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# Can supportive management contribute to the well being of Muslim working women in Malaysia?

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The trend of married working women in Malaysia will become an increasingly common scenario. This is because the current statistics show that women comprise 50% of the workforce, and that 70% of them are married working women. Hence, bringing more women into the workplace is not a choice but a necessity for economic and global competition. Nevertheless, many studies in both the West and the East have only emphasized the negative implications of women's involvement in the workplace on their family, in relation to work family conflict issues. However, from the Islamic perspective, women's contribution as a worker has been emphasized in all Muslims teachings. This paper presents the results of a study that observed the relationship of work family enrichment of administrators with work family conflict. The data was collected using questionnaires distributed personally to the respondents at their respective workplace. It was found that there is a significant relationship between work family conflict and work family enrichment. Furthermore, a supportive work environment has positive implications for both work and their family. Finally, the paper will discuss the various obstacles faced and the strategies related to more comprehensive and effective family friendly policies in an effort to enhance women's productive participation in the labour force as well as to create a balance between the work and family.

**Key words:** Administrators, dual work family conflict, supportive work environment.

## INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, about 70% of working women are married or have families of their own, which contributes to the increasing number of families with dual-work (Jamilah et al., 2006; PSD, 2010). As married couples, the wisdom of balancing between the roles at home and at work is important to ensure the well being of the family (Sabitha, 2009). Work and family conflict occurs when there is an overlap of roles, which reflect an incompatibility between the work and family domain (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). According to popular belief, work always propagates a negative impact on the family, and efforts to balance the roles between work and family sometimes cause problems or stress (Kahn et al., 1964). Hence, the issue of work and family conflict has received considerable attention to help deal with the pressure of

the work and family roles.

## Rights of working women in Islam

From an Islamic perspective, Islam does not prohibit Muslim women from participating in seeking an income for the family. Even the prophet Muhammad himself was initially the employee of Khadijah, a wealthy businesswomen, and, as a woman boss, Khadijah treated her workers well (Muhammad al-Ghazali, 1976). Muslim women during the time of the Prophet and medieval Islam, worked in the textile industry or the palace of the caliph, or as midwives or wet nurses, or other roles that were deemed suitable for women (Cortese and Calderini, 2006; Nawal, 2006).

Accordingly, based on the verse, al-Nisa', 4:32, Islam encourages Muslim women to work, as mentioned by Alwi (1996): and in no wise covet those things in which

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Allah hath bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others: to men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn: but ask Allah of His bounty. For Allah hath full knowledge of all things.

In fact, some early jurists, such as Abu Hanifah and Al-Tabari, uphold that a qualified Muslim woman may be appointed to the position of a judge. Other jurists hold different opinions. Yet, no jurist is able to point to an explicit text in the Quran or Sunnah that categorically excludes women from any lawful type of employment. Indeed, Omar, the second Caliph after the Prophet (P), appointed a woman, Um Al-Shifaa' bint Abdullah as the marketplace supervisor, a position that is equivalent in the world to "director of the consumer protection department" (Jamal, 2010).

Furthermore, women are allowed to pursue any economic activity as long as they observe Islamic ethics and propriety. However, their role as a wife and mother should not be forsaken while they are engaged in any economic activity outside the house (Zeenah, 2006). Hence, woman's work outside her home was never forbidden by Islamic Law. No one has the right to forbid without an authentic text, which is clear in meaning. On that basis, we say that the woman's work in itself is allowed. It is even requested if she is in need of it, if she is a widow, divorced, or did not have a chance to marry, and if she has no income to avoid the humility of asking for charity or people's condescension.

This is mainly because it could be the family who needs her work, such as to help her husband, or to care for her children, or young brothers and sisters, or her father in his old age, as in the story of the two daughters of the old man mentioned in Surah Al-Qasas, in the Quran, who used to look after their father's sheep as mentioned in Surah Al Qashash, 28:23: And when he arrived at the water of Midian (Madyan), he found there a group of men watering (their flocks), and beside them he found two women who were keeping back (their flocks). He said, "What is the matter with you?" They said "We cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds take (their flocks). And our father is a very old man".

In fact, Doi (1990) argues that if women do not neglect their main duties, which are looking after their family and raising the children, they are allowed to help supplement the family earnings but with the consent of the husband and working in a job that is lawful according to shariah. For example, women in the days of the Prophet did farming, harvesting, handicrafts and business (Doi, 1990). In a study conducted among Muslims in Egypt, it was also agreed that women are allowed to work to help contribute financially to the family (Essam, 2004). In fact, Muslim women also participated in war during the days of the Prophet as mentioned in many hadith (al-asqalani).

