

## Women's Oppression: Pilot Study in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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### Abstract

The oppression of women in society is an ongoing issue in Malaysia. However, it proved difficult to reach a consensus on what should and can be done to address the issue. While the challenge of tackling the oppression of women seems very difficult, the level of awareness needs to be raised to ensure a better environment for a fairer life. Thus, this study aims to identify the factors related to the level of oppression tendency against women in the workplace and institutes of higher learning in the Klang Valley. A pilot survey was conducted using an online survey platform on IPT students and the working class in the Klang Valley from November to December 2021. There were 106 respondents with different backgrounds voluntarily involved in this pilot study. The results show that the respondents have a good level of understanding and level of awareness of the oppression of women. The findings of this pilot study play an essential role in providing an initial overview of the current understanding and awareness of the public on this issue. This study is recommended to be continued for large-scale research, so that the findings can be the primary source of reference in dealing with the oppression of women.

**Keywords:** Women, Oppression, Pilot Study, Malaysia

### Introduction

Women's oppression has begun thousands of years ago. It has been considered as an intrinsic trait, which is a part of human nature to look down on women. Today, women's oppression is still carried out as a way to degrade women in the eyes of the world. In fact, nearly 1.4 billion women and girls are still victims of discrimination, violence, and sexism

(Azmawati et al., 2017). As stated in the 4th edition of Kamus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, oppression is defined as an arbitrary and cruel act. Women's oppression is an act that uses force, threats, or coercion to harm women's freedoms and rights.

The issue of women's oppression has occurred in various places, including homes, public places, schools, and workplaces. As a matter of fact, although women make up almost 65% of undergraduate students in Malaysian public universities, their labour force participation rate has only surpassed 50% starting in 2014 (Azmawati et al., 2017). One of the women's oppression examples is sexual harassment in workplaces, even though it is a place that stresses professionalism among all employees (Putra, 2020). Furthermore, a study in 2017 discovered that many successful women have to negotiate and struggle with various beliefs, practices, and norms regarding men's superiority throughout their careers (Baqutayan, 2017).

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) in collaboration with a research agency, Vase.ai has conducted a study to amend the Employment Act 1955. The study found that more than 50% of Malaysian women have experienced at least one form of gender discrimination in the workplace. In addition, nearly 47% of women were questioned about their marital status during job interviews, while 1 in every 5 women was asked about their ability to perform certain tasks as a woman (Sheng, 2020). A study by Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has discovered that women require more empowerment in terms of personal, relationship, and environmental aspects to narrow the gender inequality gap in Malaysia (Azmawati et al., 2020).

In terms of the educational aspect, many highly ambitious women feel trapped between their talents and social expectations of feminine domesticity (Komarovskiy, 2004). This kind of discrimination acts like cancer in society. Regardless of gender, all human beings are created equally and special in their own ways. Thus, awareness and initiatives established by governments, communities, the educational system, and individuals need to be enhanced to educate the public about gender inequality, especially to women. The common perception that women are weak has to be stopped. This is because they are human beings who have the right to say or do anything. Similar to men, they also contribute energy and ideas for the benefit of society.

Most people are aware of the women's position in the social system, especially among the society that applies the patriarchal system. The system still indicates that men hold absolute power over women, and society continues to restrict women's freedom in many aspects of life, namely employment, education, and the right to freedom of expression (Paramasivan et al., 2021). The situation is getting worse when society tends to view women as second-class citizens (including in family groups), where sons are given higher chances than daughters in education. This is because sons are considered better than daughters to make their family proud. The provision of education to daughters is often deemed as an investment without valuable returns (Probosiwi, 2015). This situation indicates the imbalance in the relationship between men and women due to discrimination in access and control to perform their roles and duties (Djelantik, 2008).

