Through purposive sampling, the author interviewed a total of twenty-two respondents, of which majority (twelve) of them came from Division Two. From Division One, the author interviewed two respondents, four from Division Three, two from Division Four and two from Division Five. These respondents came from various government sectors or ministries including Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Prime Minister's Office and Public Service Commission.

#### 3.3.1 Division One

##### 3.3.1.1 Hawa

Hawa was a wife and a mother to four children. Before retiring, Hawa, age 58, was a Deputy Permanent Secretary to Brunei Government. Before she was appointed as a Deputy Permanent Secretary, she used to be a Director to one of the departments in Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism. According to Hawa, her career life journey started as an Ordinary officer, where she worked for a few years before she was promoted to be Special Duties Officer. From there, she constantly climbed the career ladder through persistence, patience and

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<sup>1</sup> The level of education in this research refers to highest level attained by respondents ranging from PhD to no education.

<sup>2</sup> The retirement age in Brunei is 55 or 60 years old for both male and female.

performing better than her male counterparts. The author chose Hawa as a key informant in this study to explore her experiences and to provide this study with an insight on her journey that led her to occupy the position as a Director, whose main role was to ensure that her department as well as small divisions under her department met the Ministry's vision goals.

### **3.3.1.2 Hajah Raifah**

Hajah Raifah graduated with a Master Degree. Like Hawa, Hajah Raifah, 53, also started her career journey as an Ordinary Officer and climbed her way to the top. In her career journey, she had held a number of positions including Special Duties Officer, Head of Department and as a Director. She stated that in order to get to top management, she had to willingly take more challenging roles and tasks to make her credibility visible in the workplace. Apart from educational credential, she also had to constantly work on improving herself in terms of skills and knowledge on the job in order to specialize in her tasks and role. Apart from aiming to achieve goals and mission of her department, Hajah Raifah also expressed her ambition to drive a positive change to social development through her contributions in her career life as well as in the society to help Brunei achieve her Vision 2035.

## **3.3.2 Division Two**

### **3.3.2.1 Maya**

Maya was a Bachelor Degree holder. In her mid-30s, Maya was a mother of three. She was a Finance Officer in Ministry of Health and had been working with the ministry for eight years. She was mainly responsible in the smooth running operation in ensuring that every employees under the ministry received their wages, salary and allowances in timely manner and accordingly. Maya stated that she had been in the same position since she was recruited. She added that although career advancement would help her expand her knowledge and capabilities however, her perception of career advancement did not revolve only at her workplace. She had the desire to embrace self-employed career where she could manage herself better without being an employee and allocate more time with her children. Her motivation to work was mainly to be financially independent on her

own which was also a form of self-fulfillment as well as to create better life for her children.

#### **3.3.2.2 Linda**

Linda, 28, worked under Ministry of Education as Finance Officer. Like Maya, she was also responsible in managing employees' salaries and allowances. Linda had only been in the workforce for three years and was hired into her current position after graduating with a Master Degree. She recently entered motherhood and felt a shift in her role expectation. Before motherhood, her main focus, apart from family and husband, was her career. Linda aspired to achieve more in her career as it served her fulfillment after years of attaining higher education. With a newborn in her life, she stated that career life was no longer the main priority. Regardless, her family and husband remained supportive of her decision to return to work after her maternity leave. Linda told that she still aimed for more achievements in the workplace while succeeding in her role as a mother.

#### **3.3.2.3 Amelia**

Amelia was in her early 30s when the author interviewed her and was working as a Staff Officer. Just a year after achieving her Bachelor Degree, she started working with the Brunei government. A few years after she started working, she got married and now had two children. Before she had a second child, Amelia was offered to further her studies due to her good performance and work delivery. She however rejected for reasons to focus on raising her child and to focus on progressing in her career. Amelia grew up without the help from any domestic helpers. This influenced her decision to follow her parents' style of parenting to raise her own children with the help from her parents and husband. She believed that the role of a mother played an important central role in a child's life, in shaping their behavior thus children were investment that required proper nurture and care.

#### **3.3.2.4 Fariza**

As the Head of Public Relations and Coordination at Ministry of Communications, Fariza was responsible in overseeing and managing public relations tasks for her department, which included internal, external as well as

interdepartmental events. She had been in her current position for one and a half years. Compared to majority of the respondents in Division Two, Fariza married a little later, in her 30s, as she was more focused on acquiring her Master Degree and on her career life. Her transition to motherhood however, brought changes to her life that slowed down her career progression.

#### **3.3.2.5 Zahra**

When the interview was conducted Zahra was in her early 40s and a mother to three children. She held a very important role in her workplace, as she was a head of a division in Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Her role mainly involved research and development in her department. According to Zahra, before she took her current role, she worked in private sector and that her line of work was entirely different. She admitted that at first it was difficult for her to adjust from private to public service. Furthermore, her current job required her to familiarize herself with technical terms in order to understand her line of work. Reminiscing to her early years occupying her current role, she said they were a challenge to her. In addition to that, when Zahra first took up her current role, her children were still quite young.

Regardless of the challenge to be a career person as well a good mother, Zahra was a highly motivated and result-driven person. Zahra shared similar views with those respondents from Division One. She never viewed her motherhood as a hindrance to her career advancement. Instead, she argued that family should never be the reason to hold oneself back from progressing in their career. Furthermore, she believed that if men could succeed and achieve high position in their workplaces, women could also succeed in their career as long as they continue to be aspired and perform their best.

#### **3.3.2.6 Zahidah**

Zahidah, in her late 40s, was a Management Officer in Ministry of Health. Her main responsibility was to monitor her department's work quality to ensure those in her department deliver excellent work performance. She had been under Ministry of Health for twenty-two years and had been holding her current role for five years. She admitted that her job was challenging yet her career

life was satisfying as she was able to prove her own strength and ability in managing challenges. With the success of her career life, she hoped her children would be aspired to be successful individuals; academically and in their career life.

#### **3.3.2.7 Aina**

Aina, a mid 20s Research Officer under Prime Minister's Office had been serving the government for five years. She described her line of job had always demanded her time. Aina stated that when she was single, she could devote more time to focus on work. However, after she got married and since she recently entered motherhood, she felt the pressure to have an effective management in dividing work and her responsibilities at home efficiently. Regardless of this, Aina remained ambitious when talking about her vision on her career. Aina was a highly motivated and determined individual. During her academic years, she had always been a high achiever. She attributed her academic success to years of practice in self-discipline, hard work and efficient time management, habits she brought into her career life. Aina perceived her career life as equally important as her role as a mother because she believed that when she continuously progress and perform well in her job, she could help in motivating others as well as set a good example for her children. In addition to that, Aina had a supportive husband and family who had always been encouraging and supportive of her career decisions.

#### **3.3.2.8 Azizah**

Azizah was in her 50s, married and had four children. She worked under Ministry of Defense as Assistant Senior Technician. Her career journey started when she was working with a private sector, at which she worked for several years before working with Brunei civil service. According to Azizah, although she only had Cambridge O' Level qualification she tried her luck applying for a position at Technical Equipment Maintenance Division under Ministry of Defense. When she got the job, she worked her way to progress in her career through constant in-job skill trainings and experiences. As her responsibilities at work became more demanding, she and her husband decided to hire domestic helper mainly for childcare and to reduce her household duties, which helped her balance her dual roles.

### **3.3.2.9 Najla**

Najla, 35, had been working under Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for eleven years as a Research Officer. Her main tasks involved doing reports, research and analysis. She expressed that her role required her to constantly be knowledgeable and updated on related issues. Often, she had to go overseas for work. Najla been married for two years and according to her, her husband was supportive of her career decisions. Despite the demand of her role, Najla was satisfied with her job and aim to pursue further opportunities in her workplace.

### **3.3.2.10 Juliana**

Juliana was in her 40s and married. She had been working in the public sector, under Ministry of Development for more than twenty years. When she first entered the workforce, Juliana was a Higher National Diploma holder in Engineering. In order to attain more credibility in the workplace, Juliana took Professional Qualifications and went for trainings locally and overseas. She admitted that initially it was difficult when she had to be away from her family since during that time her children still needed more of her attention. Regardless, Juliana still maintained her aspiration to pursue progress in her career. Her main career aspiration was to gain more knowledge and skills in her job thus, to achieve satisfaction in her job.

### **3.3.2.11 Mahirah**

Mahirah, 32, was a Master Degree holder. She held the position as Administrative Officer Special Grade for more than a year but had been in the workforce for seven years. Her educational credentials had allowed her to advance to higher position in the workplace. In addition, her confidence in voicing out her opinions and suggestions had also made her leadership potentials visible thus opening more career opportunities ahead. Mahirah was a career-oriented person and a mother to one daughter. Her career vision was to have an impact to the organization in terms of her contribution to bringing improvements and new ideas to the organization.

### **3.3.2.12 Izzatul**

Izzatul was currently taking When she graduated her Bachelor Degree in Engineering, Izzatul (25, single) started working as a Special Duties Officer under Ministry of Development. The main tasks of her role were to update data, doing reports, providing assistance and receiving instructions from Head Officer. She had been in the workforce for two years but had already been exposed to several work experiences through her internships. Since she was not yet married, it gave Izzatul an opportunity to focus on her career advancement. She stated that she was focusing on self-development and improvement to attain more authority in her workplace with the hope to be recognized in her workplace.

### **3.3.3 Division Three**

#### **3.3.3.1 Najwa**

Najwa, 31 years old, held the role of a supervisor at Civil Service Institute. She was responsible for in-job trainings and courses management for officers and staffs working with under Brunei government sectors, including those officers who were sent overseas. Najwa had been serving the government sector for 11 years and had only held her current for three years. Najwa was not married yet when the author interviewed her. This did not mean that she did not have any family commitment and obligations. She was mainly responsible to look after parents. She also had to take time off work, leave work early or came to work late to bring her parents for medical appointments and check ups. Regardless, Najwa remained positive towards her career life.

#### **3.3.3.2 Farhana**

Farhana, 33, started her career journey at Division Four and climbed her way up to Division Three. She currently worked as an assistant of religious department. She attributed her advancement from operational to managerial level to her constant hard work and determination. In addition, her educational credentials also opened up opportunities for her to advance to managerial level. According to Farhana, since her children were still young and still requires her full attention, her family commitment slowed down her advancement. Although her husband was supportive of her career decisions and that her parents



helped with childcare when both she and her husband were at work, Farhana admitted that she was still primarily responsible for her children's welfare. She career desire was that once her children were at the stage they could be independent, Farhana would be able to focus more on her career advancement.

#### **3.3.3.3 Noraini**

Noraini, 29, worked as Assistant to Public Relations Officer. Her daily task was to provide support to public relations department, particularly to the officer. She had been with Brunei civil service for three years. Noraini was a mother to a one-year-old son. She stated that her greatest challenge to career advancement was the need to divide her time between work and her family. Since she was still new in motherhood and career life, she felt the constraint to keep up in both domains. However, she also mentioned that her husband was very supportive of her career decisions and was helpful with childcare.

#### **3.3.3.4 Saidah**

As a personal clerk, Saidah, 27, worked directly under Director at Ministry of Home Affairs. She had only been working for three years and recently got married. At work, she was mainly responsible for managing her director's schedule while at the same time prepare and file private document and letters. She viewed her career advancement was significant as it helped her family improve their socioeconomic condition. On the contrast however, if she were offered a higher position that required her to be a decision maker and a leader, she would have to decline. Her reason was that she was not confident enough that she was eligible for the role since she did not have the potential nor qualities and qualification to be a leader.

### **3.3.4 Division Four**

#### **3.3.4.1 Fatimah**

Fatimah had been working under Ministry of Health for nearly 20 years as a senior technician. When the author interviewed her, Fatimah was in her late 30s and married. She was blessed with a husband and three teenagers who were supportive of her career. Fatimah mentioned that the possibility of advancing in her career is possible but most probably she would still be in her

current position. Furthermore, since she did not have a domestic helper, she was primarily responsible for her family's welfare. Although she shared her family responsibility with her husband, she stated that her husband's main responsibility at home was to provide their family with necessities while she take responsibility of the children. When her children were younger she had to take emergency leaves to care for her children. This caused her difficulty to focus at work.

#### **3.3.4.2 Maryam**

As an assistant to Project Officer, Maryam held the responsibility of registration of contractors and suppliers under Ministry of Development. She had been in her position for 27 years and was comfortable with her job. Maryam was now in her 50s with children in their 20s. She stated that it was only when her children grew less dependent on her that she could focus on her career. Her motivation to work was to ensure that her family's necessities were more than just enough. Her motivation to work was also to ensure that her children had the best environment to grow up in and was able to afford to give the best education they could.

### **3.3.5 Division Five**

#### **3.3.5.1 Maznah**

Maznah had been working for twenty-two years with the government. As a clerk, she handled finance and operations in a department under Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. Before she worked with the government, Maznah was working in private sector. According to Maznah, she experienced several interruptions in her career life journey. When she got married, she had to quit her job to focus on raising her children. A few years after she gave birth to her third child, she reentered the workforce and soon after, she had to resign again when she was pregnant of her fourth child. Maznah started to work with the government after she gave birth to her fourth child and had been working with the government since then.

#### **3.3.5.2 Rosnani**

In her mid 40s, Rosnani was a mother of four independent children. Rosnani worked as a clerk in Ministry of Communications. Rosnani started to enter the workforce after she gave birth to her children. Before that, like her mother,

Rosnani stayed at home to look after her children. She later decided to enter the workforce out of necessity to help her husband in contributing to household income. Furthermore, by that time, her children were less dependent on her. She stated that the shift from being a stay-at-home mother to a working mother led her to carry more responsibilities, which caused physical and mental exhaustion. At home, she had to do her household duties such as cleaning and simultaneously, she had to deal with the pressure and demand from work. Regardless, being employed benefitted her and her family more than staying at home. Not only that she helped reduce financial burden on her husband, she was also able to help fulfill the basic needs of her family.

