

NAVIGATING SEXISM IN THE WORKPLACE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MUSLIM AND BUDDHIST FEMALE WORKERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study explores the widespread issue of sexism in Malaysia, focusing on its impact on Muslim and Buddhist female workers. Employing a qualitative approach, the research involves observations, interviews, and documentation to examine how sexism affects women's job opportunities across various sectors. The findings reveal that despite legal progress, sexism remains deeply ingrained, manifesting through discriminatory practices that impede women's professional advancement and reinforce gender stereotypes. Muslim women encounter additional challenges related to compliance with Islamic teachings in the workplace, while Buddhist women face cultural prejudices that impact their employment opportunities. This study contributes to the gender equality discourse by providing insights into the specific experiences of women in Malaysia, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to combat sexism and promote a more equitable society.

Keywords: *Sexism, Gender Equality, Muslim Women, Buddhist Women, Malaysia*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi isu seksisme di Malaysia dengan fokus pada dampaknya terhadap pekerja wanita Muslim dan Buddha. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengamati, mewawancarai, dan mendokumentasikan bagaimana seksisme mempengaruhi peluang kerja wanita di berbagai sektor. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun ada kemajuan dalam hukum, seksisme masih terjadi, yang ditunjukkan melalui praktik diskriminatif yang menghambat kemajuan profesional wanita serta memperkuat stereotip gender. Wanita Muslim mengalami tantangan ekstra terkait penerapan ajaran Islam di tempat kerja, sementara wanita Buddha menghadapi prasangka budaya yang berdampak pada kesempatan kerjanya. Penelitian ini memberikan perspektif baru dalam diskusi tentang kesetaraan gender dengan memberikan gambaran spesifik tentang pengalaman wanita di Malaysia, serta menekankan perlunya intervensi yang spesifik untuk mengatasi seksisme dan meningkatkan kesetaraan di masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: *Seksisme, Kesetaraan Gender, Wanita Muslim, Wanita Buddha, Malaysia*

A. Introduction

The discourse surrounding gender equality between men and women often presents a diverse and complex array of narratives. One frequently cited narrative involves the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, which has spurred various interpretations and controversies regarding gender equality (Mazaya, 2014). Despite narratives that imply differences, the teachings of the Quran offer perspectives that strive to respect and equalize the status of women relative to men, challenging traditional views that often position women as subordinate.

Before the advent of Islam, the social status of women in pre-Islamic Arab society was frequently underestimated. In many aspects of life, including marriage, women were considered property that could be exchanged and inherited without their consent. This situation dramatically changed with the arrival of Islam, introduced by the Prophet Muhammad. Islam not only elevated the dignity and status of women but also granted them rights equal to men in various aspects of life, including worship, law, economics, and politics (Abdul Rahman, 2000).

Islam brought significant reforms in the perception of women. The religion abolished many traditional Jahiliyyah practices that discredited and oppressed women. Through its teachings, Islam asserts that women possess high dignity and the same rights as men, from the standpoint of property ownership, freedom in choosing marriage partners, to rights in obtaining education and participating in social activities. From legal and social perspectives, Islam provides various rights to women that are as important as those given to men. Women are given the right to inherit and manage property, choose or reject marriage, and receive education. They also have rights in legislation, where their testimonies are accepted, and they are treated equally under the law.

This study aims to explore and analyse the phenomenon of sexism in Malaysia, with a specific focus on the experiences of Muslim and Buddhist female workers. Sexism, as articulated in various social and professional contexts, presents significant challenges that affect gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace. This research examines how gender biases, both explicit and implicit, influence opportunities and treatment of women across various sectors, including education, employment, and access to legal rights. The primary goal of this study is to understand the impact of sexism on employment opportunities, promotions, and treatment of women in the workplace in Malaysia, and to compare these experiences between Muslim and Buddhist women. By doing so, this research aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers and civil society organizations in developing more effective strategies to combat gender-based discrimination and enhance equality in the workplace.

B. Method

This study employs a field research methodology, a qualitative approach tailored for gathering information within a naturalistic inquiry context. This approach views social reality as uniquely complex, necessitating a holistic understanding of each component,

unlike quantitative research, which seeks to uncover social phenomena through extensive data for more accurate predictions. In qualitative research, the quality of data is prioritized over quantity, with an emphasis on the depth of understanding. The research was conducted in Klang, Selangor, Malaysia, to facilitate easier access to information, as both the researcher and participants are situated within the same locale.

Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations may be participatory or non-participatory and involve systematic scrutiny of emerging phenomena. Interviews consist of direct questioning to understand individuals, events, and motivations. Documentation involves gathering data from existing documents, offering time efficiency and ease of access, though it may include outdated information or inaccuracies. Data analysis techniques employed are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is an ongoing process of trimming data that occurs throughout the collection phase, while data display organizes information for ease of understanding and use. Conclusion drawing involves making preliminary inferences that are temporary and must be substantiated by valid evidence to be considered credible.

C. Discussion

1. Sexism in Malaysia

Sexism has recently become a hot topic. Originally sensationalized in the West, it has now become a subject of discussion in this region. Sexism refers to words or statements that articulate bias, particularly against women. This bias is evident through both explicit and implicit language choices. The term gained significant attention in the 1990s during the Women's Liberation Movement. At that time, pressure on women spread across nearly all social classes, prompting women to speak out against sexism. Sexism is a form of prejudice or discrimination against another group, typically women, based on gender differences. Women are generally perceived as weaker and not equal to men. Although sexism is both harmful and contrary to the law, such behaviour persists in modern society today, even in developed countries like the UK and the USA. This mindset remains deeply ingrained in their thoughts, actions, and attitudes and can also occur in the workplace. Female employees face discrimination in placement, salary, and promotions (Sihombing, 2016).

The terms feminism and gender are often associated with sexism itself. Anne Powells defined sexism as a word that suggests prejudice or a biased attitude towards a certain gender. This attitude tends to be unfair and conveys a negative connotation towards women, perpetuating negative stereotypes and social values that generally disadvantage or demean women, ultimately leading to deception. Labeling or stereotyping a particular gender, usually women, often results in injustice. Stereotypical views are usually compared with sex roles, where a woman's identity is seen as complementary to or married to a man. This gender stereotype is a complex system in terms of the oppression of women and how these views emerge. For instance, the view

that women's duties and functions are solely related to household chores or domestic tasks, thereby relegating their work and activities in the public sphere as extensions of their domestic roles (Huriani, 2021). According to Azizah (al-Hibri, 2001), both men and women still tend to evaluate themselves and submit to the dominant preoccupation that competition, independence, intellectual achievement, and leadership reflect 'masculinity' but contradict 'femininity'. They tend to act according to stereotypes. Women with qualities such as independence and active drive are often labelled 'aggressive'. Their behaviour is considered inappropriate for women, and fears might arise among women due to such significant success or fame

The Malay society is known for its politeness, gentleness, warmth, and courteousness. To this day, the Malay community maintains traditional traits, holding firm to Eastern values. Islam remains a strong foundation and an integral part of the life of the Malay people. Religious foundations and values are reflected in the lifestyle of the Malay people. This is linked to Mohamed Mansor Abdullah's views in his article titled, "The Concepts of Malu and Segan in Malay Hikayat and Old Stories." According to Mohamed Mansor, the concepts of "*malu and segan*" are considered sacred and pure values and are fundamental to belief, thus accepted by the Malay community as absolute and noble values, shaping the behaviour of a Malay individual in their daily practices, allowing them to exhibit these sacred and pure values throughout their lives (Abdullah, 1993).

Mohamed Mansor's views can be further strengthened by Mohd. Nor Ngah (1985) in an article titled, "Islamic World View of Man, Society, and Nature among The Malays in Malaysia." This article explains how the Malay society's perceptions of women and men indirectly affect the socialization system of their children. The way of educating seems to become a social norm adhered to this day. Education based on customs, religion, and beliefs has shaped the society's own perceptions towards men and women. A woman in Malay society is respected and considered a partner who can share sorrow, joy, and problems with her peers. From childhood, it is the responsibility of the father and family to provide and care until she marries. After marriage, the responsibility shifts to the husband; if widowed, her children then take on the responsibility to care for their mother. If she has no children, it becomes the responsibility of her male siblings. From the cradle to the grave, women in Malay society are supported and cared for by their father, brother, husband, and son.