Prior studies have shown that in general, women experience isolation in most countries in the world, including Islamic countries (Muqoyyidin, 2013). In a statement by UNFPA, women around the world face health and life threats due to heavy workloads as well as lack of influence and power. On average, women receive less formal education than men. Moreover, most of their knowledge and expertise are often not properly recognised (Omar & Mustafa, 2019). Studies in most South Asian countries with Muslim majority communities revealed that female students spend an average of less than half the number of hours compared to male students. The total enrolment of female students to secondary schools recorded a number not exceeding 2/3 of the total number of male students (Muqoyyidin, 2013).

In general, based on data on the salary received by women, particularly in third world countries, women receive fewer salaries and have the lowest position status in society. This proves that women's position is not equal to men's (Djelantik, 2008). According to Rahmah Ismail, on average, men receive higher salaries than women with a difference value of 74.3% by the explanatory variable and a difference value of 25.7% by the unexplained variable (Othman, 2012).

One of the factors of women's oppression is the lack of legal protection. According to the United Nations (2014), although significant progress has been made globally regarding the revision of laws and constitutional enactment with equality and non-discrimination guarantees, there are still laws that discriminate against women. Another factor is a normalisation through societal thinking with an influence of long existed culture and religion. OECD (2019) stated that 50% of the global population believes that children will suffer when their mothers work outside the home, and 17% of the global population cannot accept the fact that their female family members have jobs. Meanwhile, Fried (2003) mentioned that violence against women remains one of the biggest forms of human rights violations. He also remarked that violence hinders women's abilities to exercise their human rights and to earn full citizenship in society.

In the 'We For Women' forum during the Sime Darby Foundation International Women's Day 2019, Datuk Stanley Isaacs (2019) said that education is still the main agenda in addressing the issue of violence against women. Education and awareness can help in preventing any injustice that may occur when authorities handle abuse cases. In addition, violence against women as a serious crime that covers physical, emotional, sexual, social, and financial aspects. Therefore, the objective of this study is:

- To identify the factors related to the level of oppression tendency against women in the workplace and institutes of higher learning to understand the level of awareness.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design and Participants*

In this descriptive study, cross-sectional designs are used for population-based surveys to observe and explain the level of awareness and factors related to the degree of tendency to women's oppression in the workplaces and higher learning institutions (IPT). The population for this study consisted of IPT students and working adults in the Klang Valley area, with an estimated total of 384 respondents. The survey was conducted from November to

December 2021. There were 106 respondents (54%) aged 18 to 50 years who answered this study and were included in the analysis, excluding pilot test respondents.

### Variables and Time Limits

This study aims to achieve insights and awareness regarding women's oppression in the workplaces and IPTs. The awareness gained by IPT students and working adults regarding the contributing factors and preventive measures of this issue has been measured. However, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to other populations because the study sample only comprises IPT students and working adults in the Klang Valley. Therefore, the results of this study are only limited to the relevant sample size due to the difficulty of obtaining participants for this survey.

### Pilot test and Procedures

Before distributing the questionnaires to respondents, a pilot test was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. About 100 samples were randomly chosen to take part in the pilot test. The data collected from the pilot test was analysed in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to obtain the Cronbach's alpha value (0.838) as displayed in Table 1. The value indicates a good level of internal consistency in the sample. The Cronbach's alpha value is a measure used to determine the internal consistency or reliability of a set of items. It is also important to show the validity of the questionnaire. In general, Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 and above are good, 0.80 and above are better, while 0.90 and above are the best (Statistics Solutions, 2020).

Table 1

#### *Reliability statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on Standardised Items	N of Items
.838	.863	17

This study uses a quantitative research method. The questionnaire was randomly distributed via Google Forms through social media to IPT students and working adults in Klang Valley. The sample selection method was performed through simple random sampling to prevent sampling bias. Respondents were given a month to complete the questionnaire without haste to obtain more accurate results. The study was also conducted with respondents' consent and free will, and their identities will not be disclosed. The collected data was entered into SPSS software and analysed descriptively and inferentially. Apart from that, correlation tests such as the Chi-square test were applied to test the correlation strength between two categorical variables. In this study, the variables tested for correlation are respondents' gender and level of awareness of the women's oppression issue. Meanwhile, for the Chi-square test, the relationship between contributing factors and women's oppression issue was tested for correlation.