Indeed, society itself might be in need of the woman's work, as in giving medical treatment to women and looking after them, and teaching girls such work that concerns women. It is more proper for a woman to deal

with another woman like herself, instead of a man (al-Qaradawi). Hence, Muslim women have never been prohibited from entering the working world. According to Zeenah (2008), Islam assigns the woman as a daughter, sister, wife and mother in the family. It has not confined her to the house alone. In the same way, Islam also allocates certain responsibilities to the man as a son, brother, husband and father. Women like men, are allowed to pursue higher education and also participate in socio-economic and political structures following the etiquette of dress and social interaction.

### **Can work have a positive effect on the family?**

Many studies have shown that the overlap between work and family roles leads to conflict (Aminah, 1995; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Kahn et al., 1964), however, there is also evidence of advantages derived from the relationship of work and family (Carlson et al., 2006; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Rohany and Fatimah, 2006). The merging of work and family, by working together to support each other and provide benefits to the other role, produces something positive known as work family enrichment (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as a form of friction in which role pressure from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects, while work-family enrichment is defined as the extent to which experience in one role improves the quality of life in the other role (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). The meaning of each definition suggests a negative relationship between work-family conflict and work-family enrichment.

### **Is work family enrichment in line with past theories?**

Most commonly, many theories in the past started with the negative effect of work on the family. Amongst the theories are the role theory (Kahn et al., 1964) and the role strain theory, which were introduced to focus on the work family conflict. According to Goode (1960), the time constraints, energy and commitment, are barriers in performing various roles, which he emphasized in the scarcity approach. The scarcity approach debated that the more responsibilities that an individual needs to execute, the lesser their resources for executing other responsibilities (Goode, 1960). Furthermore, the segmentation theory (Dubin, 1958) emphasizes that work and family roles should be separated so that an individual is more focused and is able to perform each role effectively. However, the compensation theory emphasizes that the grievances suffered by an individual in the performance of a role will be offset by the second role, which seeks to achieve satisfaction (Wilensky, 1960).

Furthermore, classical theories also emphasized the negative aspects of the consolidation of work and family, and consequently, affected the studies that focussed on work-family conflict (Barnett, 1988; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999). Studies based on work-family conflict have explored areas in various dimensions including demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, and number of children, and the amount of time spent with family, along with aspects of the organization, such as the number of working hours and job categories, which have been identified as the causes of conflict between work and family roles (Bernas and Major, 2000; Greenhaus and Kopelman, 1981; Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001; Voydanoff, 1988). The study of the effects such as psychological effects and those on physical well-being, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, commitment and job performance, family performance and marriage have also been explored (Aryee et al., 1999; Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). Basically, most of the research focused on the negative implications of work on family.

In contrast to the theories that emphasize the negative effects of work on family, the theory of role accumulation has highlighted the benefits or positive effects of the merger of these two roles. The role accumulation theory has existed alongside women's participation in the working environment, which emphasizes that the more roles there are, the more privileges enjoyed, thus, opening the door to achieve satisfaction (Sieber, 1974). Furthermore, the expansionist theory by Sieber (1974) asserts that the diversity of roles will contribute to the positive effects that give advantages to the use of resources, benefits and enrichment of personality, which, in turn, contribute to the implementation of these roles (Barnett and Hyde, 2001; Haar and Bardoel, 2008; Sieber, 1974). Most recently, the enrichment theory introduced by Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1999) further supports the positive effects of the merging of work and family roles that will enhance the knowledge, skills, resources, commitment, confidence and identity of an individual.

#### **PAST FINDINGS ON THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF WORK ON FAMILY**

Studies have shown that employed women suffer less from depression and have a positive impact on their psychological well-being (Baruch and Barnett, 1996; Crosby, 1991; Rohany and Fatimah, 2006). In the Malaysian context, among the studies that have been carried out, are those concerning job satisfaction, family life and marriage satisfaction (Emilda, 2002; Erneza, 1996; Rahmah and Zaini, 1996; Robiah, 1989; Safidah and Rozumah, 2001; Tam, 2007; Uma, 2007). The studies also determined that work provides a form of motivation, self-improvement, control, autonomy and

power (Noor, 2006; Ministry of women, Family and Community, 2003; Sabitha and Samihah, 1998).