A recent study showed that Malaysia ranks 48th out of 153 countries in terms of fairness. Justice issues are just one of many equality gaps faced by women. Women are not senior managers in 74% of Malaysian companies. Furthermore, 45% of women do not work outside the home. Women in Malaysia are expected to take care of their husbands at home, according to cultural norms. Sexism in Malaysia is largely systemic. Most laws protect the rights of men, while a few laws protect the rights of women. For instance, a woman can have one husband, but a man can have up to four wives. This is just a small part of the issues on how sexism in Malaysia hinders women's success.

Sexism in Malaysia remains active, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is growing concern over the alarming number of domestic violence cases in Malaysia. Furthermore, in March 2020, the Department of Women's Development commented on how women in Malaysia should present themselves and behave for their significant others. The department, part of the Malaysian government, advised women not to complain to their husbands and they should wear makeup to look neat. This comment was not well received, and the Malaysian government has since issued a public apology and removed the post.

There are organizations fighting for women's rights and success in Malaysia. One such organization is the Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW). They agreed to launch initiatives to help women and girls in Malaysia achieve equality, better resources, and protective laws. The "Gender Equality Initiative in Malaysia," launched on March 2, 2020, is a partnership between ARROW and the European Union. It was announced during ARROW's She Decides Day, which helps women and girls with various obstacles they may face in life. Malaysia is still struggling with sexism. The pandemic has increased fears and tensions about women's rights and accessibility to socio-economic success. Through investments and interventions by the international community, in addition to social development initiatives, sexism can be addressed in the future.

The latest Global Gender Gap Index from the World Economic Forum, which measures progress towards equality between men and women, ranks Malaysia 104th out of 153 countries. It lags almost all its Southeast Asian neighbours, including Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Less than a quarter of Malaysian parliament members are women, and only 26% of companies have women among their senior managers. Only 55% of women work outside the home; 80% of men do so.

Many chauvinistic laws persist. A Malaysian citizen father can pass his citizenship to a child born abroad, but a Malaysian citizen mother must apply to do so (The Economist, ND). Women around the world can now see little change following the voices of women being heard by the world, especially in Malaysia. Some people still think that women should always be behind men and not have a voice of their own. Now, with the birth of a generation that understands their rights as women and humans, change becomes essential. Since 1962, the National Council Women's Organizations Malaysia and several organizations aimed at protecting and fighting for the rights of Malaysian women have been established. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) among them include Women's Aid Organization (WAO), All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Woman Centre for Change (WCC), Girls4Girls Malaysia (G4G Malaysia), Lean in Malaysia, Good Shepherd Services (GSS).

Currently, these organizations have had a positive impact on more than 1,485 women in Malaysia, and they are expanding their efforts to help women and families in rural areas and disadvantaged communities (Wiki Impact, 2021). Almost in all cultures, the construction of female sexuality is heavily influenced by the dominant gender

ideology in society. The dominant gender ideology determines how women should behave and act. In Malaysia, from a young age, women are socialized to be passive, gentle, obedient, shy, etc. This then creates stereotypes against women (Ilyas, 2015).

In reality, the differentiation of social roles between men and women gives rise to differences in social status in society, where men are favoured over women through social construction. The division of gender roles given to men and women, the nature of activities, and the types of work that are different, as if men can only do certain types of work, conversely, women can also only do certain types of work. Generally, society considers it unusual if these roles are swapped or changed. These gender roles are then accepted as social provisions, even believed by society as natural. This division of roles often occurs in the world of work. The gap between the roles of women and men in the world of work often occurs in the process of women in cities in Malaysia. The persistence of patriarchal culture often becomes an obstacle in the process of women in the productive sector. But fortunately, today women are starting to open their minds. Women in Malaysia have begun to access proper education and even be able to compete in the political world. There are several reasons why women need to be financially independent, namely to prepare for emergencies, to face soaring living costs, to be dignified in the family, to avoid dependence, and to change negative societal views about working women (Kumala Asri Drakel & Galih Setyawan, 2022).