### **3.4 Data**

#### **3.4.1 Primary Data**

##### **Description of Interview Methodology**

To obtain in-depth and rich data from each respondent for this research, 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. Furthermore, majority of the study on women career advancement used quantitative research. Such type of research, from the author's perspective, was biased towards researchers' point of view whereas qualitative research through interviews reduce researcher's bias by putting emphasis the voices of the key informants. In addition, differences in every individual's background, socialization, exposure and life experiences form the basis of individual differences which influence individuals' perception on life. This could result to differences in women's perception and experience in the workplace. Thus interview is the best way to capture and explore these differences.

The author used two sets of questionnaires; one set was designed for management levels, from Division I to Division III. Another set of questionnaire was specifically designed for operational level, from Division IV to Division V. The interview was conducted using both Malay and English as medium for

communication which was later, translated to English language during the process of transcribing. The questions for the interview were semi-structured. The author constructed a few questions as a guideline and the remaining questions were constructed based on the answers of each respondent. The main research interview questions that used for this research include:

**Organizational factors:**

- What are the factors that hinder women from advancing in their career?
- What are the factors that can help facilitate women to advance in their career?
- What qualities and qualifications do women need to have in order to be at the top-level positions?

**Personal motivation**

- What motivates women to work?
- Do women have aspiration to pursue career advancement?
- How to further motivate women to pursue career advancement?

The interviews via semi-structured questions allowed the study to focus on capturing the narratives of the respondents while minimizing the voice of the researcher. This method was known as ‘story telling’ in ethnographic research which aimed to reduce researcher’s bias in obtaining data. Hence, this method was efficient to obtain rich and unbiased data from the respondents.

### 3.4.2 Secondary Data

The study also required a traditional desk research on statistics of female participation in Brunei government sectors. The sources for the secondary data were obtained from Brunei Government National Development Plan and Government of Brunei Darussalam Statistical Yearbook. In addition, the study also required a documentary research on examples of interventions, recommendations and best practices adopted in other Asian and Muslim countries for women’s career advancement and how these could be applied in the context of Brunei government sectors.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

To minimize any ethical issues, the author first asked for permission from the respondents to conduct the interview and to use recording device to secure the data. It was also significant for the author to clarify to the respondents that if they felt in any way uncomfortable doing the interview and being part of this study, they had the right to withdraw from the research. The purpose of gaining permission and right to withdraw was to avoid the problem of consent and ethical issues when conducting a research. The interviews were highly confidential as no names shall be mentioned or revealed in this study. Instead, the author used pseudonym to refer to the respondents and their workplaces in order to protect their identity. Before conducting the interview, the author provided explanation on the purpose and objective of the research to the respondents to avoid the issue of deception.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

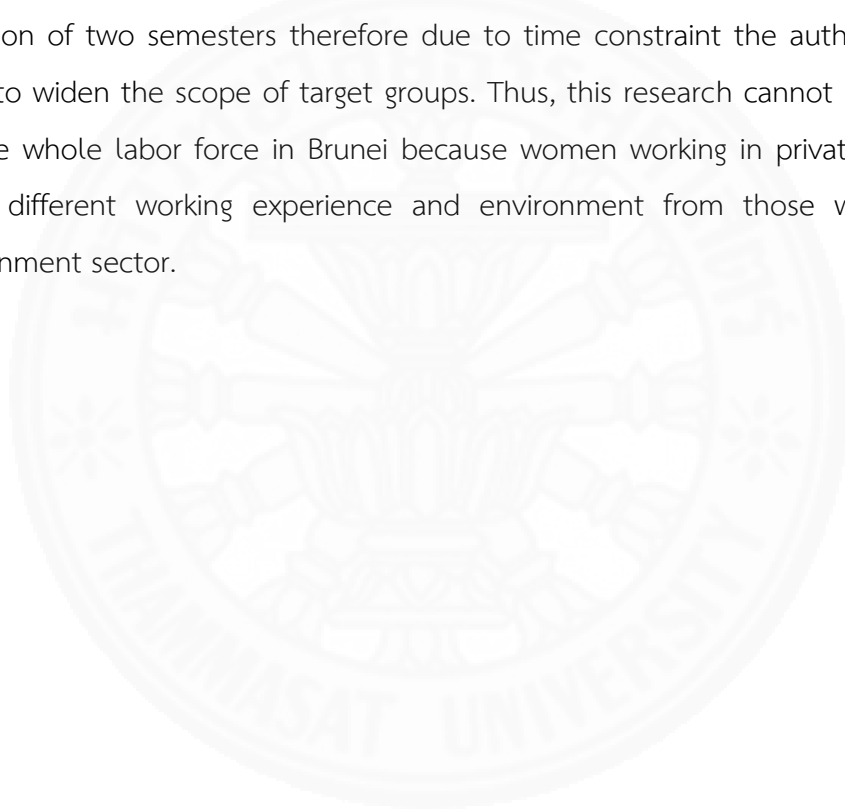
#### 3.6.1 Analyzing Qualitative Data

The author will collect the interview data and transcribe them for easy organization of data. The author will then analyze the transcripts by grouping similar themes, interpret the key findings and identify the relationships as well as differences between the variables.

Next, the author will analyse the findings into structural level and agency level. At structural level, the author will analyse the influence of social structure, cultural practices and organizational attitude or culture on women's career development. At agency level, the author will analyse how women in this research negotiate with the social structure, cultural expectations and manage their multiple roles to allow them to succeed in their career. Lastly, through the key findings, the author will be able to draw conclusions whether or not the findings will support or reject the hypothesis. It is also important to highlight the significance of applying and practicing 'reading between the lines' when analyzing data given by respondents to identify hidden concepts, issues or bias that may seem oblivious or considered as 'normal' by the respondents or within the society.

### 3.7 Limitations

This research is only limited to Brunei context. The target group for research will only focus on women working in the government sector. The reason is that it is the biggest employer of Brunei workforce therefore more women are being employed in government sector as a result of economic growth & expansion of tertiary sector requiring more of women's ability & skills such as negotiation and multitasking. Furthermore, this research will only be conducted within limited time duration of two semesters therefore due to time constraint the author will not be able to widen the scope of target groups. Thus, this research cannot be generalized to the whole labor force in Brunei because women working in private sectors may have different working experience and environment from those working in the government sector.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This part of the chapter will first, briefly discuss the background of area of study, Brunei. Then, it will focus on capturing how women perceive career advancement, their motivation to advance in their career, their opinion on the low representation of women at the top career ladder and the importance of having more women leaders to the organization. This chapter will also mention how women in this study perceived their work environment, including the factors that facilitate and hinder them in their career life. Discussion and analysis on the findings in this chapter will be discussed in Chapter 5.

#### 4.2 Background of Brunei

Brunei is small country located on the island of Borneo with land area of 5,765 square kilometres and a total population of 436, 620 (The World Factbook, 2017). Majority of the population are Malay-Muslim which comprises of 78.8% Muslims and 65.8% Malays (Ibid). Previously, Brunei economy depended on a mixture of small cottage industries but largely semi-subsistence and fishing for those living near to sea or rivers (Duraman, 2003). The two would then exchange their goods in a barter trade system. The main actors of trade were “*pengalu*” as the middlemen and main distributor of goods and “*padian*” a female vendor would sell the goods from house to house through river (The Brunei Times, 2010).

The discovery of oil and gas in Brunei in 1929 had been a blessing to the country’s economy but the oil wealth was only enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s when world market oil price increased (Duraman, 2003). The discovery had led Brunei to become a wealthy country where its citizens enjoy a high standard of living and peaceful life. Brunei economy started to bloom specifically after the discovery

of major oil reserves in the early 1960s (Ibid). Since the discovery, the oil and gas sector in Brunei experienced rapid development and this also led to rapid development of economy in Brunei. Brunei began to receive large amount of revenues. Brunei began to develop and modernize. Infrastructures were built and most important of all, this created the welfare state in Brunei.

#### **4.2.1 Overview of Brunei Civil Service**

Brunei Civil Service is the largest employer in the country. Brunei government or Civil Service consists of twelve ministries. It employs more than 50,000 employees (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2016) and is accountable for delivering goods and services to the public.

The civil servants in Brunei government sectors are divided into five main divisions, of which, Division 1 is the highest whereas Division 5 is the lowest in Brunei civil servant structure. Division One consists of those responsible for top management in Brunei government such as Directors and managerial staffs. Division Two locates executives as well as entrance level for graduates. Division Three is mainly for supervisory as well as skilled technical staffs (Brunei Resources, 2005). Division Four and Division Five are non-managerial or operational levels, comprising of clerical staffs and operators.



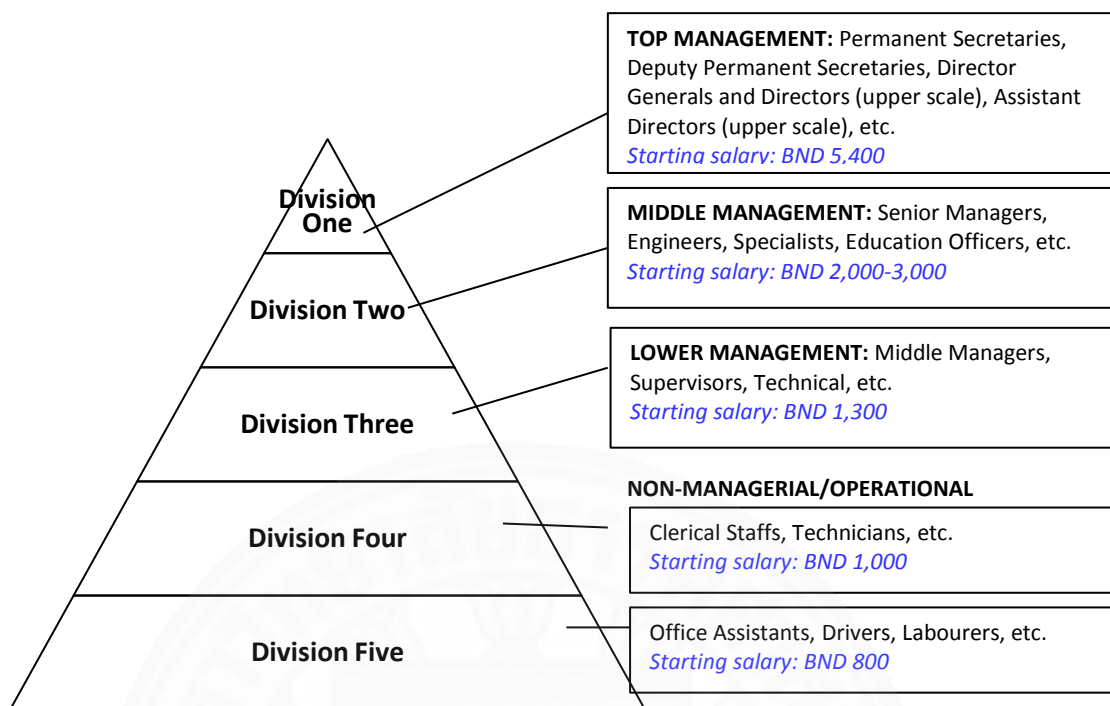


Figure 4.1 Structure of Brunei Civil Service.

Source: Brunei Darussalam Country Paper. (2009). Human resource development in the Brunei Civil Service: The perspective of civil service institute. 15<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Conference on Civil Service Matters. Vientiane, Lao PDR.

#### 4.2.2 Career Succession Development or Manpower Planning Strategy in Brunei Civil Service

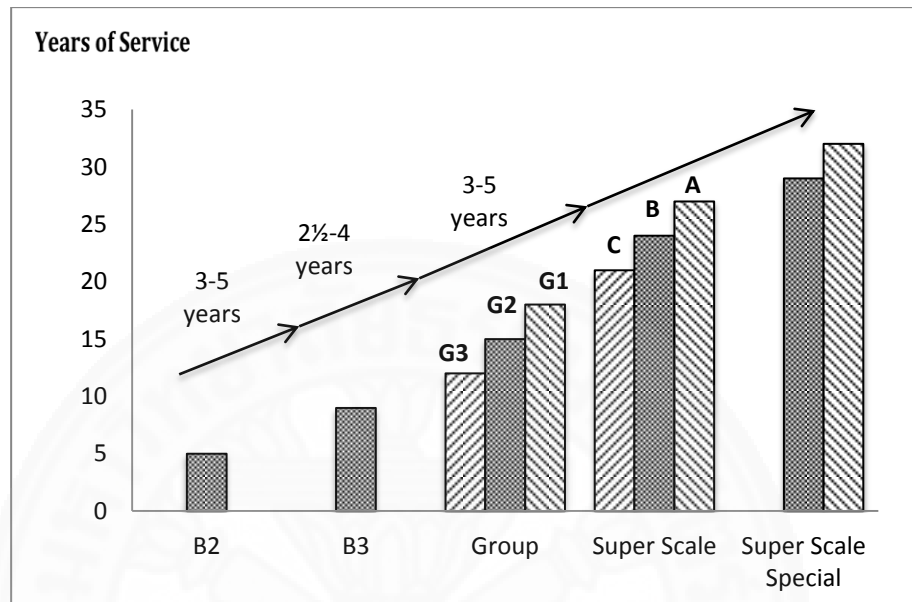


Figure 4.2 Career Succession Development model for Brunei civil servants

Source: Prime Minister's Office of Brunei Darussalam. (2012). Circular Number: 9/2012.

