



Country Report:

“Media and Gender in Malaysia”

Part of the IFJ Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific Research Project





Media and Gender in the Asia Pacific Region

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Introduction to IFJ gender and media research

This report has been prepared as part of the “Research Study on Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific” project undertaken by the IFJ and supported by UNESCO in partnership with UN Women. In line with UNESCO’s Communication and Information Programme for 2014 to 2017, the project comprises research on gender and media conducted in partnership with national stakeholders in seven countries in the Asia-Pacific region (South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific): Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu.

The report includes an overall analysis of women in the Malaysian media and explores the challenges they face. It compares the status and roles of male and female journalists in similar contexts to better understand differentiation based on gender (if any) in the media industry. Among the issues covered in the report are the number of women in senior and decision-making positions and the issues that affect this representation; the role that unions, associations and women’s networks play in advancing women; best practice case studies of campaigns, media workplaces, gender policies and codes; and coverage and representation of women.

The report offers some recommendations for action addressed to national media organisations, unions, the Malaysian government, non-governmental organisations, journalism education and training institutions and civil society organisations.

A free media landscape still far from free

Malaysia’s media has for decades struggled with the stifling of its voice. Whether it is through the Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984 which restricts print licenses and gives the power of discretion to one individual (the country’s Home Affairs Minister); or oppressive laws such as the Sedition Act of 1948; and, before it was repealed, the Internal Security Act of 1960.

In late 2014, journalist Susan Loone of *Malaysiakini*, a local online news portal, was arrested over her article based on an interview with state executive councillor Phee Boon Poh and subsequently investigated under the Sedition Act. A local weekly, *The Heat*, was accused of publishing an offending article headlined “All eyes on big-spending PM Najib” in November 2013,ⁱ referring to questions raised by opposition leaders about the Malaysian prime minister’s wife using an official aircraft for a private trip to Qatar.

The Sarawak Tribune, an English-language newspaper published in the Kuching, Sibul and Bintulu languages was also indefinitely suspended in 2006 following a controversy relating to the global furore over cartoons of Prophet Mohammed published in the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*. The newspaper, which was established in 1945, reappeared in 2010 as the *New Sarawak Tribune*.

Most notoriously, media company licences were revoked as part of Ops Lalang (or in English, Weeding Operation) during the tenure of the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The Malaysian police crackdown in October 1987 saw the arrest of 106 persons under the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the publishing licenses of two dailies, *The Star* and the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and two weeklies, *The Sunday Star* and *Watan* revoked. Also in the television sector in 2007, a government agency ordered private television and radio stations to refrain from broadcasting opposition speeches.ⁱⁱ



So while freedom of expression may be constitutionally guaranteed in Malaysia, it is clearly restricted in practice. Today, most private print outlets are controlled by parties or business groups allied with the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

According to Freedom House, privately owned television stations also have “close ties to the BN and generally censor programming according to government guidelines. State outlets generally reflect government views. Books and films are directly censored or banned for profanity, violence, and political and religious material. Publications often face harassment from the government.”ⁱⁱⁱ

There are over 30 newspapers and tabloids published in Malaysia today, mainly in Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil. The most prominent newspapers include *The Star*, *New Straits Times*, *the Sun*, *Berita Harian*, *Utusan Malaysia*, *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and *Nanyang Siang Pau*. Both television and radio were set up as government departments. From the outset both were seen as tools for nation building. State-owned RTM operates two free-to-air terrestrial local television channels licensed to broadcast in Malaysia, as well as 34 radio channels nationwide. Meanwhile, Media Prima is the parent company of four television channels and three radio channels (Hot FM [muzik paling hangat], Fly FM & One FM).

The broadcast industry in Malaysia today comprises: ASTRO - Astro Awani; Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) - TV1 TV2, TVi; Media Prima - TV3, NTV7, 8TV, TV9; Al-Hijrah - TV Al-Hijrah; internet TV outfits Tonton TV Everywhere, 1Malaysia TV, Cyberjaya-tv.com, TV Selangor, EDUWEBTV, 1Hijau.TV, MobTV; and other TV stations Asia Media, Bernama TV, vision four.

The tight control of the conventional media has given way to a lively alternative media scene, characterised by such news portals as *Malaysiakini* and *The Malaysian Insider*. But the online space has also increasingly becoming the target via legal harassment of critical bloggers, charged under defamation laws, the Official Secrets Act, and the Sedition Act. The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has also been noted for its monitoring of online content and orders to outlets and bloggers to remove material viewed as provocative or subversive.

In 2012, an amendment to the 1950 Evidence Act made owners and editors of websites accountable for information published to their sites – a move that angered press freedom advocates and bloggers as evidence of a further constriction of freedom of expression by shifting the burden of proof to the accused.

Together, these experiences cast a small insight into life in Malaysia’s media, and ultimately a landscape that has long been one of silence and of silencing by the powers that be.

Freedom House currently ranks Malaysia as ‘partly free’ with a position of 4 out of 7 (with 7 being the lowest) on its annual freedom in its world ranking. The downward ranking was due to ‘electoral fraud and structural obstacles designed to block the opposition from winning power, a decision by an appellate court to forbid non-Muslims from using the term “Allah” to refer to God, and worsening hostility and prejudice faced by the LGBT community’.^{iv} It also says women are underrepresented in politics, the professions, and the civil service, violence against women remains a serious problem and Muslim women are often legally disadvantaged through Sharia courts.

According to *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*, released in 2012,^v the ‘typical’ Malaysian journalist is about 35 years old, a full-time professional, likely to be married and has been working in



the industry about nine years and earns a monthly income of 3,000 ringgit (approx. US\$837).^{vi} It also found the majority of Malaysia’s media is female (55.5 percent) which suggests that Malaysia’s media is not as male-dominated as other Asian media.

Demographics of Survey Respondents

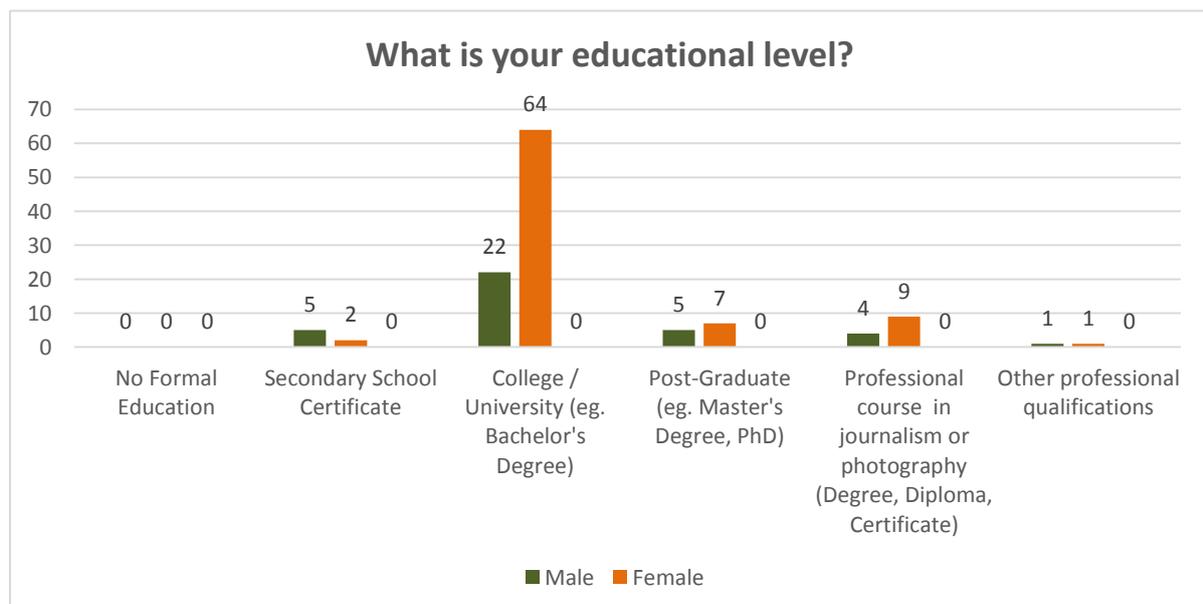
As part of the “Research Study on Media and Gender in the Asia-Pacific” initiated by the IFJ, an online survey of media workers was developed at the regional level and administered in Malaysia in September 2014. The survey was completed by 111 respondents from Malaysia; comprising 78 women (70 percent) were women and 33 men (30 percent).

Most survey participants (63.96 percent) were in the 26-35 age group, largely residents of Wilayah Persekutuan and Selangor, possibly because most media companies are located in the peninsula of Malaysia. Over one third (37.83 percent) described themselves as belonging to an ethnic or religious minority or caste – of these 61.90 percent said they belonged to an ethnic minority.

Due to the particular political pressures in Malaysia and the small nature of the media in the country, all interview subjects included in the IFJ research have had their identities protected by the researcher. Their pseudonyms have deliberately not been chosen to identify their ethnic/religious identity.

In terms of religious beliefs, respondents were represented among the following: Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Agnostic, Hindu, Atheist and Other. The largest religion represented was Muslim (38.73 percent), followed by Christian (19.81 percent) and Hindu (8.11 percent).

Nearly three quarters (71.66 percent) of respondents were university graduates; the majority of them (74.41 percent) were female. Relatively small numbers had post-graduate degrees, media training or other professional qualifications. Only 5.83 percent had not continued their education beyond secondary school.





Media in Malaysia today

Just over a third (36.27 per cent) of respondents working in fulltime or regular jobs were employed in small media organisations (up to 100 employees), another slightly larger share (37.25 percent) were employed in companies employing 100 to 1500 people and 26.47 per cent were employed in large media companies employing over 1500 people.

