

Factors Influencing the Intention to Stay Among Married Female Academics: A Study on Malaysian Universities

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Abstract: The globalization of higher education has led to the increase in the number of universities in Malaysia. The role of married female academicians in universities today is crucial in molding the future generation as they become pivotal towards the success of the higher education industry which caters to a diverse group of students. Past literature has revealed that, flexible working arrangement, family work-based support facilities, extended maternity leave and a family supportive supervisor may have important effects on married female academics' intention to stay in the university. For this research, data were obtained through an online survey from 211 female academics who are married and are working in Malaysian public and private universities. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data. The findings of this research revealed that family work-based support facilities, extended maternity leave and a family supportive supervisor had significant relationships with married female academics' intention to stay. A discussion on the implications of the research findings are presented.

Keywords:*Intention to stay, Extended maternity leave, family supportive supervisor, family work-based support facilities, flexible working arrangement.*

INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in the labour force is an economic indicator of a country because, it reduces the unemployment rate, reduces poverty, increases standard of living and it is a way towards building good governance and promoting sustainable development. The participation of women in the workforce is therefore crucial as it increases household income, consumption and purchasing power, leading to a stronger national and global economy while at the same time promoting gender equality and diversity [1] [2].

The United States of America (USA) reported that in 1999, 76.8% of women were in the workforce, yet by 2019 the percentage of women in the workforce slipped to 57.4% [3]. In Malaysia on the other hand,

according to [2], it was reported that a significant portion of female workers left their jobs because they started a family and were unable to find the right childcare. Evidently, the Malaysian Labour Statistics of 2018 reported that females made up 54.7% of the labour force in Malaysia which stands at 15 million and that the female labour participation rate came from the age group of 25 and 54 years old with the highest participation coming from the age group of between 25 and 34 years old [4]. However, according to [5], the female labour force participation peaks between the age of 25 and 29 coinciding with the age around which women usually bear children, after which it declines and does not rise again. The reason for the decline in female labour participation as mentioned by [5] could be due to a married women's domestic responsibilities. Most women begin to start families while they are working and these women find

that it is extremely demanding having to balance work and family responsibilities which includes caring for a child on top of not having organizational support [6]. It is thus important that married female academics are retained as being a mother and having family responsibilities should not be a barrier in having a career and it should not be the cause of the high turnover among married women.

WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Within the Higher Education in the USA, [7] stated that female academics who were already parents or planned to have children abandon their research careers up to twice as often as men due to domestic responsibility. Furthermore, [8] stated that female faculty members compared to male faculty members are more likely to leave academia due to domestic responsibilities. [9] further stated that female scientist left their academic career when they decided to have children. While, [10] stated that one of the major challenges faced by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard is that women junior faculty-associate and assistant professors leave at higher rates than men; one of the reasons women left was due to personal family considerations and these prevented women from reaching their final stage of review for tenure appointment. According to Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in 2014, the percentage of female academics working in Malaysian public and private universities stood at 48% compared to male which was at 52% [11]. However by the year 2017, the percentage of female academics in Malaysian public and private universities dropped to 46%, while male academics accounted to 54% [11]. One of the reasons for the decrease as stated by [12] is that female academics in Malaysia have dual duties, as a housewife at home and as an employee at work, making it difficult to handle work and home responsibilities, hence female academics in Malaysia may have a higher tendency to leave academia in contrast to men.

Female academics may be leaving academia due to family responsibilities, but what could be the possible factors that can retain these talented married female academics. Losing female academics would have a detrimental effect on the diversity of a university which contributes to the richness of the environment for teaching and research. The loss of female academics means that the country is losing talent required to mold the future generation, there will be loss of morale among fellow colleagues and students and disruption in both teaching and research and the management would be required to spend money on recruiting and replacing [13]. [14] stated that an organisation's ability to support working mothers in

academia is underexplored, in fact there is lack of studies in this area in Malaysia as well. Hence, it is important to study the possible factors that may affect the retention of married female academics' in universities, especially intention to stay as it is a good proxy of actual retention [15].

The review of past literature on the departure of female faculty from their university revealed that there are internal factors within the organization that may have an effect on a married female lecturer's intention to stay such as work family conflict, recognition and rewards, reduced job stress, equality in salary earned and nature of work [12] [16] [17] [18]. However in Malaysia, there is still lack of studies examining the influence of factors within the organisation such as flexible working arrangement, family work-based support facilities, extended maternity leave and a family supportive supervisor on the intention to stay of married female academics in Malaysian universities [12] [19] [20] [21]. [22] have stated that Malaysian women face difficulties in managing their career and family time due to their inflexible working arrangement. In the year 2018, an online job recruitment agency conducted a survey involving 2,600 women from Malaysia, Singapore and Philippines and found that 75% of working mothers quit their jobs due to lack of flexibility, which was the biggest factor that contributed to the high turnover among working women [23].