To enhance human resource capacity building, the government introduced a strategy for career succession of Brunei civil servants. For Graduate Entry Level Officers, their career plan starts at B2 of Division Two with salary scale starting within the range of BND 2,000 to BND 3,000. At this level, they are required to serve for five years before they are eligible for job promotion to Senior B3 level with starting salary scale of nearly BND 4,000, also within Division Two. After serving for four years, they are entitled for promotion to Group 3 of Division One with salary scale starting at roughly BND 5,000 and climb higher to job Group 2 and job Group 1. Civil servants who are promoted to job Group 3, 2 and 1 occupy positions as Deputy Heads of Departments. If they were promoted to Super Scale salary positions (starting salary near to BND 7,000) after serving as Deputy Heads of Departments, they could be promoted to occupy the positions as Heads of Departments. Those who are promoted to Super Scale positions are required to undergo special trainings

known as Executive Development Program for five months to enhance their leadership capabilities and improve their efficiency at work (Prime Minister's Office of Brunei Darussalam, 2012). During their years serving at Super Scale positions, they may be appointed to Super Scale Special tasks such as the roles as Deputy Permanent Secretaries or Permanent Secretaries (Brunei Resources, 2005).

Career mobility to the top is subjected to employees' performance, evaluation and assessments, involvement in training programs and for those employees who aim to be in top management, they need to be recommended by their superiors.

### **4.2.3 Women and Work in Brunei Darussalam**

#### **4.2.3.1 Cultural Aspect**

In cultural and social context, Brunei is a highly patriarchal society whereby male dominates the highest and prestigious position in the society. The backbone of Brunei's values is based on her national philosophy of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Muslim Monarchy) in which it highlights the importance men as leaders in the public domain, especially with regard to decision-making and leadership. However, Bruneians are more towards egalitarian in practice. Despite Brunei being a patriarchal society, it does not dismiss the importance of the roles of females in the society especially in the private domain such as within the context of family. In private domain, the structure of family is more towards egalitarian. Women have more bargaining power and have equal right to participate in household decision-making processes. Their opinions and suggestions are highly respected and are valued as men's and more often the final decision would be on the basis of majority agreement, not biased towards the men. Furthermore, in some households, women are given more autonomy in household management such as financial and welfare aspects of the household.

#### **4.2.3.2 Economic Aspect**

In economic aspect, majority of Bruneian households have become dual income earner families as a result of economic development and modernization. This is however not a new phenomenon. Brunei culture of work had always been egalitarian whereby women took part in trade alongside men. In the

past, female held the role as *'padian'* or river traders who operated the floating market in Kampung Ayer (The Brunei Times, 2010). However this changed when colonial powers came. The egalitarian culture of work became affected when the colonial powers distinctively divided labor through the introduction of politico-bureaucratic structure (King, 1994) by legitimizing official and political positions such as head villages to only be occupied by men. Women became segregated to work in household production.

#### 4.2.3.3 Educational Aspect

This however changed when Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien III developed the education system in Brunei in 1950s (Haji Awang Asbol Haji Mail, 2006) through the First National Development of Brunei. Education was made free to all and young children were made compulsory to enroll in schools regardless of their gender (Borneo Bulletin, 2015). This led to a great improvement in social development in Brunei especially on the movement and the roles of women in Brunei. Education became the key factor and opportunity for females to improve their position in the society. The increase female participation in schools changed the social norm of the society from the exclusion of females in the household to inclusion in the public sphere. Furthermore, women's decision to participate in the workforce are widely accepted and encouraged in due to the change in social norm. Women are also encouraged to provide equal contribution to the household income as this would greatly help in household production and consumption.

#### 4.2.3.4 Islamic Aspect

In the context of Islam, Islam put emphasis on male to be the leader of the family because according to the Holy Koran,

*"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women,"*

Surah 4 (An Nisa) Verse 34 (Ali, 1989).

Thus female must obey and respect their husband's decisions because according to Islamic teaching, the *"ticket to heaven for a wife is*

*under her husband's feet*". This means that a wife should always obey her husband and treat him with full respect. However, this does not fully mean that women are being subjected to males' dominance. According to Islamic teachings, women are to be treated with full of respect. In fact, men's *"ticket to heaven lies under the feet of his mother"*. This reflects how highly women are positioned in Islamic values.

Although Brunei is a highly conservative in its practice of Islam, women still enjoy as much freedom and right as men. Islam also put emphasis on the right of women to work in which in the Holy Koran it stated that,

*"To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn,"*

Surah 4 (An Nisa) Verse 32 (Ali, 1989; Anaman and Duraman, 2003).

This means that if men have the right to work, women also have the right to work to earn money (Mohammed and Anaman, 2003). Furthermore, although Islam requires women to prioritize family more than work (Azmi et al., 2014), Islam has never prohibited women from not going to work. In fact, Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) wife, Khadijah was a financially independent business women and this provides prove that Islam does not prohibit women from working and that those societies where Muslim women were prohibited from earning their own money was not due to Islam but due to the culture. In addition, Islam was the first religion that rewarded women with high status in the society (Khan, 2008). Islam also emphasize on equality between men and women in many aspects including equal right to take any professions, right to acquire knowledge and equal wages (Al Khayat, 2003). Hence females in Brunei enjoy the freedom to spend more time to pursue higher education and this leads to the increasing female participation in the workforce.

#### **4.2.3.5 Government Policy**

The government of Brunei promotes and encourages women to participate in the workforce. To promote gender equity in employment, the government released Maternity Leave Regulation 2011 that extended maternity leave from 56 days to 105 days to allow women to recover from giving birth, to

allow mothers to develop strong bond with their newborn and the give the mothers more time to breastfeed the her newborn to reduce infant mortality rate. Females are also given equal opportunities to pursue knowledge and skills and attain high positions in any field (Borneo Bulletin, 2015). The only barrier women face is the need to balance work and life especially when a child was born. Since Brunei is deeply rooted in culture and tradition, women are required to fulfill their biological function regardless of their status at work. Thus women need to constantly negotiate with their roles. When women focus more on childcare, it cost their career advancement. Hence, working women need government to help them improve their work-life balance and efficiency at work.

### **4.3 Women and Career Advancement**

Career is defined as a lifelong process, influenced by a person's education, work experience and trainings (Lahti, 2013). The perception of career can be subjective, which looks into how individuals construct his or her professional identity through professional mobility, as well as objective, which looks into the structure of organizations in relation to career (Ibid). Career advancement on the other hand, is generally termed, as individuals' access to promotion opportunities as well as their ability to move up in managerial ranks and the ability to acquire higher pay (Miner, Chen and Yu, 1991). In the context of Brunei Darussalam, male and female employees are eligible for promotion and that this promotion or career progress take place within three to eight years, subjected to several conditions including work performance or work assessment and pass the written and interview tests (Prime Minister's Office of Brunei Darussalam, 2012). Although organizational policies state that both men and women have equal access to career advancement, there could be other factors that cause the phenomenon whereby only a few women occupy the top leadership positions.

Studies on women career advancement often explain this phenomenon in the context of "glass ceiling" effect. Glass ceiling is defined as barrier that prevents women from pursuing career advancement in social structure particularly in

workplace institution. Murniati (2012) studied women's career advancement in senior academic administrators in Indonesia. Her study found that despite of increasing academic achievements, women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions. This is similar to the context of Brunei. Several scholars tried to explain these occurrences. Most literatures on women's career advancement suggest that women's career advancement is influenced by external and internal factors. External factors include societal and organizational factors whereas internal factors focus on individual or personal factor.

#### 4.3.1 Defining 'Career Advancement' from Respondents' Perspective

To understand why the low representation of women at the top organizational hierarchy, it is important to first understand what women understood or perceived as 'career advancement'. The meaning of 'career advancement' or 'career progress' is often defined in several categories. According to Dries (2011), female employees often understood its meaning in a form of accomplishment, personal recognition, balance, promotion, reward, personal achievements, position, material success, contribution as well as influence.

In this research, generally, the respondents consider 'career advancement' as when they achieve job promotion and moving to higher position. There was, however, a slight difference on how the respondents from different Divisions defined career advancement. Respondents from Division One mainly view career advancement as taking more responsibilities and challenges at work in order to achieve job satisfaction. They also stated that the definition of 'career advancement' was not only limited to themselves but it also incorporates the future generation through the contributions they in making a difference in their organization, to social development and nation building. Hawa of Division One described how she perceived career advancement,

*"I think of career advancement in a broader scope. Career advancement is not just to achieve the organization's goals but how you utilize your career to make a difference in the organization, and how you make use of your position in the workplace to help the country's social and economic*

*development through new ideas, discoveries and innovation. It's really rewarding when you acknowledge the fact that you play a part in developing your own country."*

(Hawa, 58, Division One, married)

Division Two mainly perceived 'career advancement' as a means to achieve personal recognition through personal development. In addition, they also view that career advancement did not necessarily mean climbing up the ladder but could also be achieved through job rotations as means to improve on their skills, knowledge and capabilities. Some also defined 'career advancement' as having more authority in the workplace through acquisition of leadership roles as well as to be recognized as equally capable and skilled as their male counter parts.

For respondents from Division Three, Four and Five, they mainly define 'career advancement' as upward mobility in the workplace, improvements in terms if skills and knowledge as well as means to have financial security and stability.

#### **4.3.2 Defining 'Career Success'**

Although achieving job promotions and higher salary were important to women, when the author asked the respondents to describe how would they define 'career success', most respondents of them described it in a subjective manner that prioritize job satisfaction and personal development rather than objective manner. Respondents from Division One, Two and Three reflect career success as being satisfied with their workplace and work environment, passion for the job they were doing, ability to achieve personal goals, able to perform their best in their career and feeling of worthiness in the workplace as well as being able to apply their skills in home management to work places and vice versa.

#### **4.3.3 Advantages Female Workers Bring to the Organization**

The author explored how women at managerial levels perceived the importance of having females in the organization especially at the top-level positions. While a few respondents said that there were no differences in leadership styles between male and female, other respondents shared the belief that when more women become leaders, they bring in new changes and improvements in



management or organizational structure and well as social structure including empowering more women to succeed in career and bring the gender equality. Division One respondents expressed the importance of having more women in leadership positions because women were more resilient than men in a way that women would not give up easily and would do anything in their will to achieve their goals. Majority of respondents from Division Two argued that the nature of women's personality and qualities bring in 'feminine touch' to their workplaces including being more understanding and more sensitive towards women's situations, ability to multitask, better communicator and negotiator, and making the workplace more women friendly. Division Three respondents viewed the role of female leaders as advantageous to the workplace because these female leaders can be mentors and source of motivation for other female employees to take up more challenging responsibilities at work.

#### 4.3.4 Motivation to Pursue Career Advancement

Division One respondents in this research stated that the factors that influenced them to pursue career advancement apart from financial stability were better education, self-driven motivation to aim for more, peer pressure, self-satisfaction in successfully climbing up to higher ranks thus social hierarchy, having a role model who had walked the path to career success as well as job availability and opportunity at the top level. One of them commented that

*“It is only natural to want advancement or else your career life would be demotivating.”*

(Hajah Raifah, 53, Division One, married)

In Division Two, apart from financial stability, majority of respondents were driven to pursue advancement to be role model and inspiration for their children as well as to help contribute to the nation in empowering women by challenging the mindset and social norm that viewed only men can be leaders in the workplace. Furthermore, they view career as a medium to assert the importance of their role in society is more than just biological function and that they can also

succeed in their role beyond their roles at home. Pursuing career advancement also benefits their social-psychological wellbeing by providing them with more self-accomplishment, a sense of independence, having more authority as well as building up their self-confidence and self-esteem. Maya (34, Finance Officer, Division Two, married) expressed her motivation to pursue in the workplace,

*“I don’t want the time and effort I had invested in, during my academic years and skill accumulations throughout my career trainings, to get where I am today go to waste. I want those investments I had made to be rewarding in my career life. I also prefer to have my own income and the freedom to choose where I want to spend them.”*

In addition to that, their drive to move forward does not only benefit the women themselves but also the future generation by creating a better life and environment for them to live in.

Respondents from Division Three, Four and Five replied that their motivation was more driven by financial reasons and security, the support they received from family, good working environment, as well as to improve their standard of living alongside with their husbands. Some also stated that career passion also drove them forward.

Based on these women’s responses, women from different levels of Divisions had different motivations that pulled them into the workforce and pursue their career advancement. Their motivations significantly reflect Maslow’s theory on the hierarchy of needs. This was evident in the different levels of motivation they had, in which the motivations increased as they move higher in the career ladder. This will further be analysed in Chapter 5.

## 4.4 Women's Workplace Environment: Organizational Structures, Policies and Opportunities in the Workplace

### 4.4.1 Organizational Policies

#### 4.4.1.1 Human Resource Development in Brunei Civil Service

To balance out the views on women and career advancement, the author also interviewed a representative from Public Service Commission. This organization is responsible for recruitment and assessment of those who applies for government jobs in any government sector as well as assessment of civil servants who had been recommended or applied for job promotions. Its main purpose is to supply and ensure that the Brunei Darussalam civil service is run by officers and staff who are effective, efficient and has the qualities required for the development of the nation. Thus every Brunei citizens who wishes to be employed by the government and those who wishes to occupy higher posts would have to go through a series of standard performance test including interviews and written tests.

According to the officer, every organization has a set of criteria used for promotion purpose that needs to be fulfilled by civil servant for respective positions. These include their qualification, work experience and their working duration in certain position and skills. In every government organization or sectors, there is no gender preference to employment as well as promotion (Prime Minister's Office of Brunei Darussalam, 2012). There are also no specific rules or procedure that specifically designed to ensure women participation in leadership position but women's participation to leadership positions are always welcomed and allowed. This indicates that promotion and career advancement is highly based on merits and performance of employees.