Respondents could select a mix of work areas across mediums. Most (69.37 percent) said they worked all or part of their career in newspapers, followed by those who worked in online/digital media (36.04 percent) and magazines (19.02).

Women surveyed were primarily employed in newspapers (54.08 percent). Only 5.76 percent worked in television. A large number of respondents (47.75) chose more than one media, suggesting they are working across at least two or more mediums. Clearly the dominance of newspaper respondents in this survey means that the responses largely reflect this sector and cannot be considered representative of the entire media industry in Malaysia.

When outlining a selection of reasons for pursuing a career in journalism, ‘love for journalism’ was chosen by most people (60 percent) while 42 percent said they wanted to ‘make a difference’.

The majority of the survey participants (61.26 percent) indicated that their families were supportive of their choice of career. Another 31.53 percent said their families were neutral about it. Only female respondents (2.70%) said their families were opposed or negative to their choice to take up a career in the media.

What was your family response to your career choice?	Total	Female	Male
Neutral	35	22	13
Opposed/Negative	3	3	0
Other	5	5	0
Supportive	68	48	20
Grand Total	111	78	33

Interestingly, the vast majority of respondents (91.89 percent) were in fulltime or regular work.

Most respondents (72.97 percent) primarily used English as the primary language in their work, followed by Malay (19.81 percent) and Chinese (7.20 percent).

The area of work chosen by most respondents to describe their job was ‘reporter’ representing 84.85 percent of men and 79.49 percent of women. The role of ‘editor’ was chosen by more men (21.21 percent) than women (10.26 percent). Interestingly, 33.33 percent of all women said they worked as feature writers, compared to only 15 percent of all men.

Around 25% of men and women had worked in the industry between 1 and 3 years. Just over half (53.15 percent) of all respondents had worked in the industry between 3 to 10 years, with a balance between men and women. But these parities changed quite dramatically in the next bracket with 36.36 percent of men working 10 or more years, compared to just 16.66 percent of women. This would certainly suggest a fading out of women from the industry



A third of men (33.33 percent) held ‘senior’ positions, compared to 21.79 of women. The ‘mid-level’ status was occupied by nearly half of the women respondents (46.15 percent), compared to 39.39 per cent of men. Just over a fifth of all women (25.64 percent) were at a junior level, which closely aligned with men at 24.24 percent.

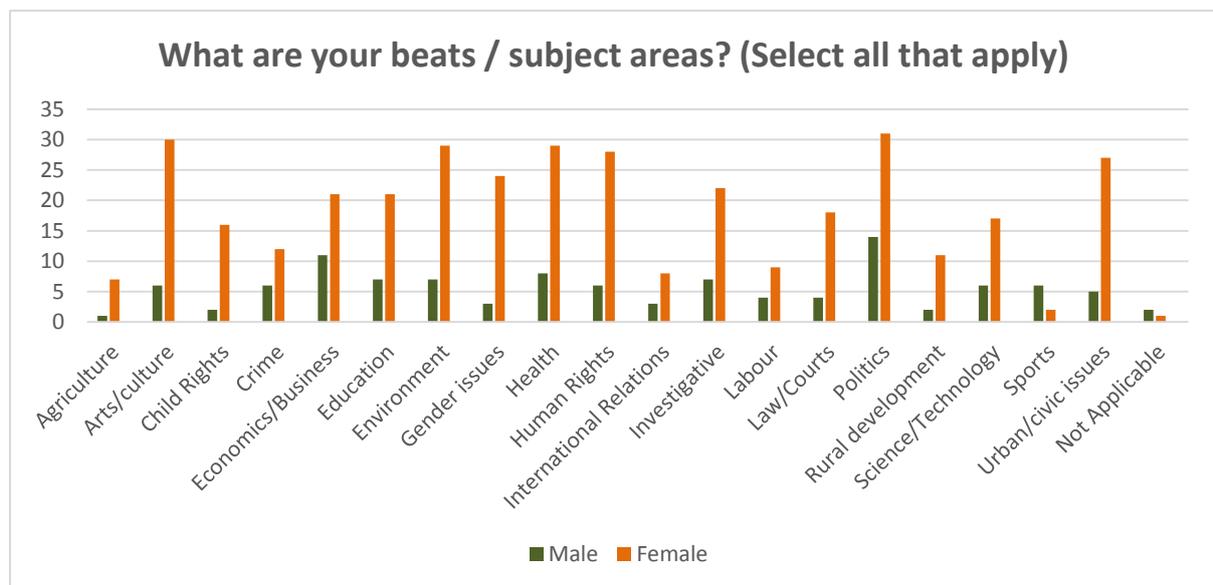
Most respondents, male and female, earned over US\$800 a month.

Over a third of respondents (35.13 percent) of the respondents said they were allowed to choose their beats. Interestingly more women (38.46 percent) than men (27.27 percent) said they felt they had the power to choose the nature of their work.

Approximately half of all respondents (51.35 percent) said they were able to determine the content of their work to a certain extent, while 17.94 percent of women said they were always able to determine the content of their work. This compared to just 9.09 percent of men.

A little over half (53 percent female and 58 percent male) seemed confident that they can influence coverage of news and views in their publications ‘to some extent’. About a quarter of men and women felt they could influence coverage of news and views in their media organisation ‘most of the time’.

Nevertheless, there appears to be some gender-based differences in the beats covered by the respondents. Although women seem to be represented in all the subject areas, judging by the responses of the survey participants, their presence appears to be highest in areas such as arts/culture, the environment, health, human rights, urban/civic issues and politics. They are barely represented in sports and marginally more in agriculture and international relations. Labour, crime and rural development followed at a slightly higher rate. Men were most represented in economics/business, politics, health, investigative journalism, environment and education.



Maria Fernandez¹ is a producer with a local television station. Having had 15 years of experience in the industry, Sin worked for various local dailies and has witness positive changes in the media

¹ Name changed as per interviewees request



industry.

She said stereotypical views still exist and often point towards women who are deemed the “weaker” gender and hence, at times, are prevented from being hired for certain types of job. Even in the media industry, this is widely practiced. The broadcast field is an area where women are often refused jobs and often time, the reason given is that women are not able to carry heavy equipment, Fernandez said.

“Experts have voiced out that the majority of these stereotypical views are not proven and if a job does require heavy weight lifting, maybe the men are more suitable. Even that is debatable as there are women who put themselves through body building in order to toughen up. Who is to say that women cannot perform on par as men?” said Fernandez.

On the brighter side however, these constant comparisons are definitely being eliminated gradually – it is of course not possible to wipe away a mindset so deeply rooted. Having worked for 15 years in the industry, Fernandez is able to give an account of how it was now and before. “I remember when I applied for my first job as a camera crew. I was one of the first few ladies who were given opportunity to help out with the cameramen. I had a bit of a culture shock, but I also felt glad that I got the job despite how women are often not considered for a camera crew job,” she said.

She recalled the difficulties of wanting to voice an opinion and she had to work harder than the men employees in order to get noticed or gain her bosses’ trust. The most challenging obstacle during her television job was her constant efforts to get her opinions or ideas through. “My suggestions were often doubted and given little attention. Harshly put, they were often shot down.”

In fact, Fernandez later found out that the television station firm had only hired because they were testing out lady camera crew. Her employment was an “experiment”. “Initially, I felt insulted but at the same time, I gave myself a challenge to prove to them that women too can do it.”

As a camera crew, her job requires for her carry heavy camera equipment to filming sites and during her more junior days, and more often than not, she was left alone to carry the equipment.

“Some people saw them as me being bullied when no one wanted to help me, but I knew that in order to gain their trust and to lessen the discrimination, I had to learn how to build my stamina and strength, in order to be strong enough to lift the heavy equipment,” she added. Prior to Fernandez being hired at station, her previous applications to other local television and radio stations were rejected.

Back in the day, Fernandez remembered that the women camera crew were often given desk-bound jobs and were discouraged from going to filming sets. “That didn’t stop me. I remember requesting to tag along to a filming set. I didn’t get a green light immediately. Although I waited for several months, but eventually I was allowed to go on set,” she said.

Those were the days when discrimination against women in broadcast companies was very noticeable. Today, Fernandez no longer has this problem. Her work has been recognised with best producer accolades, proving that women too can succeed in the broadcast industry. “Along the way, I met employers who gave me opportunities to prove my capabilities. Well I think I managed well, and I have even paved the way for many other women camera crew,” she said.



Sexing up the news and the gender ‘advantage’

Linda Tan² is a senior journalist at one of Malaysia’s English dailies, feels she was treated as a ‘sex object’ or pawn to get stories early in her career. There were many instances when female reporters would be used to getting front page stories by going to speak to men in high positions who were known to be sleazy, she said.

“They actually expected women to flirt with men to get stories. A very powerful businessman once requested a one-on-one interview with me. I knew there was something fishy about this and told my boss that there was no reason why only I could do the story. I asked him to assign the interview to someone else but he refused. I then asked a male colleague to accompany me but, when we reached the man's office, he requested my colleague to leave the room.”

Her suspicions were confirmed when “instead of giving an interview, he took the opportunity to ask me out on a date that weekend! I managed to decline the offer but it was an unpleasant experience.”

Tan recalls a culture that whenever she proposed stories related to women, the first questions that followed were: “Is the lady pretty? Is she sexy?” “If the answer was negative, the story idea was shot down, no matter how interesting the subject,” she said.