It is important to note that the vast majority of empirical studies addressing the work and family role management either explore the relationship between negative impacts of balancing work and family roles (work/family conflict) or positive impacts of balancing work and family roles (work/family enrichment) but not both (Hennessy, 2007). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) identified 15 studies in which both work-family enrichment and work-family conflict were measured. Only eight of the 21 correlations between work-family enrichment and work-family conflict in these studies were statistically significant (three positives and five negative). Only 18 reported studies explore both the negative and positive effects in managing personal and professional roles, and the results showed that the relationship is small and negative.

#### **Importance of supportive work environment**

These findings strongly support the importance of a supportive work environment, known as a family-friendly policy in an organization. This statement is also supported by the most successful organizations such as Intel, Motorola, Telekom Malaysia Berhad, and Royal Selangor, which have been implementing family friendly policies to suit the needs of employees, especially among female workers (Harian, 2008; Sabitha, 2009). Similar studies have been carried out in the Western community and found that there is a correlation between the implementation of family friendly policies among workers and their impact on the organizations, such as increasing job and family satisfaction, job commitment, job performance and productivity improvement, reduction of work family conflict and job stress, turnover rates, working parts and maintenance of low skilled workers (Allen et al., 2000; Baltes et al., 1999; Scheibl and Dex, 1998; Thomas and Ganster, 1995).

Similarly, from the Islamic perspective, the relationship between the employer and the employee should be maintained as that of brotherhood, as mentioned in the Quran al-Hujurat, 49:10: "the believers are but a single Brotherhood: so make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that ye may receive mercy". And also in the verse al-Mu'minun, 23: 52: "...and Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord and Cherisher: Therefore fear me (and no other).

If the employer understands that their relationship is not an employer-employee relationship per se, but based on Islamic brotherhood, the employer should encourage, understand and support the workers by providing benefits in terms of family-friendly support, as Islam encourages every person to do good, as mentioned in al-Nahl, 16:90: 'Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and Liberty

kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He you, that ye may receive admonition'.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

At present, not much data has been found in Malaysia concerning issues that increase the understanding of the relationship between work-family enrichment and work-family conflict, which can provide greater insight into the work-family interface, and hence, further help the organizations to be aware of the importance of family friendly policies, which is also in line with Malaysia as a Muslim country that supports women's involvement at work. Hence, this study was conducted to explore the relationship between work-family enrichment and work-family conflict among women administrators. This study hopes to shed some light on the strategies concerning family friendly policies in the workplace.

## METHODS

The scope of the study has been limited in terms of the selection of the sample. An exploratory study was conducted among 60 administrators working in the public sector in Sarawak, who were selected as the respondents for this study. The inclusion criteria, was that the respondents were chosen based on their marital status and must have at least one child. These criteria were outlined in order to ensure that the samples have similar work and family roles. The data was collected through questionnaires, which were distributed personally to each respondent in their respective workplace. Work-family conflict and work-family enrichment were measured, using the instrument developed by Carlson et al. (2000, 2006), whilst family friendly policies used the instrument by Burke, (1996). The Cronbach's alpha value for the entire instrument score above is  $\alpha = 0.80$ .

## FINDINGS

### Demography of the respondents

The sample consisted of 60 working women and achieved a 100% return rate for the questionnaire. The age range of the respondents was 27 to 54 years old with the mean age being 40 years old. The majority of the respondents have a bachelors degree (83.1%) followed by masters' degree (13.3%) and other qualifications (3.4%). In terms of the number of children, most of the respondents had 3 to 4 children (53.3%), followed by 1 to 2 children (40%) and 5 to 7 children (6.7%). Among the women in this sample, 65% did not have stay-in maids. The findings are similar with the research done by Sabitha (2009) among working women in Peninsular Malaysia, which showed that 90% did not have stay-in maids. On average, the women worked 45 h a week; this compares to the average working hours in Peninsular Malaysia, which is 44 h a week (Noor, 2006).

### The relationship between work-family enrichment and work-family conflict

The findings indicated that there is a negative relationship between work-family enrichment and work-family conflict ( $r = -0.344$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This result suggests that women with higher levels of work-family enrichment are more likely to report lower levels of work-family conflict. This finding is similar to the research done in the West, which indicates a negative relationship between work-family conflict and work-family enrichment (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). It was also supported by Hennessy (2007), who found that women working in the universities also revealed a negative relationship.