### Instrumentation

The quantitative method is used to measure, rank, categorise, identify trends, and make generalisations. It combines multiple-choice questions, dichotomous questions, and 5-point Likert scale questions, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire

of this study was adopted and modified from the work of Bader et al. (2018). There are three sections in the questionnaire, consisting of nine general awareness questions on women's oppression issue, two questions on its contributing factors, and six questions on its preventive measures.

### Results and Discussion

Out of the total respondents, 76.4% are female respondents and 23.6% are male respondents (refer to Table 2).

Table 2

*Respondents' gender*

	Number	Percentage (%)
Valid Female	81	76.4
Male	25	23.6
Total	106	100.0

In this study, it can be seen that 60.4% of the respondents consist of working adults and 39.6% are IPT students (refer to Table 3).

Table 3

*Respondents' status*

	Number	Percentage (%)
Valid Working adults	64	60.4
IPT students	42	39.6
Total	106	100.0

Half of the respondents (50% & 51.9%) agreed that women are being oppressed and believed that there is a 'double standard' issue for women in society. This form of discrimination against women is not in line with women's empowerment efforts. Previous studies show that the effects of double binds, namely femininity and competence are perceived as mutually exclusive and well-documented in male-dominated workplaces (Jamieson 1995; Valian 1998). Besides, 55.7% of the respondents stated that they are aware of cases or issues related to women's oppression experienced by their family members, classmates, or colleagues. Many studies have discovered that male employees are paid higher salaries than female employees, even though they have the same level of education and skills. This is because some employers assumed women as less productive, have limited mobility, lack of ability to be leaders, and tend to create more difficulties at workplaces due to frequent holidays like maternity leave (Darity & Mason, 1998).

Table 4

*Awareness of the issue*

Question	Item	Number	Percentage (%)
Do you think that women are being oppressed in today's society?	Yes	53	50.0
	No	14	13.2
	Maybe	39	36.8
Do you believe that there is a 'double standard' issue for women in today's society?	Yes	55	51.9
	No	22	20.8
	Maybe	29	27.4
I am aware of cases or issues related to women's oppression experienced by my family members, classmates, or colleagues.	Yes	59	55.7
	No	32	30.2
	Maybe	15	14.2

Based on cross-tabulation analysis from the Chi-square test, 90.6% of the respondents were aware and believed that women face worse stigma than men. Female respondents (69.8%) were seen to have higher awareness compared to male respondents (20.8%) (refer to Table 5). Nevertheless, there was no significant correlation between gender and awareness regarding women's oppression, following the Chi-square test results showing a p-value greater than 0.05 (refer to Table 6).

Table 5

*Cross-tabulation analysis (Gender\*Awareness)*

		I think that women face worse stigma than men.			Total	
			Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Gender	Female	Number	2	5	74	81
		Total %	1.9%	4.7%	69.8%	76.4%
	Male	Number	1	2	22	25
		Total %	0.9%	1.9%	20.8%	23.6%
Total		Number	3	7	96	106
		Total %	2.8%	6.6%	90.6%	100.0%

Table 6

*Chi-square test*

	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.358	4	.851
Likelihood Ratio	1.474	4	.851
N of Valid Cases	106		

Referring to Figure 1, a lot of respondents gave a scale of 5 to the 'stigma of vulnerable women by society' (29 respondents) and 'community thinking' as the main contributing factors of women's oppression. For instance, studies by Prentice and Carranza (2002) and Rudman et al (2012) found that society sets a stereotype that women should be communal and stay away from dominations, while men should dominate and avoid showing weakness. Indirectly, it may lead to numerous violence cases against women.