Jessica Lim, previously a sub-editor with a free English daily, recalls a disturbing memory of a weekly editorial meeting when the topic of discussion was breastfeeding. “The discussion went from health issues related to breastfeeding to how men can help their wives pump milk faster. The conversation was between a male colleague and my editor. The former was assigned to write the story, which I felt was an insult to women staff. The editor refused to assign the story to a female reporter on the grounds that it would not produce the required ‘excitement’ in the story.”

Unfortunately, the media in Malaysia is still headed by managements who believe that only sex sells, breast feeding stories are salacious and that all stories must therefore be packaged accordingly.

More women journalists, not enough decision-makers

Within the region, Malaysia is regarded as progressive in terms of the numbers of men and women working in the media – with a strong workforce of women. However, their participation at the decision-making levels remains minimal.

As outlined, while media in Malaysia is constitutionally free, the IFJ research in Malaysia was challenged by access to information. The country is far from achieving 100 percent transparency and true press freedom status. The IFJ research was particularly challenged in securing interviews with editors and heads of media companies and in accessing information on staff and employment issues.

² Name changed as per interviewees request



Nevertheless, the research found that Malaysia’s media companies are largely led and governed by men – most editors are male, as are owners of news media, with women more likely to be in mid-level rather than top management.

While 44.14 percent of all respondents said women were represented at executive level, it is how much they are represented remains the sticking point. More than a quarter of all respondents (27.02 percent) said the proportion of women at top level was less than 10 percent, 13.51 percent said it was between 10 to 25%, and around a quarter (25.22 percent) of all respondents said the proportion was somewhere between 25 to 50 percent. Interestingly, 18.91 percent of journalists said they did not know about the gender breakdown in the top level of management in their media company.

When it came to middle level editorial positions, 32.43 percent of all respondents said that women comprised between 25-50 percent of these positions. Another 23.42 percent said that women occupied between 10-25 percent of middle level editorial positions.

What percentage of middle level editorial positions are held by women in your media organization	Total	Female	Male
Less than 10%	14	11	3
10-25%	26	23	3
25-50%	36	23	13
More than 50%	18	11	7
Don't Know	9	5	4
No Answer	8	5	3
Grand Total	111	78	33

An IFJ analysis of Malaysia’s major newspapers revealed the following board breakdowns. In *The New Straits Times Press*, (M) Berhad, all six board directors are men, while women take four of the 14 positions on the management team. In the Star Publications, (M) Berhad, out of nine board members, there is one woman. Four of the nine member management team are women. In Utusan Melayu, (M) Berhad, there is one woman on its eight-member board. Its 14-member management team has three women. No women are represented within its eight subsidiaries. And in Sin Chew Media Corporation, (Media Chinese International Limited), there are eight men and one woman on its board of directors. Its management team consists of all six senior managers, all men.

It is worth looking at the changes in the industry in terms of gender composition in editorial to see how gender balance has progressed.

In 1986, men held all top five positions in the local news agency, Bernama. Only two of ten senior news editors were female while all 15 senior journalists were men, according to a paper by written by Dr Azman Azwan Azmawati in 2006 for the Universiti Sains Malaysia.^{vii}

By 1996, a research study revealed that women held only between 20 to 25 percent of positions at the decision-making level. But during that period, only one woman succeeded in becoming chief editor of a mainstream newspaper. Another media organisation appointed one female assistant



editor. In the electronic media, Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) employed 12 women executives. Its only competitor at that time, TV3, had 20 women executives at its helm.^{viii}

In a 2005, RTM had a total of 89 permanent staff in its editorial department, with women outnumbering men by 38. However, only 22 females held decision-making positions (such as editor, assistant news editor, producers). In March 2006, there were only 13 women (less than ten percent of the total) among the 139 executives at decision-making levels in ..., publishers of the Malay daily, *Berita Harian*, and its sister publication, *Harian Metro*. However, women comprised 42.72 percent of the total number of journalists of the organisation. In Bernama, the editorial staff was well-balanced, with 92 women and 101 men (women constituting 47.66 percent of the total number). In contrast, there were only half as many women as men in decision-making positions: 14 women, compared to 27 men.

Women’s presence at decision-making levels in managerial and editorial positions, including senior and middle-level editorial posts, is still low. Despite the fact that women media workers are now well-represented in the media as a whole that progress has not translated to the higher levels.

The IFJ 2014 research found that women are very present in newsrooms with most respondents (40.56 percent) saying that the percentage of women media workers in their department comprised between 51 – 75 percent of all workers. Another 30.18 percent said that women comprised between 21 to 50 percent of media workers in their department. Another 17.92 percent said that women comprised between 76 to 100 percent of workers.

Interestingly, at the senior editorial level, respondents were almost evenly split in their responses in two quite contrasting areas. While 29.72 percent of respondents said 20-50 percent of women held senior editorial roles, another 27.92 percent of respondents said less than 10 percent of women held senior editorial roles. This would suggest a striking contrast in gender equity between workplace approaches when it comes to possibility for advancement for women to senior roles.

What percentage of senior editorial roles are held by women in your media organization	Total	Female	Male
Less than 10%	31	23	8
10-25%	19	16	3
25-50%	33	21	12
More than 50%	12	8	4
Don't Know	9	6	3
No Answer	7	4	3
Grand Total	111	78	33

The experiences and perspectives of two women who worked in the same company provide a glimpse into the complex, and sometimes contradictory, situation prevalent in the media industry in Malaysia. Pauline Wong³, a senior journalist who previously worked with the newspaper, *The Sun*, is currently with a recently-launched weekly newspaper, *Focusweek*.

³ Name changed as per interviewee request



In both workplaces, decision-making positions are held by men. She says the extent of bias and gender discrimination varies from workplace to workplace. For example, no female photographers were employed in Wong's first workplace. "The photo department head had openly admitted that women are weak and unable to handle heavy camera equipment," she said. Such attitudes prevented the company from hiring a female photographer for six years, and the last female photographer hired lasted for less than nine months, as she found herself constantly sidelined in favour of her male colleagues.

Alyaa Alhadjri⁴, who is also a senior journalist, was previously a news reporter at the *The Sun*, covering what she describes as 'hard news'. *The Sun* is a small company, which does not have the luxury to assign reporters to specific beats given the editorial team is small and not rigidly organised, she said. However, Alhadjri has been refused several assignments, including an incident of military intrusion which escalated into an armed conflict in 2012: Ops Daulat which occurred in Lahad Datu, Sabah (East Malaysia). She believes that her request to cover the incident was rejected solely on account of gender.

"I wasn't given a solid reason to explain why I wasn't allowed to report on site," she says. "My guess is that my editor was worried that there would be accommodation problems in case I was the only female reporter sent to cover the incident."

Despite the fact that her current workplace treats women fairly in most respects, Alhadjri has experienced and observed sexism throughout her career, including at the publication she has been working with for the last four years. "There have been instances where male staff members were sent to report on hard-hitting subjects, such as crime, simply because of the assumption that women are incapable of enduring late night shifts and handling investigative reporting," she said.

Such occurrences are common across the Malaysian media industry. In her view, this is so, despite the fact that there are more female journalists and writers in most newsrooms today, because there are "always more men than women in decision-making roles."

Jeslyn Sin⁵ is a deputy editor with a local-based monthly publication. Having had seven years of experience in the industry, Sin worked for various local dailies but she says she has witnessed positive changes in the media industry. There is no such thing as 'a woman cannot do a man's job' in Sin's publication company (company name cannot be revealed).

"My general manager is a woman, and so is my editor. As long as you are able to do your job, you take up the post," Sin said. This includes being sent out to cover protest events, courts and crime cases and if need, being sent to disaster struck areas. But sadly, in other organisations, women are still discouraged from being sent to such events or happenings.

Whether or not women are discriminated against appear very much to depend solely on the discretion of the company or employer. For example, she said one new media company that does not have a union to fight for their rights as employees, all of its decision-makers are men. "As compared to here, the decision makers are women," she said.

⁴ Name changed as per interviewee request

⁵ Name changed as per interviewee request



By and large, she thinks the media isn't as bad as in other industries. Her case in point was the 2012 Guppy Plastics case where eight former female employees of a plastic manufacturing company lost their appeal in a gender discrimination suit in 2012 when they took matters with the Court of Appeal.

The women filed the suit in July 2001 against the plastic company when they were forced to retire based on a new regulation listed in a handbook introduced by the employer. The handbook said that all women employees in the company will be terminated once they reach the age of 50, as they would be prone to suffer medical problems. The case was then taken to the Industrial Court which duly ruled in favour of the workers in 2008, saying Guppy Plastic Industries' regulation was archaic.

However, the company sought a judicial review and in April 2010, the High Court ruled in favour of Guppy Plastic Industries. In making the ruling, Justice KN Segara, who led a three-man bench, said it was straight forward case and it did not involve gender discrimination. With this ruling, a company can terminate its entire female staff saying they are medically unfit even when the employer has no valid medical proof to back their claims.

Sin said, although it was not a media organisation, but it does not mean that it will not happen to media companies. She said the verdict is "absolutely abhorrent".

"To even put it in a company handbook is violation of basic human rights and contravenes so many areas of the UN convention against the discrimination of women (UNCEDAW). It's disgusting that the judge can reject the appeal. Sin however always voiced a warning, that media organisations in Malaysia although are not experiencing such ridiculous rulings, she cautioned and stressed that every media organisation must have a workers' union in place. "My worry is that, without a union, such rules can be implemented and there is no one in power to fight of the women workers basic human rights' needs," she said.