When the author asked what then seemed to be the problem that women often faced that hindered them from advancing, the officer stated that the problem often involved the stereotype towards female leaders for example their capability to lead an organization, their commitment to work and competency on the job. Working mother mainly experienced these stereotypes

because when they have children, they were seen as less committed to their job. The officer replied,

*“Sometimes women are seen as not committed to work when they have to go in and out of the office every now and then due to their family commitments. Women are also still perceived as weak and emotional”.*

(Human Resource officer, Public Service Commission)

The officer also mentioned that to facilitate career advancement, every government ministries offer equal in-job trainings to all government officers regardless of gender. These training programs however vary in each ministry. Some ministries have a specific program designed specially for their own staff whereas most ministries send their officers to the Civil Service Institute, a government training agency that aims to facilitate advancement in human capital development through consultancy and research activities and through competency development framework (Brunei Government, 2014). To ensure government civil servants or government officers receive quality of training, the Civil Service Institute also brings in consultants from overseas to help develop their skills in areas that needed further improvements. This institute is also not limited to government officers. It is also accessible and available for private and semi private sectors.

This indicated that organizational policies and structures were key facilitators to women’s career advancement that helped women to achieve the positions in line with their qualifications and skills. This provided with female employees with a platform to express their talent and skills in their organizations. Thus, motivating them to continuously perform better in their work and at the same time, the organizations were able to retain talented employees.

#### **4.4.1.2 Respondents’ Perspectives**

All respondents in all the five Divisions in government sector rejected the presence of gender bias or gender issues in their workplaces. They agreed that women were given equal access to promotion and trainings as their male colleagues. One of the respondents from Division Two answered,

*“Access to job promotions and leadership positions are equal to both men and women. I believe in this because in the two workplaces I have worked at, I have worked under as many women as men. Both genders are capable of holding leadership roles.”*

(Fariza, 31, Division Two, married)

Promotions according to them are based on merits and performance, qualification, years of experience on certain job, as well as their skills and quality of performance that they had delivered. Promotions also depend on the availability of the position.

One respondent from Division One highly supported this view. She said that,

*“Job promotion in the government sectors is based entirely on merits. It depends and assess based on how you perform in your job, the quality of your work, and whether or not you have the qualification and qualities to be hired into higher position. For example, to get to my position required at least ten years of job experience and specialized on the field before you are eligible to go higher.”*

(Hawa, 58, Division One, married)

The author also asked the respondents to briefly explain their working experience and their workplace environment to assess their work situation in terms of their organizational policies and facilities that may support their career advancement. This chapter also looks into women’s perceived facilitators and barriers to their career advancement such as access to promotion, trainings, networking, mentoring, perceived qualities that women need to have to achieve high positions and further improvements that could be done by organizations or ministries to support women’s career advancement.

## 4.4.2 Factors Facilitating Women's Career Advancement

### 4.4.2.1 Hard Work

Those in Division One contributed their success to constant hard work, high determination, passion and willingness to take up more responsibilities including challenging tasks. They agreed that hard work and the need to outperform men in the job was always rewarding. This further enhanced their motivation to produce excellence in their job. In addition to that, maintaining professionalism in the workplace is also important. Professionalism means that a woman should not let her emotions influence her decision-making processes and professionalism in terms of treatment towards other.

Respondents from Division Two and Three acknowledged the qualities needed to achieve top-level positions would include qualification, specialization, and confident in doing their job as well as in making decisions. One of the Division Three respondents summarized the ideal qualities that need to be present in a leader,

*“A woman needs to be open-minded, be professional, don't let emotions or personal feelings affect decisions, need to have empathy and be considerate to those below her. To be a good leader is someone who started working at the lower Divisions and climbed their way up. They would be more empathetic because they have walked in the shoes of those below her.”*

(Noraini, 29, Division Three, married)

### 4.4.2.2 Competency on the Job

When it comes to job competency, unlike men, women have to constantly prove their competence in order to be seen as qualified for top management positions. The Division One respondents stated that to get into top-level position, they had to make their capabilities, determination and dedication, commitment on the job as well as their consistency in delivering good quality of work visible to the higher ups. At the same time, they also received constant

support, motivation and advise from their bosses. Hawa (58, married) from Division One described her journey as a journey full of blessings. She always had help from people surrounding her along her journey from whom she took up formal and informal lessons to be applied in her career life as well as home management. She shared the journey of her career life,

*“To get to top-level positions in government sector depends on several factors. First, is the availability of the post at the top. Second, your qualifications, specialized skills and knowledge on the field. Third, recommendation from the bosses. Fourth, own personal motivations and incentives to step up and take the job. This includes managing your time effectively to meet the demands at both ends-home and work.*

*I got to my current position due to recommendations from my bosses. It was not easy to achieve this position. I had to constantly keep the bosses happy and satisfied with my work quality and delivery to achieve the department goals. It was important to always be on my toes (alert) with those at the upper level (the bosses) and those at the lower levels (the people who work under me). When I got to this position, I needed to maintain good leadership and effective management skills to be able to delegate tasks in an efficient manner. I also need to be assertive, to ensure the workflow in the department and push them to be consistent with their work to achieve the department’s goals.”*

(Hawa, 58, Division One, married)

For Division Two, the respondents said that they needed to be highly committed, communication skills, determination, passion, good networking and display good leadership skills if they want to be a leader for the whole department or sector. Most importantly, they needed to be mentally strong, persistent in doing their work as well as having confidence in voicing out opinion.

#### 4.4.2.3 Education Credentials and Work Experience

Education is the key factor to all development. In this research, the highest level of education achieved by respondents in Division One was Master's Degree. Out of twelve respondents in Division Two, most of them held Bachelor's Degree except for four of the respondents who held Master's Degree, one had Higher National Diploma with Professional Qualification and one was a Cambridge O' Level holder. Whereas in Division Three, two of the respondents have acquired National Diploma, one had Bachelor's Degree and another was a Master's Degree graduate. Division Four respondents graduated with Higher National Diploma, whereas Division Five respondents held Cambridge O' Level certificate and the other graduated with Lower Certificate of Education.

Education and developed skills could help change the socioeconomic status of an individual and improve the standard of living for the family. It also opens up to more opportunities to achieve advancement in career. The higher the educational attainment, the higher the chance for them to land on a high paying salary and higher chance to climb the corporate ladder. Most of the respondents highlighted the importance of acquiring high academic qualifications for career advancement. The positive relation between education credentials and advancement is one of the reasons why many females are motivated and aspired to stay longer in academic institutions to pursue higher education which resulted to outnumbering of male students in terms of academic achievements and thus in most government levels of Division. In addition, based on the interview, the respondents seek career advancement as a form of reward and as a means to prove themselves that the investment that they had spent years in trying to get higher education was worth it and fully utilized in their career life.

Although the average requirement for to be at Division Two is Bachelor's Degree, two of the respondents held O' Level and Higher National Diploma with Professional Qualification. This shows that apart from academic qualification, work experience is also another factor that helps women to progress further in their career. Work experience adds more value to academic qualification because employees develop more skills and knowledge that help them to be more



effective and efficient in performing their work. The respondent who held O' Level qualification, Azizah, shared the challenge she experienced in her career life where her experience helped her work performance:

*“I first started working in a private sector, with Royal Brunei airline then I applied for government job and I got the position I applied for. At first, it was very challenging for me to adapt to new work settings and new environment from private to government. I had to learn new things; I had to learn the tasks for my new role. I overcame the challenges by applying the skills I gained from my previous job and apply it to my current work.”*

(Azizah, 50, Division Two, married)

#### 4.4.2.4 Individual Aspiration

Majority of respondents showed high aspiration to seek further progress in their career. Division One respondents demonstrated high aspiration on their career goals. Even when they have succeeded in achieving top-level position in their department or sector, this did not stop them from wanting to achieve more. One respondent mentioned her ambition in her career life. She stated that her motivation to work was to help contribute to the development of the country and to help make the country as advance and well-developed as other countries in terms of standard of living, stability and sustainability.

Respondents from Division Two and Three said that they would continue to seek advancement in their career. When the author asked where would they see themselves in the next ten years, majority expected that they would move to higher position, still within the same Division. Some responded that they would like to be enrolled in professional training courses and obtain more skills and knowledge in their career life. They mentioned that their circle of friends outside work also had influence on their career aspiration.

One of the respondents in Division Two, Izatul (25, single), who had Bachelor's Degree qualification was currently pursuing part time course to attain Master's Degree. She displayed high aspiration when talking about her career

goals. Her decision to pursue Master's was to open up more opportunities ahead for her to achieve in her career. According to her, she did not want to limit herself by staying at her current position. She wanted take up more challenging tasks and continuously learn and develop through new experiences.

#### 4.4.2.5 Training

Respondents in this study rejected the presence of gender bias or discrimination in access to trainings. They reported that in-job trainings are equally given to men and women at every government levels to ensure civil servants undergo skill-development. All respondents stated that they received trainings throughout their career life and that trainings had helped them developed their skills for their roles. The purpose of these training programs being provided by workplaces was to meet the training gaps in order to progress. Training programs offered differs for every level, depending on their tasks at work.

Majority Division Two respondents expressed that they underwent several trainings and skill development programs. Zahra (58, Division Two, married) recalled, when she shifted from working with private sector to public sector, initially she struggled with her new role and the responsibility that came along with it. The reason was that her new role required her to study and familiarize herself with technical terms in research and development of which, she had little knowledge of. Furthermore, her role also required her to be active in voicing out her opinion during discussions and meetings. She was lacking in confidence. Her attitude changed when she was sent for trainings overseas and locally to attend seminars, conferences, workshop and briefing courses. These had helped her gain more knowledge, at the same time developed her skills and confidence for her role which led to her advancement. Another respondent, Zahidah (47, Division Two, married) also shared similar view. She stated that the trainings provided by her organization had been helpful with her career advancement. For her role, she and her colleagues were sent overseas for skill-development trainings to have better skills dealing with people.

Respondents from Division Three also agreed to have access to training programs. One respondent noted that she had attended many coaching

classes for her career, which included motivating courses, seminars and team building courses.

At Division Four and Five, the respondents also noted that they were sent by their department to attend career trainings at Civil Service Institute.

#### 4.4.2.6 Interpersonal / Networking

All respondents described their work environment and relationship with colleagues as warm and friendly. They also described the people that they worked with, colleagues, staff and employees in all levels, were very supportive and respectful with one another. They highlighted the importance of maintaining good relations among the people they worked with in achieving the smooth running of the office thus the overall performance of the organization.

One of the Division One respondents stated that good communication and networking skills with the higher ups and those below was also one of the key factor that helped her get to top-level position. She also emphasized the significance of having these skills when becoming a leader. She added that one of the strategies that helped her be a good leader was keeping the people who worked for her motivated by allocating some time with them through inclusivity in the department. Whenever her department had new projects, she would allocate time with her employees by finding the opportunity to bring her employees to the field or project location with her. This inclusivity helped elevate work performance in her department through enhanced teamwork and cooperation. This contributed to fully functioning office operation at the workplace.

A respondent from Division Two also highlighted the importance of creating highly supportive and cooperative working environment.

*“In my department, we work as a team. When one person is having a difficult time in doing his or her task, we would offer help and face the challenge together. Our main priority at work was to deliver excellent outcome and results as a team.”*

(Zahidah 47, Division Two, married)

Another Division Two respondent described her working environment slightly different,

*“At times there would be disagreements among me and my colleagues but only on work related matters. We all want the best outcome for our department but sometimes we cannot find common grounds due to differences in our ideas and opinions. Beyond that, we are in good relations.”*

(Izatul, 25, Division Two, single)

Division Five also stated that they have good relationship with their colleagues despite working in male dominated environment.

#### **4.4.2.7 Mentoring / Coaching**

Respondents of Division One reported that they received mentoring and support during their career life. Having a mentor had helped them deal with the challenges that they face at work. One expressed the importance of mentoring to her advancement,

*“My mentor had always been there to support me whenever I faced difficulty at work. Although she has retired, we still maintain contact. We still meet up for coffee and she would help me look at things in different and better perspective.”*

(Hajah Raifah, 53, Division One, married)

Among Division Two respondents, four mentioned that they had informal mentors who served as their mentors. One mentioned she formed a mentoring relationship with her seniors who offered advice on how to perform better at her job. They would often talk about the struggles she faced on the job and they would share their past struggles and how they overcome them. Another Division Two respondent stated that she received mentoring from two people who helped her greatly in delivering and performing well on her job. She said that,

*“Before I took my current role, the person before me was excellent at his job. He taught me that the key to drive for excellence at your job is when you work, focus on work. Another mentor I had was a woman. Her advice to me was, “When performing your work, always question yourself: is this the best you can do? If the answer is yes, then there should not be any feelings of regret or dissatisfaction once you complete the task.” Her advice has been very helpful with my career advancement and becomes part of what motivates me throughout my career.”*

(Zahra, 42, Division Two, married)

On the other hand, respondents from Division Three, Four and Five said they did not receive any mentoring in their workplace.

#### **4.4.2.8 Family Support**

Family support in this context refers to support in terms of assistance in childcare, moral motivations, encouragements, advice and empowerment. Family support is an important factor that helps women to be involved in the public sphere, participate in the workforce, take up promotions and advance in their career. All respondents said that their family had always been supportive and are very encouraging towards their choices of career including their progression and none said otherwise.

For women at Division One, this family support was central to their decision to take up job promotions because once they go higher in the career ladder they knew it meant that their work would demand more of their time. Family support as well as outsourcing their domestic work is also one of the determinants to their advancement and work-life balance. Majority of those in managerial levels chose to outsource their responsibilities such as cleaning, doing laundry, feeding children to help reduce work-life conflict. Hajah Raifah (53, Division One, married) said that when as her responsibilities at work increased, her husband and herself decided to hire domestic helpers such as maids and a driver, to help with household operation which included sending and fetching her children from school and to ensure that the house was always kept clean.

Respondents from Division Two and Three thanked their family and husbands for the influence and contributing factor to their career advancement and balancing their roles. These women grew up in a family whereby their mothers also worked while raising them. Their employed mothers shaped how they view women's role in the society and the positive effect women bring to the family and society as a whole. They also learnt balancing life and work through their mothers and other women.