Sexism has quite serious impacts on the daily lives of women. Sexist experiences are associated with negative effects, weak cognitive performance, and feelings of incompetence, discomfort, raising levels of anger and depression, and lowering self-esteem. Sometimes women find it difficult to identify sexist experiences that occur in their lives. Men too. Interpersonal interactions in daily life that are very possible are cat calls and comments related to women's sexuality, which are one form of sexual harassment/social objectification. Sexism itself contains ambivalence, which is a theoretical concept in expanding understanding related to sexism. Ambivalence in sexism, namely hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is defined as an attitude that does not have domination, degradation, hostility, and equality. Hostile sexism is closer to traditional sexism in the form of offensive actions, offensive jokes, and harassment. Benevolent sexism (virtuous sexism) is a subjective attitude that positively towards protection, idealization, and affection towards women. However, unconsciously benevolent sexism shows that women's status is lower than men's (Hakiki & Mashuri, 2021). Sexist comments, both in the form of hostile sexism (for example, "counting jobs do not have to be done by her, she is a woman, women's performance in mathematics is not good", "women should obey men"), and benevolent sexism (for example, "let me carry those items, women should not carry heavy things", "wear tight clothes, you look sexy"), are not necessarily perceived by every woman as sexist comments. Because sometimes comments like that occur in ambiguous situations making it possible for women to consider them as compliments, especially comments classified as benevolent sexism (Jannah, 2021). Therefore, it can be concluded that sexism is a form

of prejudice or discrimination between genders, both men against women and vice versa, assuming that their gender is better than the other. Sexism also does not only occur on an individual level but can occur in a social environment or gender group itself. Most sexist behaviour is directed at women. This is reinforced by the patriarchal system where men are supposed to be better than women, which has developed through the workplace, the political system, and even religious life (Hakiki & Mashuri, 2021).

2. The Impact of Sexism on Muslim Female Workers in Malaysia

Women are often seen as a vulnerable group that faces various challenges, including in their opportunities to secure employment. They are typically perceived as only being capable in domestic-related jobs. As Cik Sabrina mentioned:

“In my view, I find it somewhat challenging to secure the job positions I desire. This is because I need to consider the halal and haram aspects of the job and cannot simply accept any position. Even if the pay or salary is high, as a Muslim, I must consider whether the job is permissible under Sharia law.” (Interview, October 2022).

With the modernization era offering a wide variety of job types, it is crucial to deeply investigate the origins of these job opportunities, as Cik Ilyani explains:

“I take seriously the dress code required by companies when working, such as long sleeves for women. Before accepting any job, I first find out about the dress ethics at the workplace, including potential issues like having to remove the hijab for work, such as jobs like flight attendants and actors. Some companies enforce employment conditions that do not allow female employees to wear hijabs.” (Interview, October 2022).

This is contrary to Islamic teachings, which guide the faithful to cover and protect their body (aurat) from the gaze of non-mahram individuals or any public exposure at the workplace. Cik Farah states:

“As a Muslim woman, I do not find it difficult to secure employment because there are many opportunities. However, as a Muslim, the first thing to consider is the halal aspect of the work. Secondly, the workplace environment should be free from dubious elements and aligned with Sharia, avoiding anything doubtful or sinful.” (Interview, October 2022).

The abundance of job opportunities in Malaysia makes it crucial for Muslims to carefully examine the background of the jobs offered before accepting any position, as there might be elements that are dubious and not permitted in Islam.

Janet Chafetz in her national study of employers and both female and male employees found that the turnover rates for women and men in jobs were similar and proportional. What differentiated the two groups was the reason for leaving. Men left their jobs to move to others that offered more promotional opportunities. Women were more likely to leave the market altogether to fulfil responsibilities of childbirth and

childrearing. The result for employers was the same: they lost their investment in worker training. The consequences for workers, however, were quite different. Men used job changes to advance promotions and take advantage of their seniority. Women left the market and lost their seniority, neglecting their promotional lines, to return later when their qualifications might no longer be relevant.

Another factor in the turnover rate is that more women remain in the labour market because their economic choices are reduced, or their need to maintain seniority has increased. In the 1970s, several Supreme Court decisions stated: (1) an employer cannot refuse to employ a woman because she is a mother; (2) mandated maternity leave is illegal; and (3) seniority cannot be lost while on maternity leave. By 1986, women with children under six had a labour force participation rate equal to that of women in general. However, unlike other Western European nations, the United States does not have a policy that guarantees maternity leave for women without the possibility of losing their jobs (Ellenberger, 2002). Malaysia is one of the major industrialized nations that does not have insurance planning to cover the costs of childbirth and compensation for loss of earnings.