The positives outweigh the negatives at work

Entitlement to allowances, employee benefits, leave, medical benefits and other such provisions are generally determined through collective negotiation and agreements between employers and journalists' or media workers' unions.

However, in Malaysia, unions are not readily accepted by media organisations, which tend to view them as 'advantage seekers.' Despite this evident 'anti-union culture', Malaysia's unions have been able to sustain their presence thanks to large membership numbers. They have to be constantly on guard against the union-busting strategies that are often subtly exercised by employers.

The IFJ research has already shown high levels (91.89 percent) of media workers are in fulltime or regular work – this is in strong contrast to regional trends and movements toward contractualisation.

Media workers and journalists without a union in their organisations generally do not enjoy the kinds of benefits their colleagues with unions have. The two most common benefits that non-union members are often deprived of are various categories of leave – they tend to be granted shorter periods of leave – and overtime allowances.

All companies in Malaysia, including those belonging to the media industry, have a compulsory responsibility, under the Labour Law of 1955, to offer staff/employees Employee Provident Fund (EPF) allocations.



Many journalists in Malaysia today say they are often over-worked and do not have sufficient time to allocate for training, even if a media organisation offers it. There is also a mind-set that views journalists as multi-taskers, overloading them with more than one responsibility or beat to take care of. This obviously saves companies the additional expense of hiring more employees.

Interestingly, almost equal percentages of men (42 percent) and women (43 percent) surveyed saw their opportunities for recruitment and advancement in Malaysia as 'good' within their media organisations. More women (23 percent) regarded their opportunities as 'fair' than men (19 percent) and more men (26 percent) regarded their opportunities as 'very good' than women (17 percent).

When asked if men and women received equal wages in their media organisation, more than half the women (54.66 percent) did not know. More men (64.51 percent) than women (40 percent) thought wages were equal in their media organisation. This may suggest some guesswork by journalists on wage scales or a lack of pay audits in many media organisations.

In terms of job satisfaction, a third of both men and women surveyed said their job was 'challenging but the positives outweigh the negatives'. Both genders, 28.20 percent of men and 30.30 percent of women, were also closely aligned in describing their experience at work as 'supportive' and 'a good work atmosphere'. A greater percentage of men (15.15) described their experience as positive and rewarding than women (11.53 percent). A small percentage of only women (6.41 percent of all women surveyed) described their work as 'frustrating' and of feeling 'unappreciated/undervalued'.

Allowances and benefits mostly often paid to both women and men included annual pay increases, annual bonuses, employee provident funds, travel allowances and medical benefits. Other allowances such as health insurance were paid to 50 per cent of women and accident insurance to 23.07 percent. But pensions, rent or housing allowances, life insurance, accident insurance and insurance for covering conflict were paid out to less than 13 percent of women.

Allowances and benefits paid to men more than women included accident insurance (33 percent) but fewer men (39.39 percent) had health insurance. Only 3 men and 3 women in the total group said they had been denied a benefit they were entitled to.

When I worked for the New Straits Times I was denied my rights to be part of the union which deprived me from a lot of benefits. I left the company and am now in a much better company – Female

Within the workplace, facilities such as separate toilets and staff lounges were available to most survey respondents. Workplace security was available to approximately three quarters of respondents across both genders.

However, surveys showed that no workplaces of the entire 111 respondents provided any form of childcare facility for staff. Only a third of women (35.89 percent) and for 24.24 percent of men said they had access to transport after late shifts and almost half the men (45.45 percent) had access to safety equipment, compared to only a quarter of women (26.92 percent).

Leave entitlements such as annual leave and sick leave were honoured to almost all respondents. Less than half the men (42.42 percent) had access to paternity leave. The greater majority of women



(80.76 percent) had access to maternity leave, but that still suggests around 20 percent of women did not have access to maternity leave provisions in their workplace despite the fact that most of the respondents were employed in full-time/regular work.

When the company assigned me to an outstation assignment but deducted the number of work days from my Annual Leave and refused to replace the leaves. - Female

As a union officer, my company has once attempted to deny my union Leave which stated in Industrial Relations Act. The union then file a complaint to Industrial court, the company offered to settle the case outside the court at last. – Male

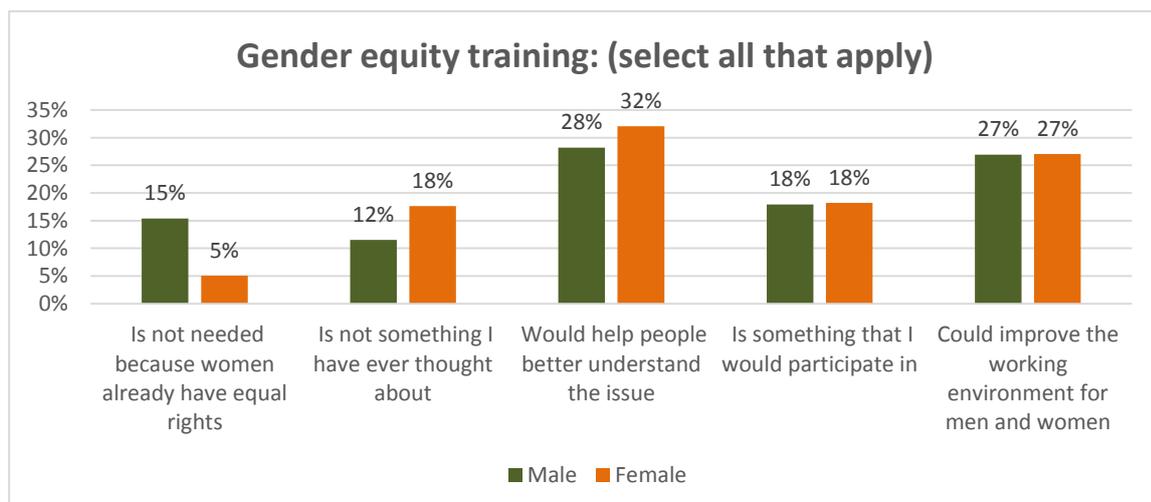
When asked about leave and re-entry for women after childbirth, a third of respondents did not have a fixed view. Among women, 26.66 percent described it as ‘good’ and 20 percent described it as ‘acceptable’, 5.33 percent described it as ‘poor’ or ‘non-existent’.

Jeslyn Sin, editor of a monthly publication interviewed for the research, cited that during her previous work experiences, whenever she had to do more hard news coverage, she was always sent with men colleagues. “My editors then would always remind me be accompanied by men colleagues. They would never allow me to go on my own, especially if it was crime scenes. According to most of them, it is for safety reasons that we should be accompanied by men, but to me, if there are police women, why can’t I go on an assignment on my own?” she said.

The only obstacle Sin had yet to overcome was the fact that reemployment of pregnant women are still well accepted in the industry. “I still don’t have children yet, but I realised that the trend to hire editor positions are even sub-editors are that they would avoid hiring individuals who have family or young children. I think it is very unfair. I am still fighting for more fairness in hiring women with family. They deserve to have a career just like everyone else and should not be excluded simply because they have to care for their family,” she said.

Nearly two thirds of respondents (69.81 percent) said their workplace offered training or professional development programs. A greater proportion (77.47 percent) had participated in training through work or ‘other avenues’.

In trainings, a quarter of respondents (24.32 percent) said women comprised between 25 to 50 percent of the group participants in trainings. Most women (84.61 percent) had not been provided with safety training, compared to 63.63 percent of men.





More than half of all surveyed (65.77 percent) when asked to select their views on gender equity training that 'gender equity training would help people better understand the issue'. This was closely followed by those (57.66 percent) who said it 'could improve the working environment for men and women'.

Interestingly, 36.36 percent of the male responses selected the perspective that gender equity training 'is not needed because women already have equal rights'.

Empowering women through union representation

By Hajjah Norila Daud

Never had I dreamt to be a union leader, what's more a president of a national union. Whatever the reasons may be, believe it or not, I became the first woman president of the National Union of Journalists Malaysia (NUJM) from 1998 to 2010.

Regardless of being a woman in a male orientated work-force, during my time as leader the challenges were met. What I had was a big passion to help fellow journalists and union members to have a more conducive working environment, secure good fringe benefits and a guaranteed and safe career future.

No doubt, I was tested and held under scrutiny by my fellow members. But our achievements came through our union's continuous struggle for equal opportunity, the struggle in negotiating between the union branches and management of various media companies before collective agreements (CA) were signed, and the improvement for women's requirement within these collective agreements. There were also many seminars and forums we conducted to bring about equal representations of male and female for discussion and union-related matters.

As far back as 2002, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) held a gender equality and trade union leadership seminar in Kuala Lumpur. From there the legwork had already started in trying to empower women journalists not only in the union but in the workplace as well. Through trainings provided by the IFJ, today more and more women are now represented in their unions.

Back then, and now, it was important for us to see that the IFJ trainers were mostly women and this added to the interest of women journalists to participate in workshops and seminars. Many of us remembered that back in the 1970s there were practically no women officials in unions, be it at branch level or at the HQ. But during the 1980s I first stepped in as the union treasurer and by 1990 more women journalists were getting involved. I stayed on as general treasurer from 1988 to 1998 before becoming president.

NUJM's leadership very much played the role of advisor and mediator in any deadlock situation in the media. During my time, I had a woman vice president with five women executive council members from five branches. All were the chairperson and secretaries of their respective branch.