For Division Four and Five, they also received support from their family and husbands on their career life. Their support was one of the main reasons they entered the workforce in the first place. Both respondents from Division 5 did not have a domestic worker to help them with childcare. When their children were younger yet they wanted to enter the workforce to help contribute to household income. Although balancing their dual roles were difficult and exhausting, they said that their husband and family were always supportive with and encouraging in terms of their career, childcare and household work.

#### **4.4.3 Factors Hindering Women's Career Progression**

Majority of the respondents deny the presence of gender discrimination and inequality in access to promotion, employment and training opportunities. If equal access is given, then why the representation of women at decision-making and policy-making level remains low?

##### **4.4.3.1 Prevalence of Cultural Bias**

The author included a question on the perception and opinion of the respondents towards low representation of women in Division One. Division One respondents replied that the posts at the top-levels were based on job availability and recommendation from their bosses. Majority of the answer the author received was culture as the hindering factor to women's advancement to top-level positions. Five of Division Two, two from Division Three, one from Division Four and one from Division Five answered culture. Another common response to why low representation of women at top-level position was due to the family commitment and responsibility that women have to carry. Majority of the respondents agreed that society still holds high expectation on women's role at home such as to fulfill the

role as a good mother, wife and daughter, while on the other side, the need to manage their career life. Regardless of women's status in their workplace, they remain primarily responsible for their home welfare. A few mentioned the difficulty that they sometimes face in managing both roles efficiently and effectively and that they felt guilty when career demands more of their time.

Respondents who pointed culture as a barrier to women's advancement to leadership position argued that Brunei society still view the role of a leader is best suited for males and not females. The society also still has lack of trust and lower expectations on female leaders even when women have shown their leadership capabilities. Yet, male are still prioritize and since Brunei's society and culture is shaped by its national ideology of Malay Islamic Monarchy, this could have influence on the society's mindset.

Three from Division Two offered a different response. They replied that it had nothing to do with discrimination but women's entrance in the workforce is considered as a new phenomenon and that the higher positions are held by 'old guards' or officers who have been in the workforce longer, of which there were mostly men at that time, therefore their representation and progression is still slow. Another argued that the number of women holding higher positions is now increasing and it does not only occur in the government sector. She explained that,

*“Brunei is changing and improving in terms of female's involvements in the public sphere. Although we are still holding to our concept of MIB (Malay Islamic Monarchy) where in Islam men are put first in many aspects due to their role as the head of the family, I have noticed that there are increasing numbers of women holding high posts in organizational structure such as Accountant General, Magistrate of Attorney General's Chambers, Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Permanent Secretaries”.*

(Maya, 34, Division Two, married)

The author found it compelling that these respondents were not aware of the discrimination in the cultural practice against female in the workforce. It made organizational structure, policies and practices appear not to be

gender-bias. This showed that employees, especially female employees were made to believe that their organizational workplaces, structures, opportunities and policies are gender-neutral when in reality organizational attitudes and behavior that stem from cultural and social norm have largely and indirectly influenced women's advancement to top management. The hidden gender bias in organizational setting that set high preference for males over females in the workplace in fact, still prevail. The Human Resource Officer the author interviewed revealed gender bias practices during selection process, particularly selection process for senior executive roles. She stated that even when both candidates, a male and a female, were both equally competent for the role, the committee would always secretly prefer male to occupy the top management positions, mainly because males were believed to be better suited for the role.

#### **4.4.3.2 Age**

Age also has influence on career progression. Respondents from Division One consist of those who are in the age group where responsibilities toward their family have been reduced. The reason for this is that their age group is within those where their children are at their teen age thus independent to take care of themselves. Furthermore, some of their children were also financially independent and married. This eased women to climb up their career ladder.

Respondents in Division Two and Three are however in the age group whereby their family responsibilities and commitment demand more of their time. Their children were also at the age where they relied heavily on their mother.

One of respondents from Division Five stated that age was her barrier to seek further progress in their career. The respondent mentioned that she was almost at her retired age. Since she was still stuck at Division Five, it was impossible for her to climb up the career ladder. Instead, she was looking forward to her retirement to rest and spend more time with her grandchildren. Furthermore, the respondent also mentioned that she took a long route, from working with private sector to government sector, in her career development. She also took several times



off work to raise her children when they were younger. Thus her advancement was slow due to the time it took to occupy current position.

#### 4.4.3.3 Lack of Career Aspiration

The author asked whether or not the respondents would take up higher position if the opportunity were given to them to find out whether or not they have motivation and aspiration to climb career ladder. The research found that while most respondents from Division Level One to Four said they would take the opportunity and pursue for further advancement, respondents from Division Five offered different views. They would refuse to take the opportunity because they lack the required qualification and they did not want to take the risk of bearing heavy responsibilities. Due to their lacking in terms or educational credentials, they were not confident to compete against more qualified individuals and they were also not confident of being to handle more heavy responsibilities. Furthermore, they stated that they were happy at their current position. One of the respondents of Division Five shared her opinion,

*“I would not want to take up the position even if it were offered to me. I don’t feel I deserve to take it because to take up higher positions would require higher academic qualification of which, this puts me at a disadvantage. Furthermore, I am happy with my position. To me, it’s easier to occupy the posts that only receive orders from the higher ups and do the tasks that are assigned rather than to occupy posts that require you to delegate or manage an organization and everyone under it. It’s a heavy responsibility and I don’t want to take the risk.”*

(Rosnani, 46, Division Five, married)

#### 4.4.3.4 Family Factor

Majority of respondents from Division Two rejected the notion that family commitment slowed down their career progression. Whereas three out of twelve respondents from Division Two perceived their family commitment as a hindrance to their career advancement. The reason behind this was that this perception was mostly shared among those women who had young and dependent

children. One respondent from Division Two, Fariza, who worked as a head of public relations in Ministry of Health, mentioned that since she recently had a baby, she had the tendency to put aside her desire to pursue career advancement until her baby grew to be less dependent on her. Amelia from Division Two also noted that sometimes she had to come in to work late or leave work early due to her commitments and responsibilities at home. This affected her performance at work because this kind of situation that a mother like her experience, meant that it would be difficult to fulfill the requirement number of working hours. This indicated that when a woman entered motherhood, her career life became affected. Since motherhood demanded more of her time, it resulted to the slowing down of her career progression thus losing out on opportunities that may have come in their way.

Hajah Raifah and Hawa of Division One respondents admitted that when their children were younger, they had less time spent with their children due to the demand of their work but they managed their responsibilities by outsourcing their domestic work via hiring maid to help with most of household work. Although this could give rise to the stereotype of not fitting the gender norm and societal expectation of being a good mother, both Hawa and Hajah Raifah argued that outsourcing household duties did not indicate that they were negligence towards their parental duties. Their perception of family and work also reflected their desire to succeed in achieving work-life balance. Hajah Raifah stated that,

*“Everyone has a family. Family commitment is a responsibility held by both men and women despite of the differences in their expected roles. It is a commitment also held by every woman regardless of her position or level at work. If you cannot give them more of your time, then you should be more affectionate and attentive whenever you spend your time with your family. Commitment to family should not be a factor that stops you from progressing. Instead it should be the main drive for you to succeed in your career.”*

(Hajah Raifah, 53, Division One, married)

Reminiscing to past experience when duties as a mother and career women overlapped, Hajah Raifah added,

*“When my children were not feeling well and needed my care and attention, I would attend to their needs first. This would affect my work but I always try to make up for it and bring my work home.”*

(Hajah Raifah, 53, Division One, married)

Respondents from Division Four and Five stated that their family responsibilities and household management fell heavily on them. They mentioned that when their children were younger, they had to stay at home to raise them because they had no maid to help them with domestic responsibilities such as cleaning, cook and doing laundry. They also had to raise their own children. As their children grew up and started to be independent, the tension to manage their dual roles reduced because they could delegate household tasks to their children. Maznah’s (54, Division Five, married) experience on raising her children showed several career interruptions some women had to go through. Maznah had to resign from her jobs in order to fulfill her parental duties and for reason that she could not hire a domestic helper. Rosnani, on the hand, started her career life a little bit later. She only entered the workforce after her children became less dependent on her.

#### **4.4.4 Further Organizational Support to Empower Women**

When the author asked respondents what could organizations do to support their advancement, many highlighted the need to have more women-specific training programs on leadership skills, time management and work-life balance. Other suggestions made by respondents from Division Two to Five mentioned the need for their organizations to make flexible working arrangements, more transparent career planning briefings from Human Resource department in their workplaces, improvements in term of women-friendly facilities such as day care center in the workplace and breast-feeding room. Respondents, especially those from Division Three and lower wished they could have more opportunities to voice out their opinions, more involved in decision-making process in their department.

#### 4.5 Summary of Findings

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 on organizational structure. Organizational factors have direct influence on women's career advancement and their career life overall whereas individual factors are influenced by both societal and organizational factors.

Most of the respondents except for those in Division Five showed high aspiration to pursue further advancement in their career. Respondents from lower operational Divisions showed lower aspiration and had low confidence compared those at higher managerial levels. Majority respondents agreed that the traditional belief that men as better leaders than women still exist in the organization. This also influenced women's career advancement to higher positions. Regardless, women in managerial levels continuously pursue for advancement in their career and that support from family plays a significant role in influencing and facilitating their career advancement. At the same time, however, family commitment and responsibilities that still fall heavily on women had caused women to feel the heavy burden of managing both roles at home and their career life. In addition, due to the nature of the society as patriarchy, women could not escape from the cultural and societal expectation of their gender roles. They are still expected to fulfill their biological function regardless of their position or rank they have attained and work. Despite of these the respondents still view both their family responsibilities and career as a necessary part of their life and these two institutions complements one another.

Brunei government had created an environment that may help empower women in the society and make their workplace environment more inclusive. Government policies made promotions and trainings equally accessible to both men and women and that promotions were based on quality of performance and merit. Apart from their qualifications, women's work experience and skills on their job also facilitate 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. They also stated that they were continuously motivated and aspired to achieve more in life.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This research was constructed with the aim to understand women's perception of career advancement as well as the barriers and facilitators to they experienced in their career. This study looked into societal, organizational and personal or individual aspects to understand how these three main factors influence women's career advancement. The findings found that women working in Brunei government sectors have high aspiration to continuously seek for advancement in their career life. Having a career is crucial in shaping their identity. Career advancement also brings in psychological benefits to women's life in a way that advancement brings in self-satisfaction through their accomplishments in their career life. Apart from organizational policies, women's educational attainment, their accumulation of skills and experience as well as their personal motivation and aspiration have significant impact in determining their career advancement and success. In this part of the chapter, the author will discuss how societal factor including family factor influence women's progression at work, how organizational policies try to facilitate and open up opportunities to allow women to compete fairly alongside with men in the workplace while at the same time organizational practices and culture remain bias against women. Lastly, how women's personal motivations influence their decision to continuously pursue career progression.

#### 5.2 Structure of Society and Social Norm in Brunei

This study also found that at macro level, cultural bias that prefers male over females remain prevalent in the society. Women in this study are also highly socialized to have strong preference for family. Whereas at micro level, family play a significant role in empowering women challenge patriarchal norm by empowering

them to pursue higher education. In addition, respondents were empowered by family to pursue advancement in their career by expressing their potential in career life.

As a 'collective and familial' society (Hofstede and Bond, 1988), sociocultural values continue to persist to anchor women in to their domestic roles (Jamil, 2015). This results to the difficulty women that women experience in balancing work and career life. In relation to this study, although cultural bias against women continues to persist, women in Brunei are encouraged and empowered by the society to have high aspiration to succeed both in their career and at home. Unlike other women in other Muslim countries, Brunei women in this research were given equal opportunity to participate in the public sphere and this gave rise to the number females participate in the workforce.

Education has been proven to be a strong tool for women empowerment, which has helped in opening up more opportunities for women to succeed in their career life. Hence, this is one of the main reasons Brunei the late Sultan introduced the 'Education for All' policy (Young, Muhammad, Bakar, O'Leary, Abdalla, 2017). This policy had been so influential to an extend it contributed to the change in social norm in Brunei as a whole. Under this policy, both male and female are entitled access to educational benefits including sponsored tuition fees, educational and transport allowances. This allowed women in Brunei to utilize and maximize their educational attainment. Previously, the significance of Brunei women's roles were only concentrated in the domestic and private sphere, now, the significance of their contribution have been expanded into the public sphere. Furthermore, due to small population, women were pulled into the labour force to participate and contribute to national development. Women also utilize these opportunities to improve their position in the society.

In addition, the government has set up effective national policies under the country's Vision 2035 which aims for inclusive development by promoting gender equity to ensure that women have equal opportunities to express their potential in the work force and national building (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2012). Women in the workforce are also entitled to access to capacity building

opportunities including skills training, To help women integrate their dual roles, under the Employment Order 2009, the government outlined several maternity benefits including extended maternity leaves from 56 days to 105 days, entitlement to get paid maternity leave and prohibition from being terminated during maternity leaves (ibid). Furthermore, women are also given equal right to be active in economic contribution including the right to entrepreneurship and businesses.

Their growth and changing roles have contributed to the change in traditional 'gender order' (Connell, 1987). In addition, the women of Brunei are also able to be at the top in their field while carrying dual. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the respondents stated that their roles did not only focus in domestic sphere but also in the public sphere. Financial contributor to every household income no longer attributed to males but also to females. The findings also indicated that although women are considerably the newcomers to paid working world compared to men, paid employment is growing more central to their life as it is for men to a point that it shapes their identity. Women in this research also display the general attitude of women working in civil service in Brunei. Majority of the women in this research, especially those in Division One and Division Two were highly committed and showed high level of determination towards their paid work.

In this study, respondents from Division One, Two and Three emphasized that the support and encouragement they received from their family empowered them to challenge patriarchal norm and express their potential in the workforce. In this study, the respondents had spouses and family members who were supportive of their pursuit for career advancement and decisions. Similar to Murniati's (2012), managerial level respondents in this study were raised to have high educational aspiration, express leadership qualities and have greater role in decision making. Furthermore, their spouses were also flexible with women's decision to outsource their domestic duties to domestic helpers. This allowed women to express their capabilities in the workforce.