Based on the enrichment perspective, it is believed that experiences in either role generate resources that may be profitably used in the other role, thereby enhancing the quality of life (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000). In the work context, the study also reported that a job that requires a person to be exposed to highly autonomous decision-making in the workplace would result in higher work-family enrichment (Grzywacz, 2002).

Among the reasons for the positive effects of dual career women or work-family enrichment are that the respondents agreed that their involvement in work provides them with a sense of success (96.6%) and a sense of accomplishment (95%), which helps them to be a better family member. The findings also revealed that involvement in work brings positive implications towards the emotional state among the women administrators. The challenge of balancing work and family makes them feel happy (81.6%), cheerful (91.6%) and puts them in a good mood (78.4%), which influences their relationship with the family members and, directly, in becoming a happy employee.

The results indicated that working women with multiple tasks and responsibilities have benefited in both directions. Involvement in work helps them to gain new knowledge (93.4%) and acquire skills (98.3%), which can be applied both when dealing with children or other family members at home. The tasks performed by married or single women can improve their health and reduce psychological distress if they are looking positively at their work.

Furthermore, involvement at work helps them to understand different viewpoints (98.4%) and feel personally fulfilled (96.7%), which may assist them to be a better family member. Further interest is the opportunity to experience success and develop self-confidence or self-efficacy to perform various roles. In addition, work will extend the reference frame of the individual in terms of information, opinions and ideas from many different perspectives and experiences. Therefore, this exposes individuals to alternatives that can possibly be used in the work-family interaction process, and to face the challenges of various roles (Barnett and Hyde, 2001; Fatimah, 2006).

Similar findings in the past also indicated that working women reported their lives were satisfactory and that they enjoyed working because, to some extent, being employed gave them autonomy, control and empowerment (Noor, 2006). The study by Barnett and Hyde (2001) suggested that a high quality of role participation could have a beneficial effect on the physical and psychological well-being, and increase an individual's happiness, life satisfaction and perceived quality of life (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000; Lu, 2007). In addition, individuals who are successful in balancing their roles as employees and spouses will experience a feeling of satisfaction and success that will encourage individuals to continue to increase their success at work and within the family (Milkie and Peltola, 1999, cited by Fatimah, 2006). In other words, a strong work commitment can enforce family commitment and vice versa.

### **Work, family and time management**

Although time has been commonly related to work family conflict (Sabitha and Norma, 2006), more than half of the respondents agreed that time-based conflicts are not a major barrier for them to perform family responsibilities. Even though they are employed, the time devoted to their job does not prevent them from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities (60%), work does not keep them from family activities (56%) and they did not miss work activities even though time is spent with family responsibilities (85%). This is supported by written comments from the majority of the respondents who reported that managing time is crucial in balancing both work and family commitment. Most of them emphasize that self discipline in managing time will help them differentiate the boundaries to do office work and housework. This was reflected in the comments from the respondents:

Respondent 1: Working only at the office. When we got home, it is family hours. Any family commitment that has to be done during the daytime will be done during the office break.

Respondent 2: My work is from 8 am to 5 pm and I will ensure that I will entertain my family commitment after that (5 pm).

Respondent 3: I make schedule and programmes so that my work will not interfere with family time. Try not to bring back work over the weekends so that I can spend more time with the family.

Respondent 4: I ensure that any encounter in the office will not be 'thought of' once I reach home. I concentrate on my family.

Respondent 5: Be committed in what you are doing. For example, when you are in the office, you must be committed to your work and try to minimize your family

affairs. However, when you are at home, you have to become a very committed mother to your kids and a good wife to your husband.

Basically, the study indicated that work does not make the administrators neglect their family responsibilities. From the Islamic perspective, the research done by Noor (2006) among employed women in Malaysia, also reported that their life situation was either due to the generosity of God or to the fact that they have been patient in facing the trials and tribulations of life, and many also believed in the wisdom behind these trials, and that whatever happened to them came from God. For example, one of the respondents, reported, "set mind – work = trustworthy (carried our duty because of God) and work sincerely." Nevertheless, due to the pressures at work, they feel too stressed to do the things they enjoy doing (70%).

The findings of the study also indicate that the higher score on satisfaction towards work-family enrichment reflects a lower score on satisfaction towards work-family conflict. Therefore, in this context of study, it can be concluded that the relationship between work-family enrichment and work-family conflict is considered as negatively related.