One of the most difficult struggles during that time was for the NUJM was to bring back the then-Sin Chew Jit Poh branch (*Chinese Daily*) to become a full member of the union in 2002. The formation of the NUJ Sun branch was amongst our efforts in bringing all journalists in the print media to be protected under one umbrella. The success of NUJM in this case was to bring the company Sun



Media Corporation to pay compensation to all the Sun media workers who had been dismissed without justice.

Being the only body protecting journalists' rights in the country, NUJM has been consistent in its call for greater press freedom and in urging the government to be more transparent in disseminating information to the public and the press.

In 2008, a woman journalist was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) but she was immediately released when NUJM acted speedily by calling the journalists in Malaysia, ASEAN and also globally to support our struggle to let her free.

NUJM's long established relationship with its counterparts including the IFJ, the Confederation of ASEAN Journalists (CAJ), Asian Journalists Association (AJA) and also with various local NGOs have made it a respectable, reputable and renowned union in our region.

But importantly, not only did we fight for press freedom; our struggle was also to encourage women to take an active role in negotiating and in leadership processes within the branches and in their workplaces as well.

Even though women would sometimes find themselves intimidated by their male counterparts, they could look at NUJM and our women leaders as beacons for their own strength and struggle to demand their rights and play a leading role.

Hajjah Norila was president of the National Union of Journalists of Malaysia from 1998 – 2010.

Union quotas for representation

Unions representing journalists and other media workers are well-represented in Malaysian media organisations, although a large section of journalists still do not belong to any union.

The National Union of Journalists Malaysia is the only organisation of working journalists in the country representing the Industrial, social and welfare interest of some 1,400 journalists.

Many journalists who participated in the survey are attached to unions in their respective organisations (42.34 percent) and are equally members of the national union. However, at present, the membership of journalists' unions is currently controlled by the government and is restricted to those working in print media. Those working in web-based media are still pushing the government to approve their membership in unions. The number of broadcast journalist was very low in the research.

Formed on Aug 30, 1962 NUJ Malaysia is the sole authority to negotiate and determine the proper rates of remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment for journalists in the various publishing houses/ print media which produce Bahasa Melayu, English and Chinese newspapers and periodicals. Among the newspapers it represents are English papers *The New Straits Times Press*, *Star Publication* and *The Sun Daily*; Malay newspapers *Utusan Melayu Malaysia Berhad*, *Berita Harian*, *Harian Metro* and *Utusan Karya* (Magazine); and Chinese newspapers *Sin Chew Daily*, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *Kwong Wah Press*.



With the broadcast sector there are a number of unions. TV3 has an in-house union (TV3 Employee Union) affiliated with the Malaysia Trade Union Congress (MTUC) and UNI Global Union-MEI Sector & UNI-Malaysia Liaison Council (UNI MLC). The ASTRO Productions Employees Association Malaysia (Astro satellite television) Union is also affiliated with UNI-MEI Malaysia. Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) has full membership with the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (APU).^{ix}

The broadcasting unions have set-up a working group “UNI MEI (UNI – Media, Entertainment & Arts) Malaysia” in March 2014 in an effort to campaign for recognition at another Media Prima Company, Primework Studios. Media-broadcasting unions include Astro Production Employees Union, Astro Production Executive Union, Primeworks Executive Union, TV3 Executive Union, Al Hijrah Union – the UNI MLC and the anchor union, TV3 Employees Union (journalists covered under this union) are all affiliated to UNI-MEI Malaysia.^x

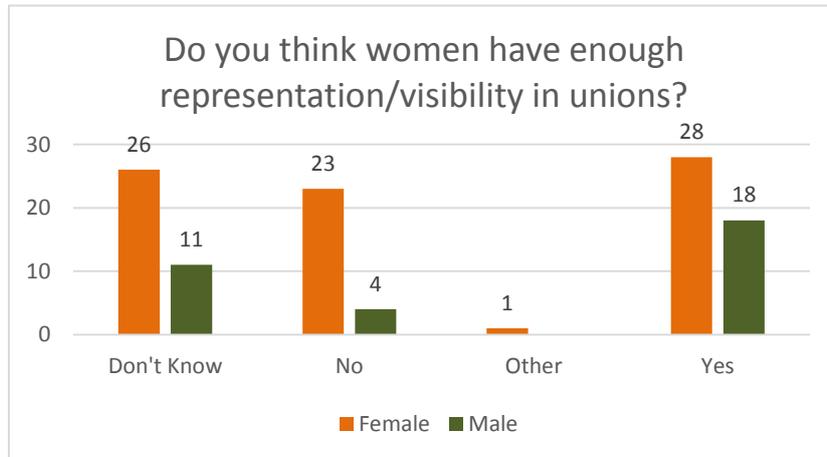
In the print union, NUJ, out of the total 1,443 members at March 2014, 721 were women journalists who work in the various print media mentioned above, comprising 49.9 percent. The NUJM said there was a slight decrease in percentage of women members in the union from the previous year 2013 but an increase in numbers. Out of 1,519, members, 757 were women. There was a slight reduction in NUJ membership in 2014. It cited one reason for this drop being that those journalists who had left the print media to work in on-line media, satellite television and blogs. Online media workers are currently forbidden by the Malaysian government to be union members.

Elected officials in NUJM saw a fall in women representation from 2012 to the present. In 2012 there were 5 women officials in the union. As of 2014 there are only 4 women elected officials although one women official holds a high post within the central working committee. There are two full-time staff working in the NUJM, one male and one female.

The general secretary of the NUJM, Schave de Rozario said: “There are more women working in media than ever before. The union is aware that women members have special needs that it must look into. This is reflected and discussed during the collective bargaining between the union and companies to increase the benefits for women especially on maternity, nursery and security.”

From the survey, 39 people (35.13 percent) were not part of a union and another 20 people (18 percent) said they did not have a union to represent them. This would account for at least some of the 25 percent of survey participants who said they worked in digital or online media – currently forbidden under government legislation from joining a union.

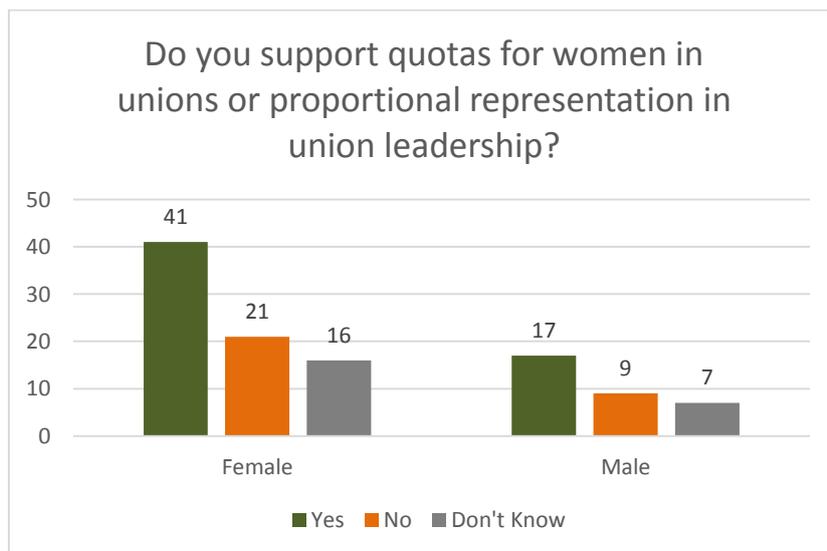
The gender equity scenario in unions is similar to that in the workplace, with leadership primarily in the hands of male members. The survey revealed that although there were proportionally by gender more women (44 percent) than men (36.36 percent) among union members, only 15.38 of those women held decision-making positions in branch unions and national unions. Women were visible in official union roles within their local media organisation than at a national level. While men more often assumed the national roles.



When asked about unions, 29.49 percent of women indicated that women are not adequately represented or visible in unions, while 33.33 percent didn't know. Another 29.48 percent of women agreed women were adequately represented.

While the women seemed more or less equally divided on the issue, far more of the men were evidently convinced that women are adequately represented and visible in unions with 54.54 percent of men said the current gender representation in unions was adequate.

Despite the fact that a substantial proportion of both women and men were of the opinion that there was nothing wrong with women's representation and visibility in unions, 52.56 percent of the female respondents were in favour of a quota system to ensure more female representation in union leadership posts. This aligned with men (51.51 percent) who also supported quotas for women or proportional representation.



Within the region, NUJM is considered to be at the forefront to give opportunities for women in decision-making roles within its functional perimeter, citing the example that a woman, Mrs Norila



Daud, was president for six terms from 1998 to 2010. However, due to the democratic process, there had been a fluctuation over women’s representation within the union.

At present, the NUJM does not have any gender committees or groups but its branches are represented by women journalists. “For example we have seen that in our branches more women members participated in organising the election process within their branches,” he said. “Out of our 10 newspapers, 6 branches saw women members organising the election process recently in October 2014 during the Union election.”

De Rozario says a “gender equity policy is mostly untapped because it requires more awareness among women journalists themselves towards their rights”. He said NUJM had initiated women issues through seminars and workshops to look into women journalists' needs to better opportunities and equality in the industry. While specific training programmes on gender equity had been conducted they had not been extensive.

While the union sees no barriers for women's participation in unions and the media, they agreed that may not be the case in the companies where they work, particularly in areas such as maternity, security, equal opportunities and nursery needs at their workplace. The latter was evident in the surveys which revealed not a single workplace of those surveyed had childcare facilities, despite the fact that more than a quarter of respondents worked in companies employing over 1500 people.

