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INVolMENT OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN DOMESTIC DECISION-MAKING

Halimah Awang and Rohana Jani
Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Women’s contributions towards the social and economic development of many states have been well recognized. There has been substantial increase in the proportion of women attaining higher educational levels, participating in labour force, and occupying in managerial and decision making positions. In many countries, including Malaysia, supportive legislations were introduced, reviewed and amended over the last decade to include ‘gender’ in order to not discriminate on the basis of gender. However, not much is known about Muslim women’s involvement in decision-making in the home front especially among cohabiting couples.

Early studies on women’s involvement in domestic decision-making were only on family health related issues (Mahmood, 2002; Mussawar, 2003; Furuta and Salway, 2006; Fantahun, Berhane, Wall, Byss and Hogberg, 2007) while research by Dobbelsteens and Kooreman (1997) as well as Bernasek and Bajtelsmit (2002) attempted to measure the degree of women’s involvement in household financial decision-making. For example, Bernasek and Bajtelsmit (2002) found a significant positive relationship between women’s involvement in household finances and their share of the total household income based on a sample of investment data of one university employees who were cohabiting at the time of the survey. Other studies focused on women’s say in a combination of decision-making in weekend activities, TV choices and big-ticket purchases (George, 2008).

This paper examines the extent of Muslim women’s involvement in decision-making on the home front using data from a nationwide survey carried out in Malaysia in 2005 involving married women aged 25 to 59 years. Involvement of women with regard to decisions made on family related matters including purchase of assets, education of children as well as sexual and reproductive health are presented. Particular interest is the extent of collective decision made by women and their spouses on these decision-making situations. The paper also examines variations of women’s decision-making involvement across selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Data for the study were obtained through personal interviews using structured questionnaire on a sample of currently married Muslim women in 11 states in