Furthermore, family work-based support facilities is needed for working women as it may promote effective coping and may lead to the improvement of female employees' well-being and the retention of female employees in the university [19]. In Malaysia, according to [24] and [25], female employees are not protected by law to breastfeed at work, there is no law to support lactation breaks and there is no mandate to provide childcare facilities, hence these factors may push married female academics to leave their institution. Extended maternity leave is another important factor in retaining married female employees. [20], stated that academics in Malaysian universities would benefit from an extended maternity leave as this would help in managing their work and family demands while also influencing their intention to stay. A family supportive supervisor is another important factor in retaining married female academics. According to [21] in Malaysia, almost 30% of teachers found that their employers were not supportive in helping them balance their work and family life.

While literature has highlighted the importance of having organizational support, there is still lack of

studies on the influence of these internal organizational factors in the retention of married female academics in Malaysian universities [12] [19] [20] [21]. To address this research gap, the objective of this study is to investigate the relationships between these internal factors with the intention to stay among female academics in Malaysian universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Flexible Working Arrangement

Flexible working arrangement is defined as an arrangement provided to employees by the organisation in allowing employees to exercise control over when and how they work; the ability to alter the timing of work (starting and ending) and to vary the number of hours worked per day or week and this may also include the ability to accumulate hours for days off [26][27] According to [18], women in Malaysia perceived that the availability of flexible working arrangement in their organizations would reduce their chances of leaving the labour market, hence enabling them to contribute to both work and home. According to [28], a flexible working arrangement reduces intention to quit of employees as a survey conducted by the authors among private schools and colleges in Pakistan using 179 employees of which 129 were female revealed a negative significant relationship between flexible work arrangement with turnover intention among female employees. In Malaysia, a study among 397 working women revealed that a flexible working arrangement had a significant impact on a women's decision to continue to work in the labour market [18]. Based on the review of literature, the following hypothesis below was postulated:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between flexible working arrangement and the intention to stay of married female academics.

Family Work-based Support Facilities

Family work-based support facilities are defined as the support provided by the organization to their employees which can be in the form of a lactation room for breastfeeding mothers, in campus childcare support, clinic/polyclinic or even a recreational centre for employees and their families. In Malaysia, only 10% of firms have childcare support in their organization, hence this could be a factor that contributes to the poor retention of women employees. [29]. [30] stated that support for mothers

such as the availability of an on-site childcare resulted to better employee performance, career satisfaction and improved retention. In Australia, a study conducted by [31] found that lack of support for breastfeeding at the Australian National University not only presented a health risk to academic mothers but also affected their productivity, absenteeism and retention rate. While, the lack of university support such as childcare was seen as a barrier for career advancement and retention of women academics [32]. Through the review of literature the following hypothesis was developed:

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between family work-based facilities and the intention to stay of married female academics.

Extended Maternity Leave

Maternity leave is defined as a job-protected employment leave provided to female employees which commences for women at the time of birth of their child and for a period following childbirth [33]. The definition of extended maternity leave in the Malaysian context is defined as maternity leave that exceeds the stipulated sixty days maternity leave for the private sector or ninety days maternity leave for the public sector. According to [34], extending maternity leave up to a maximum of six months would have a tremendous impact on the increase in the number of female employees in the labour market. When a university provides generous maternity provisions such as extended maternity leave, this can reduce turnover of highly productive female [35]. [36] research on addressing gender equality at the Welcome Genome Campus, United Kingdom found that improvement and updates made to the parental leave policies which include maternity leave had a huge positive impact on the retention rates of female faculty between 2012 and 2015, with 88 of staff members going on maternity leave and 100% of staff returning back to work. Through the review of literature the following hypothesis was developed:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between extended maternity leave and the intention to stay of married female academics.

Family Supportive Supervisor

A family supportive supervisor is defined as a supervisor who is supportive, cares about the well-being of an employee and values the contribution that the employee make in jointly performing both work and family duties [37] [38]. According to [39], when there is supervisor's support within the organization,

there seems to be a significant positive effect on the retention of working mothers. Furthermore, [40], stated that the retention of mothers with young children is influenced by a supportive supervisor in the organisation. In the research by [41], women postdoc academics from the discipline of sciences, technology, engineering, math and medical sciences (STEMM) who had perceived lack of supervisor and departmental support led to lower job satisfaction, lower workplace belonging which affected their intention to stay. Also, according to [42], an unsupportive climate and lack of successful female role models have been linked to lack of women in STEMM academia. Through the review of literature the following hypothesis was developed:

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between family supportive supervisor and the intention to stay of married female academics.