### **Satisfaction with supportive management**

The results indicated that respondents were most satisfied with the leave policy. The most policies utilized were for sick leave (96.6%), maternity leave (91.6%), personal days-off (80%), family (personal) illness days (71.6%), leave for miscarriage (66.7%), paternity leave (65%), parental leave (63.3%) and leave for maternal physical assessment for pregnancy (51.7%). However, 58.3% responded that leave for breast-feeding was not widely implemented.

Interestingly, flexible work arrangements were not widely used. The findings show that only times of arrival or departure from work were relevant in this context with 68.4% of respondents being satisfied with the item. While other items such as a reduction of one working hour per day for those who have children less than 3 years old, limited night time work for pregnant female employees, flexible working hours, compressed working week, telecommuting, job sharing, part-time arrangements and flexible workplace were not widely practiced in any of the organizations.

Finally, the use of employer-supported dependent care such as child care resources, elderly care resources and on-site childcare centres were not provided by their organizations, as indicated by the majority of the respondents.

### **Should organizations employ family friendly policies?**

The findings also indicated the importance of the role of a

supportive environment through family friendly policies that can be implemented through employee assistance and the employee wellness programme, as follows:

### **Employee wellness programme**

The national Institute of Mental Health estimates that nearly 17 million Americans, or as much as 10% of the adult population, experience depression each year. With available treatment, however, 70% of these individuals will significantly improve, usually in a matter of weeks.

Many women in Korea suffer from depression in trying to juggle between work and home expectations. In Korea, this depression is called Whabyung. Hence, looking at the findings, the dual career women in this study have indicated that they are not unaffected by this syndrome. Furthermore, according to the findings in our study among working dual career couples, although there are no specific names used in Malaysia, at least 17% of the respondents have had these symptoms for more than 7 years. The study by Kim (1995) indicated that if the symptoms are prolonged, it will develop into depression. Hence, serious consideration should be given to the conflict of dual career women in Malaysia.

According to research by Sabitha (2009), almost 60% of employed women experience poor health, such as complaining of back pain, joints, bones, high blood pressure and so on. By ensuring that each organization provides a gymnasium or sports facility will help working women deal with stress at work better, and ensure better health among these working women. One of the steps under the employee wellness programme that is important in helping women to work is the provision of health centres (fitness centre), such as gym facilities at work. The study by Zaiton et al. (2007) found that most of the public or private organizations were providing gym facilities for their employees.

From an Islamic perspective, Islam always encourages every Muslim to stay healthy, physically and mentally. Wirdati and Raihanah (2010) mentioned that Muslims performed prayer, which is among the five pillars of Islam, five times a day, which would fulfil the spiritual need and also the body movements could be considered as an exercise, which is good for human health.

### **Employee's assistance programme**

Employee's assistance programmes that support counselling and parenting seminars on an ongoing basis are important. Studies have shown that most public and private organizations provide counselling services in the form of employee assistance programmes, which are conducted by human resource managers (Zaiton et al., 2007). Such initiatives should be continued in an effort to help employees balance work and family. However, counselling assistance will be more effective if handled

by the counsellor, based on their skills and knowledge to deal with employees' problems. Aid counsellors can support workers to face work and family demands.

The written findings show that almost half of the respondents indicated that wise self-discipline through time and stress management are important in balancing work-family responsibilities. Thus, in an effort to assist and enhance the knowledge concerning the values of life, awareness and periodic seminars on an ongoing basis should be available to the employees. These seminars should be attended by employed women as well as married men, to create awareness and enhance knowledge and skills to become effective workers and excellent parents.

### **Day care and elderly care and paid leave**

As family work patterns have shifted, the demand for time off from work to address family needs have become increasingly urgent. In the absence of paid family and medical leave, working families are forced to choose between economic security and providing vital care for ill children and family. Many employers do not provide sick leave to their workers or their families when they are sick. Studies have indicated that parents who have paid sick leave or vacation are five times more likely to stay home with a sick child, and it is well documented that ill children recover more quickly when their parents are present (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2003; Heymann, 2000; Ruhm, 2000).

Furthermore, Islam encourages mothers to breastfeed their baby for two years, however, parents can ask other woman to breast feed their children by providing wages as mentioned in the al-Baqarah, 2: 233. Hence, employers should provide such opportunities at the work area, as not only do the parent and child benefit, and when such benefits are offered, it also results in increased commitment of the workers to their employers.