3. Impact of Sexism on Buddhist Female Workers in Malaysia

Prominent scholar Radha Krishnan, former Vice President of India, mentioned in his studies that Indian women during the Buddha era were not excluded. However, it is noted that Buddha was hesitant to accept them as his followers. There was a time when Ananda, a friend and cousin of Buddha, asked, "How should we treat women, my Lord?" Buddha replied, "Do not look at them." When asked, "But what if we must look?" He responded, "Do not speak to them." And if asked, "What if they speak to us?" He cautioned, "Then, you must be careful with them." Ananda was among the proponents of including women among Buddha's followers, persistently urging Buddha until he accepted women into the fold, although Buddha considered this a danger to his followers. He once said to Ananda, "Had women not been admitted, this pure religion would have lasted forever, but now that women have been integrated, I foresee it will not last long." Buddha also stated, "After my death, this message must alter its course as it endangers the goals of life." Radha Krishnan believed that by these words, Buddha meant that his followers should exclude women if they thought women could jeopardize the Buddhist call (Shalaby, 1998).

Gender inequality is the difference in roles and rights between men and women in society, placing women in a lower status than men. The "privileges" men possess often render women as "objects" owned by men, entitled to mistreat them, including through violence. The National Commission on Women reports that forms of violence women experience include trafficking, harassment at public or workplace, discriminatory local policies, rape, and rules that deprive women of their freedom in community settings. Violence against women is an arbitrary act, essentially an attempt to elevate oneself by demeaning others. Considering this, the ones considered low are not necessarily women,

but anyone who commits such acts aligns with Buddha's words, "whoever elevates himself and demeans others in his arrogance, he is called rubbish" (Udana, 1:7)(Andik Wijaya et al., 2022).

Buddhists are part of the Malaysian community that should be concerned with protecting women's rights. As Buddhists, especially men, should protect women and grant them special rights. To do this, Buddhists should practice love (Metta), compassion (Karuna), and morality (Sila) towards all beings, based on the principles of feeling shame (Hiri) and fear of evil (Ottapa) as Buddha stated in the Digha Nikaya VI, Dasuttsara Sutta: "Being close to a teacher or a good and holy friend who replaces the teacher, makes one firm in feeling shame for doing evil and fear of the consequences of evil deeds" (Andik Wijaya, 2020). From the above, it is clear that if one possesses Hiri and Ottapa, they would not commit acts of violence against any being. If humanity understands and follows what Buddha taught, the author believes violence against women would diminish.

1) Job Opportunities for Buddhist Women

Working is not a burden but a necessity to fulfill oneself within the Buddhist religion. Those who succeed without pressure undoubtedly enjoy their work, as the religion provides a set of values that shape a work mentality, practicing religious teachings to earn a livelihood means working and not being misled by misleading practices such as mystical rituals (Khrishnanda Wijaya Mukti, 2003). The opportunity for Buddhists to find employment in Malaysia is equally challenging compared to Muslims. This is due to many companies being owned and operated by Chinese who adhere to Buddhism. Chinese employers in Malaysia have facilitated job searches for Buddhists. However, discrimination against women still frequently occurs. As Ms. Jia mentioned:

"We have many opportunities to get jobs because the majority of Chinese people can speak more than 3 languages. Moreover, as Chinese people continue to progress, I don't find it difficult to find a job" (Interview, October 2022).

In Malaysia, people who can speak more than 3 languages have an advantage in finding jobs. Employers prioritize employees who can speak 3 languages and offer them higher positions within the company. Language skills increase the competitiveness of applicants or employees, as noted by Ms. Yi Wen:

"Jobs like teaching are more needed for women than men. In Chinese national-type schools, pioneered by the Chinese, I see no barriers for Buddhists in finding jobs" (Interview, October 2022).