De Rozario said many companies probably don’t feel they imposed any discrimination against women journalists and therefore don’t think they need to address any imbalances in the benefits available to males and females. “Even though companies maintain fairness in allocating resources, programs, and decision making fairly to both males and females without any discrimination, the extent of this is still in need of improvement from time to time via collective bargaining,” he said.

He agreed that more is needed and that NUJM is trying to gather more concerned parties locally and internationally to foster better understanding and to bring progress towards the goal of gender equity.

High incidences of sexual harassment at work

In Malaysia, the silence of government control becomes even more deafening as the shackles that bind journalists, preventing them from expressing themselves freely, are also placed on the voices of individual journalists faced with sexual harassment, gender inequality and sexism in the media industry. Sexual harassment is one of the most common forms of violence against women in media in Malaysia as the study revealed.

Sexual harassment was outlined in the survey as including “such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour as physical contact and advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography and sexual demand, whether by words or actions. Such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem; it is discriminatory when the woman has reasonable grounds to believe that her objection would disadvantage her in connection with her employment, including recruitment or promotion, or when it creates a hostile working environment”.

Many people respond to issues of sexual harassment describing the incident as ‘harmless’ or victims are accused of over-reacting. In the workplace, sexual harassment is seldom identified or linked to the broader issue of discrimination and violence against women.



In an interview for the research, Malaysian journalist Jessica Lim described editorial meetings in her office as being fraught with sexual innuendo. The situation got so bad that several female colleagues would walk out of the meeting just to avoid feeling embarrassed. “The worst feeling is that your very own editor is constantly ogling at you or ‘stripping’ you naked in his mind,” she said. She said she felt there was no way she could push through her arguments against such behaviour. “It seemed to me that, in order to move up the corporate ladder, you would have to sleep around with your bosses or with men in power who would then feed you with exclusive stories.” Eventually, she felt that the only option was to leave the publication.

Interestingly, the survey revealed that nearly half of all respondents (44.14 percent) had witnessed workplace sexual harassment – 47.43 percent of women and 36.36 percent of men.

Harassment is most likely to occur within the workplace than outside in the field with equal numbers of women (34.48 percent each) who had experienced harassment saying the perpetrator was a colleague or superior at work. Of these, 75 percent said they told someone about the harassment – this was more likely to be friend or a colleague, though over a quarter (31.25 percent) told a superior at work. No-one told a gender committee, their union or the police about the matter. The rest chose to deal with it themselves seeing it as ‘no big deal.’

Who was the perpetrator?	Male	Female	Total
Colleague	0	10	10
Superior at work	0	10	10
Union person	0	0	0
An interview subject	0	4	4
A member of the public	0	5	5
Grand Total	0	29	29

Less than a third of all respondents (30.63 percent) said that there was an official complaints cell, and nearly half (45.94 percent) said that they didn’t know whether or not there was a cell for complaints. On top of the lack of redress mechanisms, the reluctance to lodge official complaints is a matter of concern.

When asked what measures could effectively combat sexual harassment, the majority of respondents identified an ‘effective complaints mechanism’ as the first priority, followed by ‘awareness-raising among women’ and closely after by ‘awareness-raising among men’. ‘Stronger laws’ and ‘punitive measures’ sat lower down the scale.

What measures can effectively combat sexual harassment?	Female	Male	Total
Awareness-raising among women	34	8	42
Awareness-raising with men	32	8	40
Effective complaints mechanism	36	10	46
Punitive measures	19	4	23



Stronger laws	27	5	32
Total	148	35	183

When asked about sexual harassment as a “union issue”, the NUJM said from time to time it underwent a check-list with its branches to identify and address if there were concerns. “There may be very few incidences which the company themselves were able to exercise according to existing laws,” the NUJM said. “The Companies within their own contract and disciplinary board and under law fulfil the criteria for managing sexual harassment cases.”

In a recent case outlined to the IFJ, Company A (name not disclosed on complainant’s request), a Malay daily newspaper, had a journalist bring a sexual harassment matter to court – an unusual case given the company had a designated department where women could lodge complaints. The case involved a male bureau chief who was sexually harassing his female subordinates both verbally and physically.

The harassment had been going on for several years, but only when the situation got out of hand did the women act together to demand a formal inquiry into the incidents. Clearly the “designated department” had not helped their case. Nevertheless, the case was later brought to court where the bureau chief was found guilty and asked to leave the company. It is not clear if damages were paid.

Rita’s Story: Horrible bosses

Rita Lee⁶ was only 21 when she started out as a cadet journalist. With more men than women in the newsroom she joined, she described it as being like a boys’ club. Male colleagues would make inappropriate remarks about women reporters’ clothes which they would have to ignore or laugh off for the sake of survival. In order to protect herself, Rita would pretend to be naive and not understand the sexual innuendo in conversations with her boss.

Weaving around the circumstances that confronted her, she managed to survive the job another six years, until she was 27 and a more senior reporter. By then she was working with a different daily newspaper but unfortunately the harassment continued with a new editor.

“He would text me saying he needs to talk to me because he is feeling nervous. He would text me when I was sick, asking if he could bring me anything. He would also ask to meet me over lunch to discuss work but he would talk about everything else but work.”

The editor then started calling her every weekend “just to talk”. She resorted to switching off her mobile phone, only to be reprimanded for her lack of work commitment. She didn’t know what to do. She couldn’t avoid him at work since her desk was located right in front of his and he constantly initiated conversations. When her editor moved to a different department, he was allowed to select his staff - he chose Rita, saying he trusted her and needed her help to make his new transfer work.

“He started saying he needed to meet me over the weekend due to tight deadlines,” she said. “I thought it was all right to meet at his home because he was married and had kids. I knew his wife was a stay-at-home mother and assumed she would be present. However, when I got there, it was a bachelor pad. There was no family. He was alone in a one-bedroom apartment. He said this was

⁶ Name changed as per interviewees request



where he came to be on his own and get peace. I felt like running away. I really didn't know what to do. I finally managed to find my way out when my friend called me endlessly and enabled me to leave, pretending that it was an urgent matter.”

When she began avoiding her editor, he responded by cancelling her bi-weekly column in the paper. When she finally felt she had collected enough evidence against him, she turned to her company's Human Resource department to lodge a complaint. But was shocked at their response: “Instead, they were on his side and said the text messages were not really any indication of sexual harassment even though it was undeniable that they had been sent from his mobile phone.”

Rita eventually left her job and, in fact, moved into a different industry before migrating to Canada. The editor remains in the English daily where she once worked. It is likely that the impunity he enjoyed has resulted in other such cases not being dealt with either.

Lee's case shows a victim's courage to not only share her experience but also lodge a complaint can achieve little unless it is supported by an organisation committed to eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace.

Legislation absent for workplace sexual harassment

In 2002, the All Women's Action Society Malaysia (AWAM) and Women's Development Collective (WDC) conducted a study that found that over a third (35 percent) of respondents in Malaysia had experienced one or more forms of sexual harassment in general.

The 2002 Studies show that survivors of sexual harassment are likely to be located on the lower rungs of the company e.g.: in subordinate positions. Unfortunately, most survivors are also unlikely to take any action due to fear of reprisal.

According to an associate with the employment and industrial relations law firm Skrine, Lee Li Hoong, Malaysia currently has no legislation dealing specifically with sexual harassment in the workplace (SHW). The only existing law that came close to dealing with sexual harassment was Section 509 of the Penal Code, which does not specifically refer to the workplace:

"Whoever, intending to insult the modesty of any person, utters any words, makes any sound or gesture or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or such gesture or object shall be seen by such person, or intrudes upon the privacy of such person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 5 years or with fine, or with both." Cases under the Penal Code are handled by the police but, as Lee points out, employers have to play a role in order to curb sexual harassment in the workplace.

In 1999, the Ministry of Human Resources the Code of Practice on the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Harassment in the Work Place, which serves as a guide to employers for establishing and implementing a preventive and redress mechanism for sexual harassment. It encourages employers to (i) issue a policy statement prohibiting sexual harassment in the organisation; (ii) formulate a clear definition of sexual harassment; (iii) establish a complaints and grievance procedure; (iv) initiate disciplinary action and penalties against the harassers and against anyone who makes false accusations; (v) introduce protective and remedial measures for the victim; and (vi) institute promotional and educational programmes to explain the company's policies on sexual harassment and raise awareness of sexual harassment and its adverse consequences.



Since May 2000, women’s rights organisations nationwide have called upon the government to enact a law to tackle sexual harassment to ensure that all companies are legally obliged to implement the Code, which is currently implemented only on a “voluntary basis”. According to the Malaysian Employers Federation, only 400 of the 450,000 registered and active companies had adopted and implemented the Code, at least up to 2010.^{xi}

Lee had also proposed various amendments in the Employment (Amendment) Bill 2010. The proposed introduction of a new Part XVA that provides for the establishment of a procedure for inquiring into and dealing with complaints of sexual harassment is long overdue.

Section 2 of the Employment Act 1955 is to be amended through the Employment Bill 2010, by introducing a new definition of sexual harassment as *“any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal, visual, gestural or physical, directed at a person which is offensive or humiliating or is a threat to his well-being arising out of and in the course of his employment”*.^{xii} The definition of sexual harassment under the Bill is materially different from the one included in the Code: *“any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature having the effect of verbal, non-verbal, visual, psychological or physical harassment:*

- *That might, on reasonable grounds, be perceived by the recipient as placing a condition of a sexual nature on her/his employment; or*
- *that might, on reasonable grounds, be perceived by the recipient as an offence or humiliation, or a threat to his/her well-being, but has no direct link to his/her employment.”*

In other words, the definition of sexual harassment under the Code recognises two forms of sexual harassment: sexual coercion and sexual annoyance. Most jurisdictions have identified these separate, basic forms of sexual harassment. However, the proposed definition of sexual harassment under the Bill does not clearly include sexual coercion. Another conspicuous omission from the definition of sexual harassment under the Bill is psychological harassment, which is provided for under the Code.