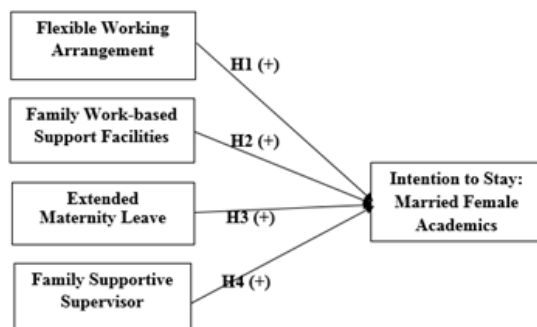


Figure 1: The research model of the study

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from the respondents using an online survey questionnaire. Overall, 211 fully completed surveys were received and there were no missing data as the respondents had to answer all questions in order to submit their response. The questionnaire had two sections, the first section required respondents to provide information on their race, age, highest education level, current university sector (public or private), academic rank, gross income per month, current employment status, number of years teaching at their current university, and whether they have children at home. The second part of the questionnaire were questions relating to the variables of the study. There were several measures used in this study. A six item scale for flexible working arrangement was taken from [43] while a four item scale for family supportive supervisor was taken from [44]. Due to the lack of an existing scale measuring extended maternity leave and family work-based support facilities the authors of this research

developed the scales through a focus group interview comprising of five married female academics from private and another 5 from public universities.

A four-item scale was developed for family work-based support facilities covering aspects such as: – lactation support space, on-site childcare centre, on-site clinic/polyclinic and on-site recreational centre. A four-item scale was also developed for extended maternity leave for the Malaysian context covering aspects such as—improvements to current maternity leave policy made by the university, interest by the university in extending the current paid maternity leave entitlement for employees, competitive maternity leave compared to other universities in Malaysia and willingness of the university to provide unpaid maternity leave in additional to current maternity leave benefit. Finally, a three item intention to stay scale was adapted from [45]. A 6-point likert scale was used to measure the variables in this study. Flexible working arrangement, family work-based support facilities, extended maternity leave and family supportive supervisor were measured in terms of the extent to which the items exist in the respondent’s current university ranging from 1=to no extent to 6= to a very great extent. Intention to stay was measured in terms of level agreement ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

Demographics

The respondents race comprised of 38.9% Malays, 34.6% Indians and 18.5% Chinese. Majority of the respondents (48.8%) were between the age group of 30 to 39 years old, while 39.8% were between the age group of 40 to 49 years old. As for highest qualification, 53.6% of the respondents had a doctoral degree, while 46.4 % had a Master’s degree. About 58.8% of the respondents were working at private universities, while 41.2% were attached to public universities. The position of lecturer was held by 39.8% of the respondents, while only 34.6% held the position of senior lecturer. The largest gross income group (36%) was within the range of RM5,001 – RM7,000, followed by RM9,001- RM11,000 (20.9%). Majority (80.6%) of the respondents were of permanent status employees. Also, majority of the respondents have been in their current university between 1 to 5 years (46%), followed by 6 to 10 years (28.4%). Lastly, majority of the respondents had children below 6 years old (45%), followed by 16.6% had children between the ages of 6 to 12 years old and 14.7% were planning for their first child. 10.4% were currently expecting their first child.

were within the respectively thresholds.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis (PCA) and varimax rotation was applied to determine if the items in this research are within the same construct as there were two new scales developed for this research [46]). The results of the EFA produced Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) scores greater than 0.70; 0.828 for flexible working arrangement, 0.740 for family work-based support facilities, 0.808 for extended maternity leave, 0.868 for family supportive supervisor and 0.773 for intention to stay. The Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity for each construct were significant at $p < 0.05$ and eigenvalue of greater than 1 [46]. All factors were retained at it was above 0.5.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Before modelling the interrelationships using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to confirm the unidimensionality, validity and reliability of the constructs and to remove any item that does not fit in the measurement model; factor loading of less than 0.60 [46]. The structural model of this study achieved a reasonably good fit. The CMIN/df (ratio) = 4.723, that is within the recommended range of 1 to 5. The GFI = 0.841 was above 0.80, and RMSEA = 0.000

which is less than 0.08. TLI = 0.900 and CFI = 0.923

Reliability and Validity Test

Reliability and validity test were conducted in this study. All of the five constructs produced Cronbach’s alpha of greater than 0.90, which is above the acceptable internal reliability of 0.70 [46]. All constructs in this study achieved a composite reliability (CR) value of ≥ 0.90 , (Hair et al., 2013). Convergent validity was achieved in this study as the average variance extracted (AVE) value was greater than 0.5 for each construct [46]. Discriminant validity was achieved in this study for all the constructs as the AVE for each construct was more than the maximum shared squared variance (MSV) and average shared squared variance (ASV) respectively [46].