Thus, career advancement is important women because it is the key factor that shapes how they perceive themselves because advancement reflects their productivity at work and it also defines at which stage are they currently at



(Padavic and Reskin, 2002). Advancement in career functions as an incentive for workers to work hard to be more productive at work, to perform and deliver quality of work and to constantly develop their skills and knowledge in their workplaces. In other words, the more opportunities given for workers to advance through the practice of recognizing merits in one's work performances, the more likely they are to work hard and deliver their best. Providing the opportunity to advance to employees also benefit the organizations they work with to retain talented workers and to replace retired workers to ensure that the higher positions would always be occupied. Furthermore, having more women in the workplace and the organization overall help in reducing the presence of gender discrimination against women in all field of work. This would also eliminate sexual harassment in the work place thus create a safe working environment for women to work in.

Advancement is also important to these women, particularly those in managerial levels, because in order for them to enter and remain in the workforce, women, especially women with children, have to make many sacrifices. The reason is that the traditional role of women in family institution is increasingly changing. Despite their involvement in the public sphere, these women also cannot ignore their role at home. They need to still fulfill their expected role as a woman. They sacrifice their time spent with their children and family. This is particularly challenging for mothers with babies and young toddlers because when they decide to return to work, they would have to leave their highly dependent children in the care of maids or their parents. Thus women need to feel that their choice was worth it through reward and career advancement.

### **5.3 The Role of Organizations in Facilitating Women's Career Advancement**

This study shows that organizational structures and policies implemented by Brunei government have been proven to be one of the key facilitators to women's career advancement. Based on the interview with Human Resource officer and respondents in this study, it appears that the government has provided a strong foundation that allows women to seek career advancement in the workplace. First,

the government has implemented policies to ensure women are given equal right in employment. Second, the organizations practice equality and equity in recruitment procedure, promotion and career advancement, trainings and access to senior positions for both males and females. Third, promotion and career advancement is based on worker's quality of performance.

The findings in this study supported Kanter's (1977) organizational structural theory that argued access to recruitment, trainings, networking and promotions would help facilitate women's career advancement. Respondents in this study stated that the structure of their workplaces provide equal opportunities for male and female employees to access trainings and promotions. Majority of the women also agreed that they had no problem related to gender throughout their working experience mainly because they worked in a female-dominated working environment, particularly in Ministry of Health, Education, Communications and Finance. They also emphasized that they were not exempted from any promotion and advancement opportunities provided that they meet the conditions and requirements to occupy the position they were applying for. The findings also showed that women were encouraged by their workplaces and family to advance in their career. This is aligned with Kottke and Agars' (2005) as well as Maton and Salem (1995) who argued that organizational support, which also include supportive working environment and relationships at work, are among the determinants of women's attitudes and behavior towards their career. This equal practices in Brunei government sectors motivates females to invest in their human capital during their academic years and their motivation continues throughout their career life.

Human capital accumulation is a significant key-enabling factor that allows women in this study to progress in their career. In this study, one of the most influential factors that allowed women to achieve top-level positions in the workplace was their educational attainment as the base for their career progress. According to women in managerial levels, their educational attainment as well as their work experience opened up more promotion opportunities in the workplace. The finding in this study supports Hayfaa Tlais and Saleema Kauser (2011) who did research on the career advancement of Lebanese women managers. Their study

found that high educational attainment allowed women to managers to compete against men in managerial positions and increased their chances to access higher positions in the organizational hierarchy. In this study, apart from skills and specialization in the job, the highest level of educational attainment provided women in Division One with an entry ticket to the top management.

The level of educational credentials also plays an important role in determining the positions and the possibilities for women in this study to occupy key positions in the workplace (Kanter, 1977; Padavic and Reskin, 2002; Jogulu and Wood, 2011; Lahti, 2013). It serves to differentiate those from managerial levels and those from operational levels. The level of Division at which a woman is positioned upon their entry to the workforce also determines the duration an employee takes to climb the career ladder; the higher they are positioned upon their entrance to the workforce, the higher their possibilities to attain leadership positions. This is evident through the career journey of respondents from Division One who started their career journey from Division Two and managed to climb their way up to Division One. On the contrast, for those at operational level, climbing their way up would take longer duration. Furthermore, age becomes their limiting factor as they progresses in their career and they come at retirement age before they could climb any higher in the career ladder. This is evident through the experience of Azizah, a respondent from Division Two. Upon her entry to the workforce, her qualification was Cambridge O Level. She managed to climb up from operational level to managerial level. Although she continuously progressed through accumulation of skills and trainings, by the time she reached to Division Two, she was just starting to develop her skills required in a leader and on top of that, she was also near to her retirement age. Whereas for those in Division One, they had years of training and specializing in their task beforehand, when they were in Division Two that assisted their progression to Division One.

Another crucial facilitating factor that has greatly helped women in this study to advance in their career is the availability and equal access to trainings for every employee regardless of their gender, provided by government sectors. This is evident from the positive view of respondents regarding in-job trainings. Thus the

study reaffirms Becker's (1975) argument on the importance of training in helping women increase their productivity, which result to increase in salary and status. The respondents also added that training programs are available to all level of divisions in Brunei government sectors with the aim to developed highly motivated, skilled and capable employees through improvements in their skills, knowledge as well as to enhance their work performance.

Training has also helped women in this study to boost their confidence in their job thus, motivating them to progress in their career. This supports Burke's (2002) argument on the importance of training in developing women's confidence through the enhancement of their knowledge, skills and credibility at work. This will contribute to greater achievements in women's career life. An obvious example of this is Zahra, respondent of Division Two who initially lacked of confidence in her role but improved as she underwent trainings, provided by the government and her workplace. Since then, she developed confidence and became more motivated to progress in her career. This reflects the effectiveness of training programs to women's career advancement. To further enhance the effectiveness of the current training programs, government should therefore practice competency-based training.

On the contrary, while the organizational structure has equipped the employees with the availability of training and development programs to assist their career progression, the presence of formal mentors is almost absent in most of the public sectors. This could be one of the contributors to the scarcity of female leaders in Division One. In this study, only a few respondents had informal mentors. The presence of mentors had significant influence in their career life that helped them in performing well in their job thus career advancement. This confirms previous research on the importance of mentors as a strategy for women's career advancement (Ehrich, 1995; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989; Hopkins et al., 2006; Ezzedein and Ritchey, 2009). Mentoring as a form of support system helps women learn through their mentor on breaking down obstacles they face at work and work to find solutions. An example of this is Hajah Raifah (53, Division One, married). Her mentor whom she grew close to became her support system whom she talked to when she faced difficulty at work by encouraging her to broaden her perspectives

thus improving her efficiency at work. On the other hand, for women in lower managerial and operational level, the absence of mentorship and such support system could explain lack of aspiration and empowerment in their career life thus their career mobility.

Hence, in order to have more females in Division One, availability of mentors, especially female mentors would attract more women from Division Two and other managerial levels to leadership roles. Based on their personal experience, female mentors can help guide other women on strategies they used to balance their dual roles effectively. One of the ways to achieve this is by enforcing women-specific training programs available for every woman in every level of Divisions. Male managers could also benefit from such program where they can help in making the working environment more gender inclusive especially at the top management.

#### **5.4 The Influence of Cultural Bias on Women's Career Advancement**

The study found that women in operational and managerial levels experience different obstacles that hinder their progression. For women in operational levels, the element of 'sticky floor' became the hindering factor in their career advancement. This is particularly true for women in lowest operational level, Division Five. One of the respondents stated that age became a barrier to her career advancement. The author relates this to 'sticky floor' argument that explains that at their level of Division, promotion would take place really slowly because they were trapped in low-mobility jobs (Berheide, 1992). Furthermore, these women were exposed to less motivating nature of tasks. The respondents in this level said that they would want to pursue more promotion opportunities only to pursue higher salary but provided that the promoted positions did not require them to be leaders or decision-makers in their department. In addition, women at this level were not exposed decision-making tasks because their role in the workplace was only to follow orders from their authorities, which explains their lack of career aspiration and their comfort in staying at their current position rather than to seek progression in their career.

In addition, they were often sidelined in decision-making process in the workplace. This means that their voices were often left out in the workplace that also led to their lack of career aspiration. Organizations often forget that women at these levels can also provide their insight on how to improve the workplace operation and make the workplace more female or mother-friendly. Most government sectors did not provide childcare center in the workplace. If the government sectors were to make this available, it may help women achieve work-life balance. Women at these levels consist of those women who had lower income and unlike those women in higher Divisions these women were less likely to be able to afford helpers for childcare while they were at work. Thus, they were less likely to be productive in their tasks.

For those women in the managerial levels, their progression is largely hindered by gender stereotype and gender culture in the workplace, of which some may appear to be subtle and unconscious. The reason for unconscious and subtle gender stereotype is that from the outside perspective it appears like the organizational structures and policies are gender equal especially in entrance to the workforce, access to trainings and promotions that are based of merits and competency. While this should have resulted to more women at the top, at least by half of the total number in Division One, the reality is far from the expectations. The same cannot be said about organizational practices, culture and attitude.

This study found that gender stereotype still persist in their workplace that influenced people's mindset on having female leaders in a department thus affecting women's career advancement to higher positions especially in leadership positions. Employees, including the superiors, were often doubtful towards women's capability to lead. Since promotion was often based on recommendation, this could create bias against females. The reason is that the top-level positions are male-dominated. Men could preserve the top-level positions to maintain their authority and power, which explains the persistence of "old boy network" at the top management (Oakley, 2000; Colley, 2002). Respondents in this research also mentioned this issue. They stated that even when a woman is as capable as their male counterpart to lead an organization, employees still hold the perception that

women are emotional being in nature and this may affect women's decision-making process. This indicated that the cultural bias that favored men over women at societal level was also reflected at the organizational level. Thus resulting to the slow progress of women to Division One. This is parallel to research done by Murniati (2012). Despite the influence of Western ideologies of capitalism and free market, traditional cultural bias that favors male over females still persists in Brunei society. Such bias thus affects leadership evaluations of females in the workplace.

Interestingly, a number of women in this study appeared to be oblivious to the bias treatment of women in the workplaces. This highlights Schaefer's (2012) argument. He argued that females unconsciously accepts their subordination rather than to challenge male domination. For example, majority of the respondents from every level of Divisions rejected the presence of gender issues in the workplace yet they never challenge the male domination or pressed the issue on underrepresentation of women in policy or decision-making levels. From the author's observation, although some respondents from both managerial and operational levels rejected the existence of glass ceiling, patriarchal values in the workplaces still persist but are masked behind gender-friendly organizational policies and structures. On the surface, women are given the perception that the organizations are welcoming towards having female leaders through equal opportunities in the workplace but in reality, the hidden bias in organizational attitude and practices make it difficult for women to climb to top management.

This study reveals that the persistence of cultural bias and gender stereotype that stems from societal and cultural expectations on women's gender role and biological functioning also results to the undermining of women's capability to lead in this study. Working mothers are often subjected to 'motherhood ceiling' that hinder them from progressing (Correll, Bernard and Park, 2007). The problem that women in this study face is that when they enter motherhood, they are often subjected to questionable commitment, leadership capabilities, and decision-making qualities. Women in this study are seen as less committed to work when their obligations to family interrupted their time at work thus affecting their career progress. This is particularly true in Division One. As highlighted by respondents in

Division One, they had to constantly work hard and outperform men in order to make their competency visible, recognized and to prove that they are fit to be at the top level.

This study proves that 'greedy institutions' of home and work (Coser, 1974) make it difficult for women to progress in their career. The reason is that 'mommy track' and 'career track' are deemed to be restricting women's career advancement as explained by Halpern and Cheung (2008). This cause difficulty for women to fit into the category of an 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990). These constraints further influence the bias in organizational attitudes and culture against female leaders. As highlighted by one respondent from Division One, having a female as leaders also had its disadvantages and these disadvantages were mostly related to their biological function and gender-role. Women were considered as a liability to the organization when they get married and get pregnant. The reason is that, when a woman gave birth, they would be absent from work. This is considered as detrimental to the organization especially when the woman was a leader in the organization or department because organizations cannot run without a leader. As a result of this, the values of a woman leader often reduces when she was away from work for three months or for maternity leave and further reduced when they had to be absent or come in late to work to attend post-natal check ups and other family-related matters. While for men, they are socially and culturally expected to focus on their career track. This could be the reason why some still preferred to have males as leaders hence, hindering women's progression.

In this study, women in Division One were able balance 'mommy track' and 'career track' by adjusting and outsourcing their role in order to reduce role strain and role overload (Holtzman and Glass, 1999) on their part thus allowing them to be career-oriented. Furthermore, in this study, the author found a pattern of age whereby a woman is more likely to be able to climb to Division One. Based on the career journey of respondents from Division One, they were able to secure positions in Division One and fit the definition of 'ideal worker' only when they were in their late 40s. At this phase of life, they were able to be career-oriented and assume the role of a leader. The reason is that apart from their years of experience and



specialization on the job, the pressure of managing ‘mommy track’ and ‘career track’ reduced because they were at the age whereby their children became independent which influenced a shift in their preference and priorities to be more career-oriented. Whereas for women in middle and lower managerial levels, they were in a phase of life whereby the pressure to maintain the work-life balance was high. At this stage, if their career progression threatens the balance, these women would prefer to stall their desire to take on more responsibilities, at least until their children were independent.