From the above statements, it's evident that despite racial and religious differences, they do not face difficulties in employment. This occurs because specific jobs, like Buddhist religious institutions, require followers of their religion to develop teachings and provide education to the community because it is their domain, as Ms. Yi Ting stated:

"There aren't many Chinese people in Malaysia, so competition for jobs is low and it's easy to find employment. Chinese mostly belong to the M40 and T20

groups, so I don't find it difficult to get job opportunities in Malaysia" (Interview, October 2022).

From the dialogue above, it's clear that Chinese people do not face difficulties in finding jobs in Malaysia. This is because most Chinese people open their businesses and then become employers, creating many opportunities by employing people from their own community, as noted by Ms. Sabrina above. The Chinese community is very cohesive and aims to help its people avoid oppression. As known, in Malaysia, most sectors are managed by the Chinese because they are smart and adept at seizing opportunities to position themselves in high places. Moreover, they are also skilled in trade.

2) Opportunities to Obtain Women's Rights at Work

One of the life goals of a Buddhist is to achieve worldly happiness and reach eternal peace (Nibbana), as there is no higher happiness than achieving Nibbana. As mentioned in the scriptures, there are four desires we aim to achieve in this world: "1) May I become wealthy in a right and fitting manner, 2) May I, my relatives and friends attain high social status, 3) May I live a long life, 4) May I be reborn in heaven after this life ends." (Anguttara Nikaya II: 65)

From the above point, it's clear that Buddhists are certainly allowed to accumulate whatever they desire, as long as all their wealth is obtained in the right and fitting way. The rights obtained by Muslim female workers are the same as those obtained by Buddhist female workers. According to the researcher's observations, there will be many improvements in worker welfare in Malaysia in 2022. This includes initiatives provided by companies where they work, such as providing breakfast and lunch during workdays. They do not need to spend money to buy food outside during workdays. The virtue maintained by employers at the workplace facilitates employees. But Ms. Jia shared her sibling's experience, saying:

"My sibling works in a high position in the government sector. She is one of the few Buddhist women working in that department. Hence, it is very rare to find Non-Muslim women obtaining such positions. Even she is always threatened, given many tasks by her superiors. But she is there without saying a word because she is the only Buddhist woman there" (Interview, October 2022).

Discriminatory treatment against women is one form of discrimination that occurs against Buddhist female workers in the government sector. Although there has been a rise in courage among female workers to fight against such injustices, there is a tendency for female workers to remain silent. They fear being fired, given the limited job opportunities at this time. This matter needs to be taken seriously by labor institutions to ensure no further discrimination occurs. This differs from what Ms. Yi Wen feels. As Ms. Yi Wen stated:

"There is no favoritism between Muslim and Buddhist workers at the workplace. Moreover, most company work hours are from 9 AM – 5 PM, and if overtime,

only until 8 PM. If an employee is on sick leave or maternity leave, then the work will be replaced by someone else. When an employee contracts COVID, the employer will ask them to quarantine at home and work from home. However, their salary is not cut and is still paid" (Interview, October 2022).

Malaysia has an amendment that will include employer responsibilities for the safety and welfare of employees working from home (WFH). "WFH has now become the norm in the world of work. The Ministry has included an amendment to the Employment Act 1955 on flexible (method) work to be submitted for the second reading at a meeting to be held between December 14 and 16," said the Minister of Human Resources Datuk Seri M Saravanan.

The scope of employer responsibilities will be limited to work-related activities within their control and subject to the nature of the work, he said in his closing speech during the debate on the Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Bill 2020. Meanwhile, the minister said the government will not forgive employers who fail to provide a safe and conducive living environment for their workers, which he described as "modern slavery." The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH) 1994 amendment aims to expand the application of the law to all workplaces, as well as increase penalties for employers who violate and fail to ensure the safety, health, and welfare of their employees at work. The proposed amendments include increasing fines from RM50,000 (US\$12,039) to RM500,000 (US\$120,388) under Section 19 for violations such as employers' failure to formulate safety and health policies (Chau, 2021).