RESULTS

According to the results of the study as seen in Table 1., H2 ($\beta= 0.576$; $p= 0.049$), H3 ($\beta= 0.714$; $p= 0.000$), and H4 ($\beta= 0.711$; $p= 0.000$) were supported by the data. This study found that family work-based support facilities, extended maternity leave and family supportive supervisor were significant predictors of married female lecturers’ intention to stay.

Path		Standardised Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
H1: Intention to Stay	--- Flexible Working Arrangement	.049	.189	.259	.796
H2: Intention to Stay	--- Family Work-based Support Facilities	.576	.293	.968	.049
H3: Intention to Stay	--- Extended Maternity Leave	.714	.174	.095	.000
H4: Intention to Stay	--- Family Supportive Supervisor	.711	.125	.697	.000

Table 1: Regression Weights

DISCUSSION

As with the findings of past research within academia, family work-based support facilities was found to have a positive and significant relationship with the intention to stay of married female academics [31] [32]. This means that having family work-based support facilities would allow female academics to better manage their work and family responsibilities and increase their intention to stay. Currently in Malaysia, the Ministry of Health has accredited more than 130 hospitals as Baby-Friendly Hospitals which aims at giving each child the best start in life through an environment that supports breastfeeding [47], however there is no legal regulation that promotes breastfeeding at the work-place, hence promoting a breastfeeding environment at hospitals without extending this to the work place will not achieve the aim of creating an baby friendly environment. Hence, the health Ministry, MOHE and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in Malaysia must work with policy makers towards providing legal support on breastfeeding rights as there is to date no regulation, policy or law to protect and support breastfeeding at the workplace in Malaysia [24]. Furthermore, having a childcare centre within the premises of ones working place such in the case of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore [48] and RMIT University, Australia [49] are good examples of family work-based support for employees as this will enhance the retention of married female academics. The allocation of a space for a childcare centre should be done before any building plan is approved by the authorities [24]. There are universities that provide in campus recreational centres, but this centres should also be extended to family members especially children. Having work based support facilities must be supported and legalized by the government to be in line with the National Family Policy of Malaysia that aims at developing a harmonious and healthy family.

The findings of this research have also revealed that extending maternity leave has a positive and significant relationship with the intention to stay of married female academics in Malaysian universities [34] [35] [36]. Firstly, the Employment Act of Malaysia should extend the 90 days maternity leave to

the private sector as well, secondly, Malaysia should strive to follow the footsteps of countries that implement the maximum number of maternity leave as set by International Labour organisation (ILO) that is up to 14 weeks. Again working with policymakers and Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is vital in promoting a healthy balance between family and career while retaining our professional female workforce that have an important role in educating our future generation. Lastly, a family supportive supervisor has also been found to have a significant impact on the retention of married remain academics in Malaysian universities [39] [40] [41] [42]. The respondents of this study felt that a supervisor who shows support in the form of being able to solve issues relating to work and family related conflicts and organize faculty work to ensure no conflict arises between work and family were important in the retention of married female academics. What is needed now is for the university management to ensure supervisors are supportive of the multiples roles that married female academics perform. The government should influence the university management to hire or train supervisors to manage faculty work in support of married female academics.

There are few recommendations for this study for future research, firstly a qualitative research using indebt-interviews is needed for married female academics at different stages of their life as a mother, wife and daughter, highlighting the supported that they need from their organisation. A longitudinal study is also needed to discover if there is a changing effect over time on the importance of these factors with the retention of married female academics. Also variables such as work life balance and job satisfaction should be studied as mediating factors on the intention to stay of married female academics [50].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has contributed to existing knowledge on the importance of family work base-support facilities, extended maternity leave and family supportive supervisors in the retention of married female academics. The university

management should have formal programmes that fosters a family friendly organizational culture and supportive culture especially with regards to supervisors' support towards the needs of married female employees. Human resource policies that cover care and assistance is important and supervisors could discuss expectations regarding different kinds of support needed by married female academics [38]. The results of this study carries an important message to policy makers and the Malaysian government that current policies and practices should be reviewed and amended and new policies and practices should be employed to retain married female academics. These policies and practices should be implemented in a synchronized manner for both the private and public universities in the retention of married female academics.

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