Based on the overall experiences of the respondents in this study, it seems like progression to top management is a lonely and individualistic journey for women. Furthermore, due to the lack of formal mentor, especially female mentor, female managers who desire to climb to top management have to learn to pave their own way up the ladder which deems to be difficult. In addition, women in Division One had to deal with ‘double-bind’ effect (Oakley, 2000) that affect their gender role in order to succeed in their career, whereby while taking on a role of as a leader, women in Division One had to break away from the norm of their feminine role-caring, nurturing and motherly-to play a masculine, assertive role in order to be a successful leader. Hence, one of the improvements organizational structures and policies could make to help more women progressing to top management positions is by further improving policy on gender diversity. Although certain improvements have been made such as extending maternity leaves to 105 days, organizations could develop strategies to help women achieve work-life balance as they transition to holding bigger roles and holding more responsibilities in the workplace.

### **5.5 Women’s Individual Agency**

Based on earlier discussions, this research found that the structure and culture of the society limit women’s capacity to be involved in the public sphere. To compensate with this, Brunei government sectors create an enabling environment to empower women to continuously seek advancement and achieve success in their career through the practice of fair and equal opportunities for both male and female

in terms of access to promotion and trainings. Although this had been helpful in developing highly capable women with high career aspiration, the author argues that women's agency plays a bigger part in influencing their career advancement. The author also argues that perceived limitations to women's career advancement can be challenged through individual's agency. Agency in this study refers to the respondents' ability to make their own decisions regarding their expected roles while during agentic processes, women constantly negotiate with the contestation of the cultural expectations of their roles to allow them to succeed in their career life (Parsons, 1937; Giddens, 1984; Loyal and Barnes, 2001). Thus, individual's agency is a powerful means of social change (Uppalury and Racherla, 2014).

In this study, the contestation that women experienced was between the need to fulfill cultural expectation and their desire to strive for success in their career. In this research, agentic processes took place when respondents at managerial levels expressed their agency by means of negotiating rather than to challenge the traditional concept of their gender role, to allow them to succeed in their career life and home institution. Women in managerial levels in particular, those in Division One, consist of those who act beyond their gender norm. To deal with the gender stereotype and cultural bias that disadvantage them in the workplace, the respondents chose to invest in their human capital-education, experience and trainings-to build their self-esteem and self-confidence to attain certain extent of authority in their workplace. Adopting male style of leadership is also significant in allowing those in Division One in acquiring position of authority in the workplace and to be a successful leader. Since women are associated with nurturing and caring image, organizational attitude often view women as incompetent to assume the role as a leader. Therefore, adopting male-style of leadership is crucial when a woman is assuming the role as a leader. At the same time, women also integrate their feminine characteristics such as caring into their leadership and management style that helps keep employees under them satisfied and motivated in their job with the aim to improve work productivity of the overall department.

When it comes to dealing with work-family spillover, respondents in managerial levels particularly those in Division One and Two possesses strong self-

belief that they can succeed in their career regardless of the cultural constraints that anchor them. When their dual responsibilities overlap, women in managerial levels were also able to provide alternative action that allow balance their dual responsibilities, for instance, Hajah Raifah (53, Division One) chose to bring her work home while looking after children when they were not feeling well.

Flexibility in managing dual role via outsourcing responsibility has been proven to be crucial for women to break away from structural constraints and help in managing the contestation between the need to conform to gender roles and the desire to advance in career. One of common strategy mentioned by respondents in managerial levels that allowed them to succeed in their career was the presence of domestic helper or maid. Having a maid is not uncommon in Brunei. In fact, having a live-in maid is common in a dual-earner family due to the accommodating employment policies for foreign workers in Brunei. Due to these available and easily accessible resources, women were able to outsource their domestic work which in turn reduced the heavy responsibility of childcare and household management. This finding is align with suggestions made by Halpern and Cheung (2008) that may help women to lead a dually successful life including to the importance of utilizing and maximizing own resources. They argued that women should outsource everything that they could afford that did not require their personal input including cleaning the house and doing laundry. This would allow women to divert and provide more of their energy and time to focus on family and work success. Women in this research had access to different resources. The habit of hiring live-in maid is more common among managerial levels, particularly among Division Two. The higher the position a woman occupies, the more resources she could utilize. Women in Division One had higher salary thus they could afford to hire more helpers compared to those at the lower levels. However, not every family could afford to hire a maid especially respondents from operational level, and some respondents from managerial levels preferred not to hire a maid. These respondents seek alternative ways to manage their dual responsibility that was by outsourcing their childcare to family and trusted family friends. This can be explained through Hofstede's description of collectivist society. Brunei as a collectivist and familial society prioritize group cooperation and

develops preference for a close social framework whereby the in-group, consisting of family members as well as close friends, often take care of one another and expect loyalty in exchange (Hofstede, 1984).

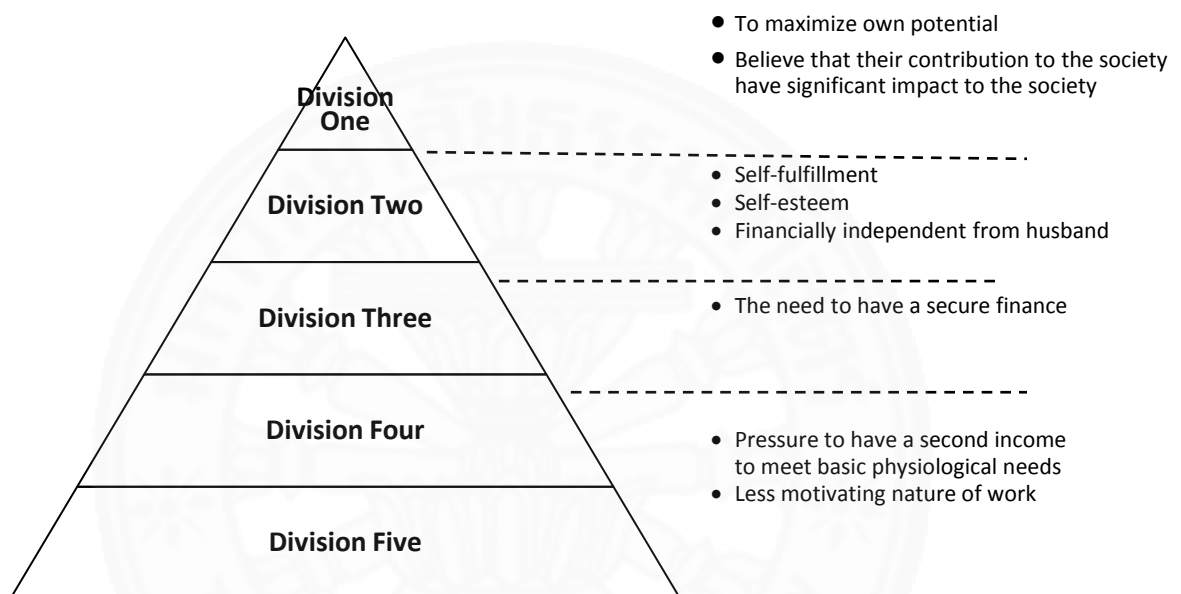
Respondents in managerial levels also contributed their career success to their ability to divide their focus between work and family efficiently. Respondents from managerial levels explained that when they were at their workplace, they focused on completing their tasks. Whereas when they were at home, they gave their utmost attention to their family. Halpern and Cheng (2008) suggested in practicing work-to-family transition method to efficiently manage women's dual roles that is by shifting the mindset between work and family. When a working mother drives to work, it should be a signal that it was time for her to shift her role and mindset from being a mother to a career woman. This can be done by thinking about the tasks that she needed to complete on that day. Whereas when she returns home from work, she should shift her mindset back to the role of a mother (ibid). This could help working women succeed at home as well as at work at the same time. Thus, improve efficient management of their dual roles.

### **5.5.1 Individual Aspiration**

Career aspiration could be the determining factor that differentiates those who would climb higher and break the glass ceiling and those who would be stuck at Division Two at most. The reason is that even when two women are positioned at the same level of Division with equal responsibilities, their career aspiration and their willingness to take up more challenging responsibilities and opportunities play a huge role in their mobility to top management. Furthermore, based on this study, women who desire to be at the top management need to adopt masculine traits and behavior at work.

In this study the author found that women in different levels of Division expressed different levels of career aspiration. For women in managerial levels, they view career as a medium to express independence from their traditional roles. Achievements in their career are also significant as it brings benefits to their psychological wellbeing in terms of self-fulfillment. Thus, majority of those in

managerial levels expressed high aspiration and ambition to achieve further progress in their career. Whereas for those in operational levels, career serves as means to help meet their basic needs. The differences in level of aspiration among respondents from different levels of Division are found to complement Maslow's model on hierarchy of needs.



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

Source: Author's own analysis.

In Maslow's theory on hierarchy of needs, he explained that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy of priorities, which differs for individuals. These priorities that they want to fulfill, influence women's career decisions and shape their career aspiration as well. Different from the basic layer of Maslow's pyramid model, this study found that for women in a collectivist society such as Brunei the basic layer of the pyramid model is social belonging. The reason for this is that the identity for individuals in a collectivist society is most often associated with their social system (Gambrel and Cianci, 2003). Thus, sense of belonging through membership is important to empower women who pursue life outside the private

sphere because as more women achieve success outside the private sphere, more women will also be aspired to follow similar path.

Socioeconomic background, family background and characteristics, socialization process and upbringing were found to have significance in influencing the respondents' career aspirations. These factors also influenced their perceived facilitators and barriers to career advancement. Respondents in operational levels came from lower socioeconomic background. Hence, their motivation to work was only due to the pressure of having a second income for the family in order to provide adequate basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter without going into debt especially with the increase in standard of living in the global context (Poduska, 1992). They also needed to contribute to household income alongside their husband with the hope that their family members could have better life chances and have extra savings for their future needs. Thus their motivation to work was not to only to meet the basic survival needs but to achieve the next level that was to seek for safety and security from the deprivation of the basic survival needs. As long as their family meet more than the basic needs, these respondents showed no aspiration to progress further and were comfortable in their line of job.

Unlike those in managerial levels, they faced more obstacles that limit their career advancement and capacity to develop high career aspiration due to their restricted access to resources that can help them with household responsibilities. They were also found to be more home-oriented and more likely to conform to traditional gender norm compared to those in managerial levels. Their aspirations were strongly linked to their roles at home hence, they were more likely to seek fulfillment in their roles at home.

Respondents at this level also possessed low self-esteem and engaged in self-stereotyping behavior as highlighted by Leach (1988) and Vianen and Fischer (2002) in literature mentioned in this study. This resulted from the environment and social interaction that they were exposed to. These respondents were exposed to primary socialization whereby their mothers were stay-at-home mothers thus were home-oriented themselves. These respondents were exposed to socialization process that influenced them to conform to traditional gender norm hence, expecting them to prioritize their roles at home rather than at work.

For respondents from managerial levels, the higher they move up the career ladder, the higher the aspiration and confidence they express in their career. Their motivation to have a career was also to help provide basic needs for their family but their level of needs was higher than those at the lower operational levels. Since they earn more than those in operational levels, their income covered more than just the basic human needs and deprivation from those needs. For Division Three respondents, although they did express their motivation to pursue career progression, their main drive was to ensure financial security and safety in case anything happens to their marriage. Respondents in Division Two had higher career aspiration than those in Division Three. The reason was that unlike those in lower management and those in operational levels, Division Two respondents seek fulfillment in their career advancement. It boosted their self-esteem and self-confidence, the second highest level in Maslow's hierarchy model, when they were able to achieve their career goals. Most Division Two respondents had high aspiration resulting from their investment they had made in their academic years. Furthermore, these respondents came from family background whereby their mothers were career women themselves. This also influenced them to set high aspiration in their career. In their primary socialization, unlike those at operational levels women from managerial levels were expected by their family to succeed not just in their roles at home but also in the public sphere. Hence they had the tendency to invest in their human capital accumulation in their academic life in order to achieve success in their career life.

Respondents at Division One expressed the highest aspiration for their career. Kanter (2003) explained that once an individual was situated on high-mobility tracks, they developed high tendency to be driven and move further in their career tracks. In this study, even with their success in occupying the highest level of Division in government sector, they continuously pursue further achievements in their career life as means to achieve for more self-fulfillment. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these women were considered as those who have achieved the self-actualization stage. Thus, compared to those at other managerial levels, Division One respondents were more likely to behave beyond their gender norms. They were self-driven, confident, assertive, persistent, and had the ability to command authority in the

workplace. This resulted to their high achiever attitude and values. For women from Division One, career advancement did not only depend on effort from the organization but personal incentives were also significant in determining women's progression.

In this study, having strong self-belief shape women's career aspiration and help facilitate women's progression to top management. This supports Bandura (1997) argument that people's level of motivation and actions were determined by their own beliefs. Division One respondents strongly view their roles in management to be highly significant to development of society and that their commitment and contribution help improve the workplace. They also believed that women leaders could bring differences to the workplace through their 'feminine touch'. This highlights feminization of work culture brought about by females in the workplace. Women have qualities and personality such as being more empathetic nurturing and caring (Low and Haji Sulaiman, 2013) that is important in binding the whole organization. Low (2013) described female leaders often practice mother-like leadership style which people-centric. This is supported by the findings from this research whereby one respondent from Division One prioritized unity among the workers by making the department a more inclusive and harmonized environment. Her leadership style was making her workers engaged in projects through site visits as a way to spend time with them.

In addition to that, Division One respondents perceived women to be more resilient and mentally stronger because they are capable of managing multiple roles and the responsibilities that come along with them. Women from other levels of Divisions also praised women's ability to divide their attention among multiple activities which was lacking in men because men narrowly focus their brains on one specific matter. Women of all levels also mentioned that women were better organizer, planner and negotiator than men because their role as mothers requires them to have those qualities to maintain proper management of their family members. As a female leader, they wanted to serve as a role model and as an epitome that women can succeed both in their career and their roles as mother, wife and daughter. They believed that they could be an inspiration for other women to



continuously work hard and work smart to progress further in their career without neglecting their home responsibilities.