Another important aspect that the employers should focus on is care for the elderly. Islam teaches Muslims to treat their parents properly as mentioned in the Quran Surah Luqman: 14. In addition, the Prophet also asks Muslims to give priority to their parents first, as narrated by Al-Walid bin 'Aizar (al-Asqalani). Islam teaches Muslims to be kind to their parents and even the Prophet said that being nice to parents should be a priority over going for jihad, (Muslim). Islam also prohibits children from hurting their parents: Al-Israa': 23: Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age In Thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them In terms of honour.

In fact, in the long run, employers may ultimately lower their wages to workers because of their partial provision for family leave. However, the ability of employers to do so is limited because it might make them less competitive in attracting employees who do not stand to gain as much

from paid family leave. The cost of losing employees alone can be far greater than the cost of providing the short-term leave to retain existing employees. The minimum amount of paid sick leave covered by employers will have no serious impact on organizations that already provide paid sick leave.

Researchers have found that flexible working hours, parental leave and help with care for the elderly, can reduce multiple-role strain, work-family conflict and increased satisfaction and commitment towards work (Frone and Yardley, 1996). Similarly, Islam protects the interests of the employee; for example, employers who do not pay the employees their wage are considered to have committed a sin, as narrated by Abu Huraira (al-Asqalani, 1997). Consequently, Islam encourages employers to take care of their worker's right when they are working with them even when they are quitting their job. For example, there was a hadith showing that Islam appreciates employers who deal with the employee nicely, as narrated by Abdullah bin Umar (al-Asqalani, 1997): Anas stated that the Prophet always treated him nicely and that employers should follow this example of being nice to the workers (al-Asqalani, 1997): I served the Prophet for ten years, and he never said to me, "Uf" (a minor harsh word denoting impatience) and never blamed me by saying, "Why did you do so or why didn't you do so?"

### **Career support**

One of the ways to provide a supportive environment is for management to introduce mentoring benefits for women, as it offers benefits similar to men (Sabitha and Norma, 2006). A reason for this is that many women take a break in their career at the active age of 30 to 40. Unfortunately, there are not many avenues for the dual career women to do so, unless they quit their job. Hence, the management should also allow staff who resigns to rejoin the service within the same organization or make provisions where they can be taken by other public sectors.

### **Flexible working hours**

Although, the concept of flexible working time is not much applied by many public organizations, its implementation can be considered to reduce the stress of work and family. Research has shown that 63.2% of working women would increase the number of children if the employer implemented flexible working hours (LPPKN, 2004). Therefore, it is time for employers to consider that the implementation of flexible working time be aimed not only at helping women to work but in facing the dual-work family situation that is now growing.

Encouragement to provide flexible working hours has long been highlighted in each women's summit,

especially in recent years. In fact, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, stressed the provision of flexible working hours for employed women in order to continue their work, despite being a wife, and reduce their desire to discontinue working (Women Summit, 2007, 2008). Thus, flexible working hours is seen as one of the positive efforts that should be undertaken, especially with the current work situation and the increase in dual-work families. Hence, there is a need for organizations to look at different working arrangements such as working from home, e-working, teleworking, and part time work.

### **Establish best practice benchmarks for work-life balance**

The Ministry should take the lead in establishing the best practice benchmarks for work-life balance in Malaysia that are specific to the local context. Organizations can then be audited according to these Benchmarks. If they comply, they can be awarded with special certification, which could (as an incentive) include specific tax rebates or exemptions.

In summary, there is an immense and growing need for Muslim women to be involved in various sectors, for example, in the medical field, education, and helping professions such as social work, counselling, psychology, psychiatry, and childcare. There is no decree in Islam that forbids women from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, especially in positions that fit their nature best, and in which society needs them most. Examples of these professions are: nursing, teaching (especially children), medicine, and social and charitable work. Moreover, there is no restriction on benefiting from women's talent in any field.

### **Conclusion**

Balancing work and family will be an integral part of the future family in Malaysia. For married couples, the wisdom to balance between the roles at home and at work is important to ensure the wellbeing of the family. Based on the earlier discussion, it is imperative that the organizations understand the needs of their employees and systematically provide the necessary environment to develop and harness the employee's potential and ability without neglecting their family commitment and responsibilities. This is because the quality of the organization is very much dependent on the quality of the workers. In view of Malaysia being a Muslim country, a supportive working environment should be the paradigm in every working organization.

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