Lee is firm in the belief that the 1999 Code of Practice on the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Harassment in the Work Place is still not up to par. But even he acknowledges legislation alone will not eradicate sexual harassment. Other efforts like education, training and outreach programs are still necessary.

Balancing up the gender equity scale

The challenge for Malaysia’s media – and society in general – is determining how best to tackle gender equity issues women face at work and creating a way forward for improved understanding of the importance of achieving true gender equity.

The issue is certainly not one confined to the media. In the Global Gender Gap Index, published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Malaysia’s ranking in the index has continuously slipped from 72 in 2006 when the report was launched.

In 2014, the country’s place on the global gender gap ladder was 107 out of 142 countries.^{xiii} The index, which covers 90 percent of the world’s population, measures gender equality across four areas: health, education, economics and politics. Malaysia fare poorly in the index, especially in



comparison with its neighbours and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Malaysia trails behind Philippines (now at 9), Singapore (59), Laos (60), Thailand (61), Vietnam (76), Indonesia (97) and Brunei (98), ranking second last in the Southeast region, with Cambodia at the bottom, but just one spot below (108).

It is also ranked one spot away from being among the 10 nations occupying the lowest spots for political empowerment of women (determined by the ratio of females to males in terms of seats in parliament and ministerial berths, as well as the number of years with a female rather than male head of state over the past 50 years.) These numbers speak volumes about how little attention is given by the government in Malaysia to close gender gaps.

How media companies take on the issue of gender equity can begin with policies and approaches. Yet when asked about gender policies, only 6.3 percent of respondents in the research said their workplace actually had a gender policy. A concerning 66.03 percent did not know if their organisation had a policy and 26.13 said their company did not. This in itself says quite a lot about understanding and knowledge of gender equity.

Would a gender policy contribute to gender equity though? Only 27 percent of respondents thought so, while the vast majority (55.86 percent) did not know.

The types of provisions or approaches people thought would improve gender equity in media companies were in order of priority: an equal opportunity or gender equity policy, flexible work hours, sexual harassment policies, a dignity at work policy, ILO maternity/paternity leave conventions, health and safety audits and pay audits.

The introduction of an equal opportunity or gender equity policy was supported by the majority of men (48 percent), compared to 27 percent of all women surveyed. Slightly more women (31.53 percent) thought flexible work options would help improve gender equity.

When asked about union approaches to gender equity, more women (28.20 percent) felt unions could improve their work on gender equity whereas more men (30.30 percent) had no fixed view. Overall between genders, 25.22 percent thought unions could improve their work on gender equity and another 18.01 percent thought unions should be working with media employers on joint strategies on gender equity.

Unions and journalism organizations in my country: (Please choose only one of the following)	Total	Female	Male
Already promote diversity and equity	19	11	8
Could improve their work on gender equity	28	22	6
No fixed view	28	18	10
Should adopt a national gender equity policy	4	2	2
Should lobby government for stronger gender equity legislation	12	10	2
Should work with media employers on joint strategies on gender equity	20	15	5
Grand Total	111	78	33



The issue of pay audits was not a high priority in the survey response, perhaps because most of the respondents felt (whether accurately or not) that wage equality was not an issue they faced. But without pay audits, it is hard to determine the reality.

The 2014 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report ranked Malaysia fifth for wage equality for similar work, with the average salaries measured being within 80% of their male counterparts.^{xiv} However, the estimated earned income for women in Malaysia is only half of that earned by men, putting Malaysia at 103rd place.

In another question, respondents were asked about 'strategies' that would make a difference to gender equity issues. Women ranked 'affirmative employment strategies', 'more women in decision-making roles' and 'more family-friendly work conditions' as their top choices. Men ranked 'having more women in the media at every level' and 'more family-friendly work conditions' as their top two choices.

Together, both genders chose 'more family-friendly work conditions' and 'affirmative employment policies' as the top two strategies. Other options also supported in order of preference were 'more women in decision-making roles' and 'more women in the media at every level' (both equally ranked), and 'gender sensitive men at every level'.

What strategies do you think would make a difference to gender equity issues such as portrayal of women, career advancement etc.?	Female	Male	Total
Having more women in the media at every level	15	10	25
Having gender sensitive men in the media at every level	19	5	24
Having more women in decision making roles	22	3	25
Affirmative employment strategies	24	7	31
More family friendly work conditions	22	11	33
Total	102	36	138

In April 2014, Prime Minister Najib, citing a Diversity in the Workplace Survey (2013), conducted by Price Water House Coopers (PWC) and commissioned by TalentCorp, announced that Malaysia's female labour force participation rate (FLPR) had increased from 49.5% to 52.4% by 2013. He said this put Malaysia very much on track to achieve the target of 55% by 2015. Progress is measured by the introduction of incentives for family-friendly workplace and work-life integration.

However, the same survey suggests diversity at top management could be further improved given a representation of only 24% women; 18% aged 40 years old and below; and only 34% Bumiputera. PwC emphasized that retaining qualified women professionals was "a critical business imperative" and there is a need to provide flexibility for women to balance work and family commitments. One of its initiatives is a 'Back2Work Programme' to hire women returnees, providing them the option to apply for a Flexible Work Arrangements package.

Commitments by the Malaysian government are a first promising step. In September 2014, Deputy Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, said the government was studying a proposal to set up Malaysia's own "30 Percent Club" to boost the number of women holding top decision-making posts in the private sector. In 2011, the government also introduced a policy to ensure that at least 30% of the decision-makers in the private sector are women, to ensure representation of women on corporate boards rises to 30% by 2016.



In 30 Percent Clubs elsewhere across the globe, corporate leaders of major firms have introduced monitoring initiatives that have led to the consideration of capable women to fill up top positions, he said.

Corporates are making slow progress in achieving the national target of 30% women on corporate boards by 2016. Performance Management & Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) – NIEW Women on Boards Baseline Study (2013) shows that only 8% of board members of all listed companies are women.

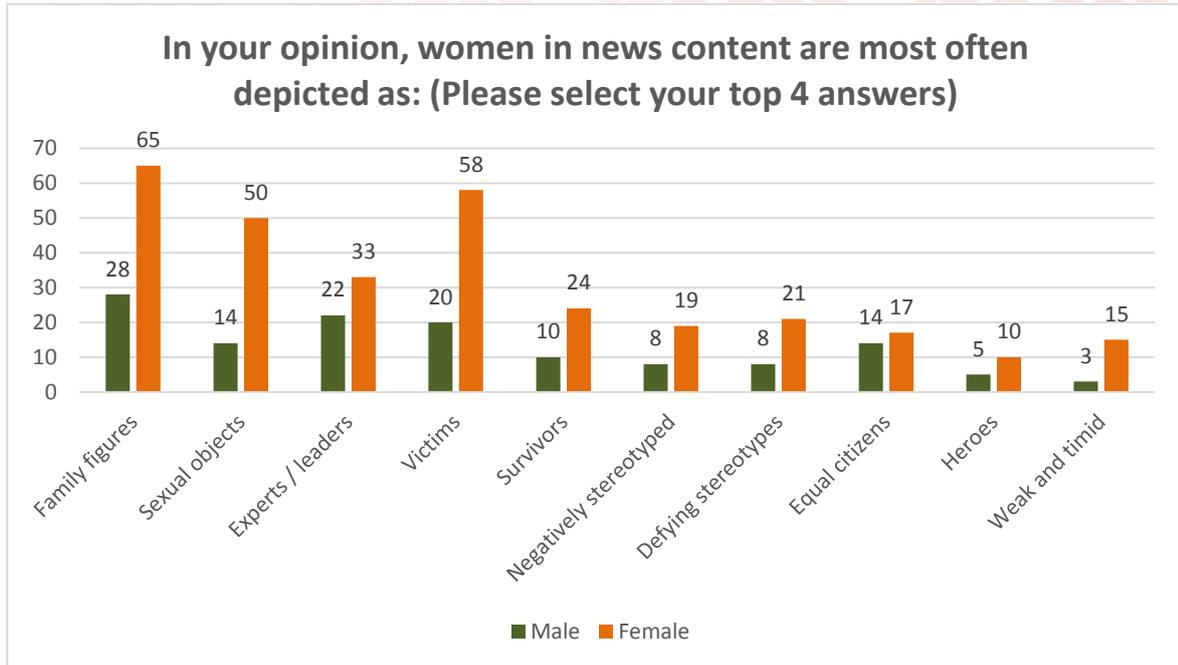
Despite more than 700 women having been trained under the NAM Institute for the Empowerment of Women’s (NIEW) Women Directors’ Programme over 2012 and 2013, to date only 115 placements have been made to listed companies.

More than just mums and vixens

In the mainstream media, headlines such as “Beauty with Brains”, “Woman in a Man’s World” and “Woman On Top” are commonplace. So too are comments passed on to female politicians contesting elections as members of parliament or state representatives in the 2013 general elections where ‘looks’ were the focus ahead of ‘capabilities’. Yet this same approach is not applied to their male rivals.