In this study, social capital is significant for women who attempt to position themselves to top management. Metz and Tharenou (2001) also argued that social capital was important for women in managerial levels to progress to higher positions. This was due to scarcity of women in senior management that led women to be excluded from male networks (ibid). As highlighted by Hawa (58, Division One, married), recognition and recommendation were crucial to be in Division One of which, this requires accumulation of social capital. Since organizational structure was still based on male concept, women need to work hard to show their capabilities and develop good communication skills and maintain good relations with superiors and inferiors. This further proves that in order to occupy key positions in the workplace, women in managerial levels needed to develop their social capital to penetrate the 'old boys network'.

#### **5.6 The Influence of Socioeconomic Status, Family Background, Socialization and 'Significant Other' in Influencing Women's Advancement**

Socioeconomic and family background had a significant impact on respondents' career aspiration and advancement. Respondents Division Two and Three came from middle class socioeconomic background; some were from lower middle class while others from upper middle class. Division One respondents came from upper socioeconomic status. Similar to Murniati's (2012), respondents in this study emphasized that their socioeconomic status allowed them with the affordability to outsource their domestic duties and childcare while at the same time it provided them with the opportunity to focus on their career advancement. Family background, on the other hand, constructs differential socialization patterns they are exposed to. It also shapes their career decisions, behaviour and perception towards barriers and career progression. The higher they were positioned in socioeconomic strata, the more likely they were to have high career aspiration because individuals who were positioned at the middle and upper class were constantly interacting with highly aspired 'significant others'. This indicated that when females are socialized

and exposed to an empowering environment, they develop the tendency to also be empowered. Respondents from Division One and Two also stated that peer pressure, the need to improve their socioeconomic status, the pride of knowing they could do or perform better in their job as well as taking up more challenges at work influenced their motivation to pursue career advancement.

Interestingly in this study, women in managerial levels expressed different levels of aspiration among themselves. Some were more career-oriented and others were caught up with the need to fulfill their expected gender roles. Those who came from higher socioeconomic status were more likely to be career-oriented. For example Division Two respondents, Zahra and Mahirah, who shared similar career aspiration and characteristics similar to those in Division One. Unlike majority of Division Two respondent, both were more career-oriented. They were also persistent, assertive and willing to take up more challenging tasks to improve her productivity at work. Their socioeconomic background had influence in their aspiration. Both Mahirah and Zahra came from a family of higher socioeconomic status and were constantly surrounded by individuals who were successful in their careers. This allowed them to be more exposed to how other male and female superiors made their way to the top and adopt their strategies into their own. As a result, they were socialized and highly expected by family and colleagues to also be high achievers in their career life.

Division One respondents were able to progress and develop high career aspiration because unlike those in operational and lower managerial levels, they faced fewer obstacles in their career life. Their socioeconomic background allowed them to access and maximize resources to help them outsource their responsibilities at home resulting to less work-life conflict and role demands. This allowed them to focus on being career-oriented. In addition, they came from family background with high socioeconomic status whereby success at work was considered a form of standard within the upper social class. Women in Division One and Two also acknowledged that their motivation to pursue career advancement was also influenced by other women-friends, colleagues, mentors and family members-for doing so well in their careers and home management. When women are exposed to this kind of environment, they learn through observation and interaction with

successful women on the strategies that these successful women used to overcome their perceived barriers in the workplace thus became an influential model for other women to develop high aspiration in their career life (Clarke, 2011).

Strong support system within family institution has been proven to be critical to women's career advancement. Based on the findings, the author argues that the support that women received from their significant others have influence in women's career advancement because they affect the environment and the surrounding that the women were exposed to that shaped their decision toward their career choices. Respondents from all levels of Divisions attributed their success at work to their family. Without these support, it would be difficult for women to enter the workforce in the first place and to succeed in their career. Furthermore in Islam, a married woman is required by the religion to obtain permission from her husband in order for her to be engaged in public domain including her participation in the workforce. This was not a problem to married women in Brunei as proven by the respondents in this research. These women were raised in families where their mothers were career women themselves and in addition to that, the respondents' parents and siblings were supportive of their career decision and choices. They also receive such support from their husband including support with childcare. This shows that when individuals are exposed to an environment whereby it has become a social norm for the females in the society to succeed in their career while managing their dual roles efficiently, these individuals would be more likely to follow the pattern of behavior of the society. Socialization is thus one of the contributing factors that shape how women perceive the importance of their roles in the society. Socialization through constant interaction shape how gender is being performed and that socialization differ in every society depending on their culture and traditions they are exposed to. In this research, women learnt how to successfully perform and integrate their dual roles through social learning at home and in the public sphere. These women learnt that their roles did not have to be limited in the private home institution.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Conclusion

This study was designed to study the facilitators and barriers to women's career advancement in Brunei government or public sectors. This idea of this study branched from the visible scarcity of women at top management in Brunei public sectors despite the constant increase in highly educated females compared to males in Brunei. Furthermore, even when Brunei is moving forward to achieve equality and to empower women in the society, the scarcity of female in decision and policy-making level prevails.

The research had revealed that despite the increased in number of women in majority level of Divisions in Brunei government sectors and organizational structure remain to be constructed based on male model of career development. The society and culture still expect women to perform the traditional concept of 'womanhood' that anchored them to home responsibilities. Women also experienced career interruptions such as maternity leaves, emergency leaves and difficulty in meeting the required working hour when family required their attention, of which these affected their career advancement. These led to gender stereotype against female who were seen as less committed to their work. Thus, further improvements in the organizations would help improve women's career advancement to higher positions.

Nonetheless, women in Brunei continuously displayed high motivation to pursue career advancement. Majority of them were empowered and encouraged by their workplaces to pursue advancement. Women have equal access to promotion opportunities, trainings, mentoring and networking. Their desire to succeed in public domain however did not mean that they neglected their responsibilities in private domain. The nature of the society as a well-integrated mixture of Western ideology and Eastern ideology had created an empowering environment that allows females to succeed in their career. Women in Brunei government sectors make use available

resources such as domestic helper and seek help from their family and friend with childcare responsibilities when they were at work to help them manage their dual responsibilities and at the same time succeed in their career life as well as their role as mothers, wives and daughter.

Hence, the role of the government sectors as organizations is important in ensuring that women can achieve their goals both in their career life and private life. This paper had shown 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.

## **6.2 Recommendations from This Research**

The government and the society as a whole acknowledged the fact that culture and cultural expectations limit women's participation in the workforce in a way that women were still held primarily responsible for their family's welfare and that women in Brunei willingly accepted this responsibility as part of their identity as a woman, they could not ignore the rising number of highly educated and ambitious females who seek for more achievements in their career life. The government and organizations also need to keep and sustain these women in the workforce, utilize their skills and knowledge to develop highly functioning society for long-term development. To achieve this, organizations needed to create an enabling environment whereby women were effectively integrated, empowered and encouraged to continuously seek for career advancement. To help empower more women to pursue career advancement and progress to top management, organizations should:

1) Provide a women-specific support network program or development program whereby women, particularly those in managerial levels, can have the opportunity to learn from one another on strategies that successful women utilized to secure top management positions while managing their motherhood duties efficiently. This support network will expose women to an empowering environment that will influence more women to develop high career aspiration that will enhance their self-efficacy. Furthermore, as this study has shown, socialization influence women's perception of career advancement; their perceived barriers and facilitators to their career life. Through this development program, women would have the platform to discuss and address issues they experience in the workplace, learn how those women at the top successfully manage male dominance in their work setting.

2) Human Resource management need to also be efficient and effective in tracking down potential high-achievers, guide them to further expand potential their talent and capabilities in their work tasks. This will help potential women and highly ambitious women to progress in their career and climb up the hierarchical ladder.

3) Supervisors and Human Resource managers need to also be accommodating, empathetic and be considerate towards the needs of female employees especially when the situation required them to attend their family and children's needs. Supervisors, Human Resource managers and the overall organizational behavior should not discriminate or stereotype women for using work-life benefits such as maternity leaves or emergency leave to attend to family's needs. When organizations are being empathetic and cater to women's inevitable family responsibilities, supervisors and bosses should understand that they would not lose anything by being considerate. Instead this would result to organizations being able to sustain potential women in the workplace. Such type of management behavior would also earn more respect and appreciation from the employees, which would enhance cooperation, work delivery and performance of the whole organization thus improving the level of productivity of the organization. Furthermore, when women were satisfied with their workplaces and bosses, this would in turn encourage them to be more motivated to perform well in their job.

4) Open up more opportunities for women, especially those in Division Three and higher, and encourage them to voice out their opinion, participate in discussions and decision-making process. Development or training programs mentioned above could also help in encouraging women from all levels of Division to be more proactive in their workplace which will in turn enhance their self-confidence and career aspiration. Through these improvements, government sectors or organizations could tap more into women's strength and capabilities as well as integrate different points of view regardless of gender, thus improving the performance of the department as a whole.

To help women manage their work-life balance, organizations should:

1) Implement flexible working arrangements such as flexible working hours and work from home options to allow women especially those with young and dependent children to manage their dual responsibilities better. This would be very beneficial to women especially those in managerial levels since majority of these women experience tense dual demand from both their career life and motherhood compared to other levels of Division. Such flexibility in work arrangement will result to positive outcome and positive attitude that benefits both employee and the organizations.

2) 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 provide an alternative means to achieve work-life balance thus 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.

## 6.2 Recommendation for Future Research

There are multiple ways to expand this research. Since this study was only done in the context of Brunei, it would be useful to study the effects of varieties of cultures on women's career advancement and compare the differences and similarities between countries. It could also be used as comparative study to analyse the differences experienced by the Malays in Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei since these countries have similar cultural background and are Muslim majority countries.

This research uncovers plenty of information into details on the factors that helped women advance in their career and the hindering factors that prevent them from advancing. This research is however, only focused on Brunei government sectors focusing on the public civil service and the experiences of women working in public sector may not be similar to the experiences of women working in private sectors which is more likely to be male-dominated. Thus, more research is needed to capture the experiences of women in private sectors. By understanding the effects of societal, organizational and personal factors on women's career advancement in private sector, and by comparing it with this research, more knowledge would be obtained to learn the differences and similarities between the experiences of those in private and public sectors.

Since this research only focused on women, the future research could focus men's experiences in public sector including their career development, advancement and hindering factors. It could also be expanded to cover men's perception on women's career advancement and their perception towards female leaders. Such research would be more valuable when used as comparison for this study.



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APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MANAGERIAL LEVELS**

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**Respondent's background**

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1. Age
2. Highest level of education
3. How many children do you have?
4. How old were you when you got married?
5. How long have you been working in the public service?
6. What position are you currently holding?
7. How long have you been in your present role?
8. What are the main tasks of your role in the workplace?

**Work-related questions**

1. What does career advancement mean to you?
2. Would you please describe your career journey up until now?
3. Do you have anyone who serves as an inspiration to be successful in your career?
4. How would you describe your relations with your colleagues?
5. Did you receive any kind of career support such as mentoring, coaching, networking or trainings to help you in career advancement?
6. Do you think access to career opportunities are equally accessible to male and female?
7. Have you or someone you know experienced gender-related issues such as discrimination or stereotype at work?
8. Does your workplace offer facilities such as child care services or mothers' room in your workplace?
9. How do you manage your work and life balance?

**Family or motherhood-related questions**

1. After you enter motherhood, do you experience changes in your aspiration and attitude towards your career? Please explain further.
2. Do you experience the need to juggle between work and home responsibilities? Please explain further.
3. Are you primarily responsible for your family's welfare such as child rearing and household responsibilities?
4. How does your family/partner help you with childcare?
5. How supportive is your partner towards your career decisions?

**Career aspiration**

1. What motivated you to pursue career advancement?
2. How would you picture your career journey in the next few years? Do you have aspiration to progress to higher leadership positions?
3. What are the qualities and qualifications that women need to have in order to be at top-level positions?

**For Division One**

1. What strategies/resources did you utilize to be in top management?
2. Why is it important to have more female leaders in the workplace?

**Round up questions**

1. In your opinion, what could be the reason for underrepresentation of females in top management (Division One) despite of them outnumbering men in middle management (Division Two)?
2. What are the factors that facilitate and hinder women's career advancement?
3. In your opinion, how can workplace settings be improved to sustain potential women and empower women to pursue career advancement?

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR OPERATIONAL LEVELS**

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**Respondent's background**

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1. Age
2. Highest level of education
3. How many children do you have?
4. How old were you when you got married?
5. How long have you been working in the public service?
6. What position are you currently holding?
7. How long have you been in your present role?
8. What are the main tasks of your role in the workplace?

**Work-related questions**

1. What does career advancement mean to you?
2. How would you describe your relations with your colleagues?
3. Did you receive any kind of career support such as mentoring, coaching, networking or trainings to help you in career advancement?
4. Do you think access to career opportunities are equally accessible to male and female?
5. Have you or someone you know experienced gender-related issues such as discrimination or stereotype at work?
6. Does your workplace offer facilities such as child care services or mothers' room in your workplace? Do you find such facilities useful?
7. How do you manage your work and life balance?

**Family or motherhood-related questions**

1. After you enter motherhood, do you experience changes how does it affect your career? Please explain further.
2. Do you experience the need to juggle between work and home responsibilities? Please explain further.
3. Are you primarily responsible for your family's welfare such as child rearing and household responsibilities?
4. How does your family/partner help you with childcare?
5. How supportive is your partner towards your career decisions?

**Career aspiration**

1. What motivated you to work?
2. How would you picture your career journey in the next few years?
3. Do you have aspiration to progress to higher leadership positions? Please explain further.
4. What are the qualities and qualifications that women need to have in order to be at top-level positions?

**Round up questions**

1. In your opinion, what could be the reason for underrepresentation of females in top management (Division One) despite of them outnumbering men in middle management (Division Two)?
2. What are the factors that facilitate and hinder women's career advancement?
3. In your opinion, how can workplace settings be improved to sustain potential women and empower women to pursue career advancement?

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