Starting now, it can be said that the majority of private sector workers and civil servants in Malaysia have returned to their workplaces and offices. Many are relieved after being confined at home for a long time fighting the COVID-19 virus that is attacking Malaysia in general and the entire world in particular. It is important for every worker to know their rights as contained in the Employment Act 1955. This is to prevent workers from being oppressed and arbitrarily threatened by employers and superiors just because they are workers. Employers who violate violations will be punished under the Employment Act 1955 if workers are not paid during paid sick leave, including having to quarantine for COVID-19 at home even though workers are entitled based on working time as regulated in Article 60F, Employment Act 1955 salary payments. Moreover, employers will be punished under the Employment Act 1955 Women Workers if female workers are directed to work in the agricultural or industrial sector starting from 10 PM to 5 AM, and if female workers are directed to work underground starting from 10 PM to 5 AM (Malaysia News, 1955).

Speaking of the rights obtained by Buddhist female workers, what Ms. Yi Ting does is different from the opinions of Ms. Jia and Ms. Yi Wen above. As Ms. Yi Ting felt, "The holiday for Buddhist workers is not as many as the Eid holiday for Muslim workers. Until one day the workload decreases so much during the Islamic holiday. So much so that non-Muslims must work overtime at that time. The lack of non-Muslim

workers also causes the workload to increase because they are on holiday" (Interview, October 2022). According to Ms. Yi Ting above, this often occurs. Non-Muslims often become victims when Muslim workers are on long holidays. They are forced to work overtime and sacrifice to replace the job scope of Muslim workers at the workplace. The Employment Act 1955 states that those who work on public holidays will be paid three times the hourly wage. In addition, the Malaysian government decided to implement the amendment of the Employment Act 1955, which was supposed to take effect on September 1 last year, postponed to January 1, 2023, next year. Among the contents of the amendment that was postponed is the increase in maternity leave from 60 days to 98 days, the establishment of seven days of menstrual leave, the reduction of weekly working hours from 48 hours to 45 hours, and flexible work arrangements for workers (Saravanan, n.d.)

Deputy Minister of Human Resources, Datuk Awang Hashim said that amendment of Article 23 involves extending menstrual leave from three days to seven days. This is intended to provide space for men whose wives are giving birth to be able to take care of the birth for a sufficient period, and this decision is in line with the Human Resources Service Circular SR.5.4.2, which emphasizes the concept of 'prioritizing family.' Through this amendment, private sector male workers will also enjoy the same benefits as civil servants. Among other articles changed is Article 12, which provides an additional period of maternity leave for female employees from 60 days to 98 days. Menstrual leave and maternity or childbirth leave are one of the rights of female workers. Although each company has different policies related to maternity/childbirth leave and menstrual leave, the state has laws that clearly regulate it, so companies are obliged to at least run according to what is regulated in labor regulations.

Currently, although gender inequality still exists and occurs in Malaysia, the gap is gradually decreasing. Finally, the opportunities for women and men are increasingly the same. Similarly, in the field of employment, women's roles in employment are increasingly broad. Opportunities and chances for women to develop their potential nowadays are increasingly open. Supported by the motivation of women to work, study, and do business like men without being their destiny as a woman getting stronger.

D. Conclusion

The reality of sexism in Malaysia persists across various societal layers. Expressed through actions, words, or beliefs, either consciously or unconsciously, sexism discriminates against individuals, particularly women. The culture of sexism, often attributed to women, must be eradicated to foster equality in community life. Therefore, a renewal in societal thinking patterns is imperative. The impact of sexism is profoundly felt by Muslim women in the job market, positioning them as a subordinate group. Predominantly male-led sectors often make women feel unworthy of acceptance and uncomfortable working in male-dominated environments, as they seek to avoid sexist attitudes. Similarly, Buddhist women in Malaysia also experience the pervasive effects

of sexism. Their involvement in the workforce is contingent upon the job opportunities available, which are often influenced by lingering societal views that underestimate women's capabilities and suitability for roles traditionally dominated by men. Thus, women should have access to higher and equitable education compared to men, enabling them to acquire and demonstrate competencies and wisdom on par with their male counterparts. Women should also be encouraged to offer valuable insights and ideas in national leadership. In reality, men and women are interdependent in all aspects of life; they should collaborate, combining their opinions and skills to make informed decisions. The role of women depends on the status afforded to them, and their involvement in the workforce is determined by the job opportunities available. If opportunities for women to enter certain educational fields are obstructed, it inevitably hinders their employment prospects in those fields.

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