Pauline Wong⁷, from *Focusweek*, provided the example of Datuk Seri Syahrizat, a former Minister for Women, who attracted more news coverage when her family was being probed for abuse of funds than when the ministry she headed took progressive steps on women-related issues. Highlighting the focus on women’s looks, Wong also highlighted the tendency of the media to write about: "The beautiful Sheila Majid..." rather than "The award-winning singer Sheila Majid..."

⁷ Names changed per interviewees request



When it comes to getting ‘balance’ that is another story altogether. When asked about their thoughts on the percentage of women appearing in news stories as sources or experts, almost half all respondents (49.54 percent) felt that women comprised between 20 to 30 percent.

In terms of depictions in the media and the use of old gender stereotypes, the most commonly agreed depiction by both men and women (from a top choice of four) was that of women as ‘family figures’. This was followed by victims, sexual objects, and, then, by experts/leaders. The lowest proportion, thought women were depicted as ‘heroes’.

Among the measure outlined to promote gender equity in news content, almost a third of respondents (36 percent) felt the answer lay in having more ‘gender-sensitive male journalists and editors’.

Women (29.49 percent) also felt strongly that having more women in ‘decision-making roles’ would help. While men as a second and third option felt ‘enforcement of guidelines on gender equity’ (27.27 percent) and ‘more women journalists and editors’ (24 percent) would be a good approach.

Wong believes more gender balance within media organisations is necessary, especially to enable the coverage of more women’s issues and potentially sensitive topics, for example for interviews with sex workers or transgender people. The presence of more female journalists and photographers would perhaps enable the greater inclusion of such minority groups within the media landscape.

“Media that are unable to shed gender bias work towards gender balance and deal with gender issues seriously cannot expect to help achieve gender equality in society as a whole,” she said.

A public controversy over one sports page headline in Malaysia clearly highlights the perils of not only sensationalism and disregard for media ethics but also gender imbalance in editorial departments.



In October 2014, one of Malaysia's English daily newspapers, *The Star*, was criticised for a distasteful, sexist headline, which indirectly connected Thai golfer Pornanong Phatlum, runner-up at a Malaysia-hosted Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) event, to pornography.

The daily published a picture of the 24-year-old sportswoman crouching on the green along with the headline, "Hot Porn," set in big type for its Sunday edition. What may have been intended as a play on words reflected badly on the ethics of the decision-making authorities in the publication. The headline was immediately condemned by a news portal (only a few non-mainstream news portals, such as *Rakyat Times*, highlighted the matter. Not much other coverage was given to the incident, which troubled local media workers who fear the precedent has been set.

The Women's Aid Organisation of Malaysia (WAO) condemned the publication for being "sexist and disrespectful to all women," as well as culturally insensitive. It said such sexism in the media affects not only the public or readers but also the female journalists working at the publication. In the case of the woman golfer, the fact that editors allowed such a headline to be published reflected their own attitude towards women and suggests that such demeaning, sexist remarks are ok too.

WAO urged the daily to adhere to the Code of Ethics of the Malaysian Press Institute, which states that sensational and provocative headlines should be avoided. Local media workers also expressed their concern about this matter, especially since no strong action was taken against the copy editors responsible for the headline. The publication merely issued a printed apology; there was no indication of any inquiries or disciplinary action. Some editors in other publications also voiced their opinions, pointing out that if the publication's Sports Desk included women such a headline would probably not have been published.

These types of incidents illustrate some of the issues when it comes to gender balance seen through media content among both local news publications and portals.

According to Pauline Wong, "News coverage is often overwhelmingly male-dominated. Women-related topics are often left out on the assumption that they may not create a great impact. Only subjects involving women that are sexual or crime-oriented tend to get covered".

If a woman's issue is covered by the media, it is almost always from a patriarchal perspective, with little to no presence of a female voice or viewpoint, she said. Instead, only superficial or scandalous stories related to women receive significant attention.

Wong says she finds it difficult to push stories related to women's issues and in the five years she has been working in the media, she has rarely seen a story on a landmark ruling on a women's issue on the front page of any newspaper.

"Ideas put forward by female members of the team are more often disregarded than those proposed by male colleagues," she says. "This is simply because they are still, even today, deemed the weaker voice."

Journalist Alhajri believes an increase in the number of women in decision-making positions would improve the situation, as long as "have the authority to influence/over-rule questionable decisions based on gender bias. If there is still one man who can have the final say, there would be no point."



Although the women who are in decision-making roles “are strong enough to have their voices heard,” she says it is important to overcome the cultural mindset that “women should not appear to have a stronger voice than men.”

She feels women need to take a stand in decision-making processes, and avoid falling into the trap of the middle-ground, which is a noticeable phenomenon in the media industry. Gender equality in the media industry would help advance the careers of female journalists and media workers and create new opportunities that do not currently exist for women.

“Gender equality would ensure that the same opportunities are available across the board and fair competition is available to both men and women without any bias.”

Conclusion

Malaysia has a long way to go in terms of gender equality, both policy-wise and mindset-wise. Unfortunately, the solution is not as simple as changing company policies, especially if women themselves feel stifled by culture, shame, embarrassment and fear of stigma even before they broach the topic of sexual harassment.

Gender inequality is not an individual or societal problem; it’s a national problem. It needs to be highlighted constantly by the media and led by the media so that change can take place within the media industry first and eventually, through a domino-effect, in the others industries too.

Sadly too often, the solution for women is to ‘quit’ or suffer in silence. But women need to be empowered to speak up or, in certain cases, simply know how to identify whether or not they are victims of gender inequality.

Malaysia can move toward changing policies or implementing policies that do exist, but women in the country need to be more aware of their surroundings and trained to look out for issues that are caused by or derived from gender inequality.

While the country has an uphill task ahead, this research has identified several clear ways forward that both women and media organisations can use to work towards achieving gender equality and balance in their media.

Policies that deal with gender issues, such as sexual harassment and discrimination, should be clearly drawn up. Not just some, but every member of the staff must be made aware that neither abuse of power nor sexual harassment will be tolerated. Organisations should also ensure equal gender representation among the staff.

Human resource departments in media companies should adopt policies and mechanisms that will protect their staff from gender-based discrimination – which we can see clearly exists from this research. They must also make safety briefings available and compulsory. Importantly, the HR department must be able to reassure staff that they can depend on them to ensure their well-being in the company, without fear or favour.

There is no doubt from the research that men are an important part of the equation. They should be engaged in this topic to ensure that they too play a role in promoting gender equality and preventing sexual harassment.



ⁱ In the edition dated 23-29 November 2013.

ⁱⁱ Hasmah, Z 2007, *Political Influence in Malaysia and Thailand's Media Sector*, 12th (vol.), JATI, viewed 18 November 2014, pp 71-82.

ⁱⁱⁱ Freedom House 2014, *Malaysia: Freedom in the World 2014*, Freedom House, Washington, viewed 24 November 2014, < <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/malaysia#.VOFwG8k1ail>>.

^{iv} Freedom House 2014, *Malaysia: Freedom in the World 2014*, Freedom House, Washington, viewed 19 November, 2014, < <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/malaysia#.VOFwG8k1ail>>.

^v Weaver D.H, Willnat, L 2012, *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*, Routledge, New York, viewed 20 November, 2014, <<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=ETE5vTeLQkC&pg=PA83&lpg=PA83&dq=women+in+media+malaysia+journalist&source=bl&ots= DaAzjmH6J&sig=FNnHr7kxSOeBOBQmYDJ6-g81Q7g&hl=en&sa=X&ei=4F7YVMPJBYuK8QWf5IKQAg&ved=0CCOQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=women%20in%20media%20malaysia%20journalist&f=false>>.

^{vi} Tamam, E, Jalarajan Raj, S & Govindasamy, M 2012, 'Chapter 7: Malaysian Journalists' in Weaver D.H, Willnat, L (ed.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*, Routledge, New York, pp. 78 – 89.

^{vii} Azmawati, AA (2006), *Cultivating Gender Sensitive Culture in the Malaysian Media Industry: A Critique and an Alternative*, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, viewed 26 November, 2014, <http://eprints.usm.my/4896/1/Cultivating_Gender_Sensitive_Culture_In_The_Malaysian_Media_Industry.pdf>, pp. 1 – 6.

^{viii} Azmawati, Dr A, A 2006, 'Cultivating Gender Sensitive Culture in the Malaysian Media Industry: A critique and an alternative', In: *2006 International Conference Affirming Diversity: Women making A Difference May 18-20, 2006*, viewed 10 January, 2015 <http://eprints.usm.my/4896/1/Cultivating_Gender_Sensitive_Culture_In_The_Malaysian_Media_Industry.pdf>

^{ix} Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union 2011, *About the APBU*, Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, viewed 10 January, 2015, <http://www.abu.org.my/About_Us-@-About_the_ABU_.aspx>

^x UNI Global Union 2015, *Media, Entertainment & Arts*, UNI Global Union, viewed 15 January, 2015, <<http://www.uniglobalunion.org/sectors/media-entertainment-arts/about-us>>

^{xi} Habib, S 2010, 'Hands Off Women,' *The Star Newspaper*, 1 August 2010, viewed 28 November, 2014 <<http://www.thestar.com.my/story/?file=%2F2010%2F8%2F1%2Fnation%2F6775531>>.

^{xii} Editorial note: The IFJ checked the Employment Act 1955 and the wording is still 'his' well- being.

^{xiii} World Economic Forum 2014, *Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, online article, viewed 1 December, 2014 <<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/economies/#economy=MYS>>.

^{xiv} World Economic Forum 2014, *Global Gender Gap Report 2014; Country Score Card*, online article, viewed 1 December, 2014 <<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/economies/#economy=MYS>>.