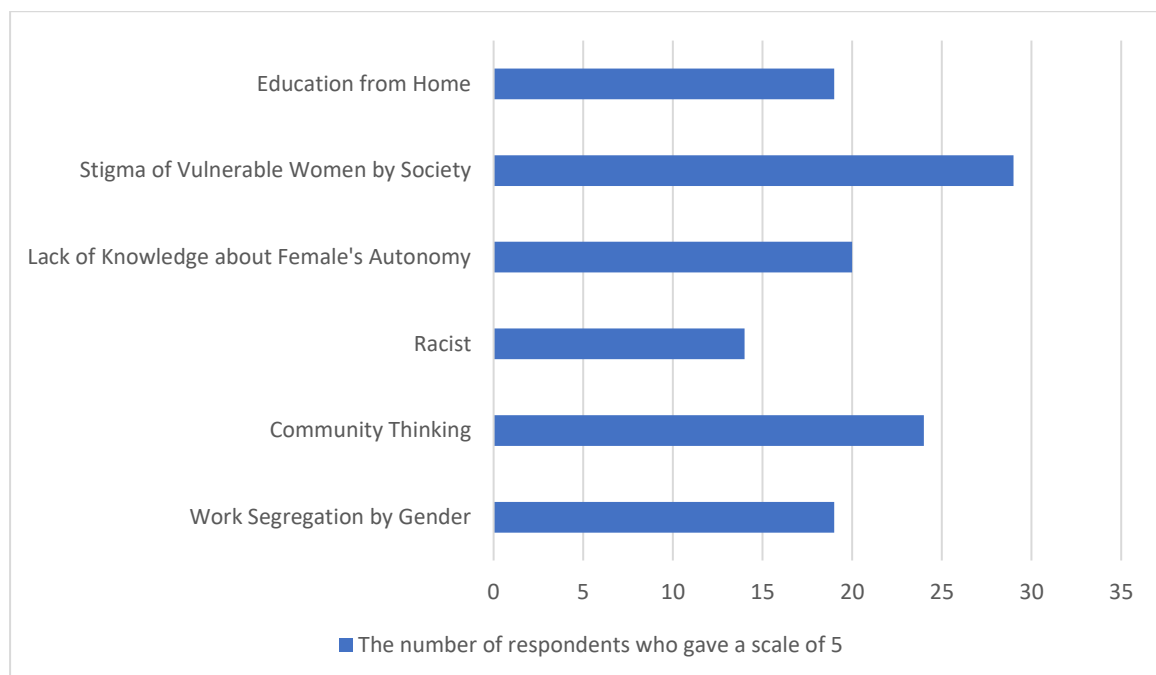


Figure 1. Contributing factors and a number of respondents with a scale of 5.

Other than that, Table 7 shows that the majority of the respondents (48.1%) believed that home is the starting point of women's oppression. According to Asbah et al (2019), various factors have been identified as closely related to the issue of violence against women. One of the factors is due to women's weakness which makes them victims of crime and violence, namely sexual violence. The image of women being weaker than men may influence the increase of violence cases against women. The gender factor socialised in the lives of boys and girls has led to stereotypes about each gender role since childhood. It also influences men's violent behaviours towards women (Belknap, 1996).

Table 7

*Contributing factors*

Question	Item	Number	Percentage (%)
In your opinion, where does women's oppression begin?	Home	51	48.1
	Workplace	22	20.8
	School/High learning institution	16	15.1
	Public place	17	16.0
Total		106	100

The preventive measures that received a scale of 5 from most of the respondents (77 respondents) are 'enhancement of ethical and civic education in primary schools'. It is considered an important subject to properly shape the personality of students. Elements of human rights need to be inculcated in the civic education curriculum in schools. Having lived in a country that has long faced the issue of human rights violations, Abu al-Rub (2012) found that teachers' attitudes and roles, textbooks, and learning climates are essential pillars in ensuring the success of human rights education among Palestinians. In addition, 76 respondents gave a scale of 5 to 'government plays an important role in increasing awareness about ethics and civics in society' statement. Several international commitments involving the Malaysian government, namely Beijing Platform for Action 1995, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and a series of International Women's Convention since the 1970s have succeeded in raising public awareness regarding women's role in the employment sectors (United Nations, 2016). This awareness is very crucial due to the highly static position of women in workplaces. Besides, women are often underestimated on the grounds of reproductive activity as well as domestic employment which restricts their potential opportunities in various sectors.



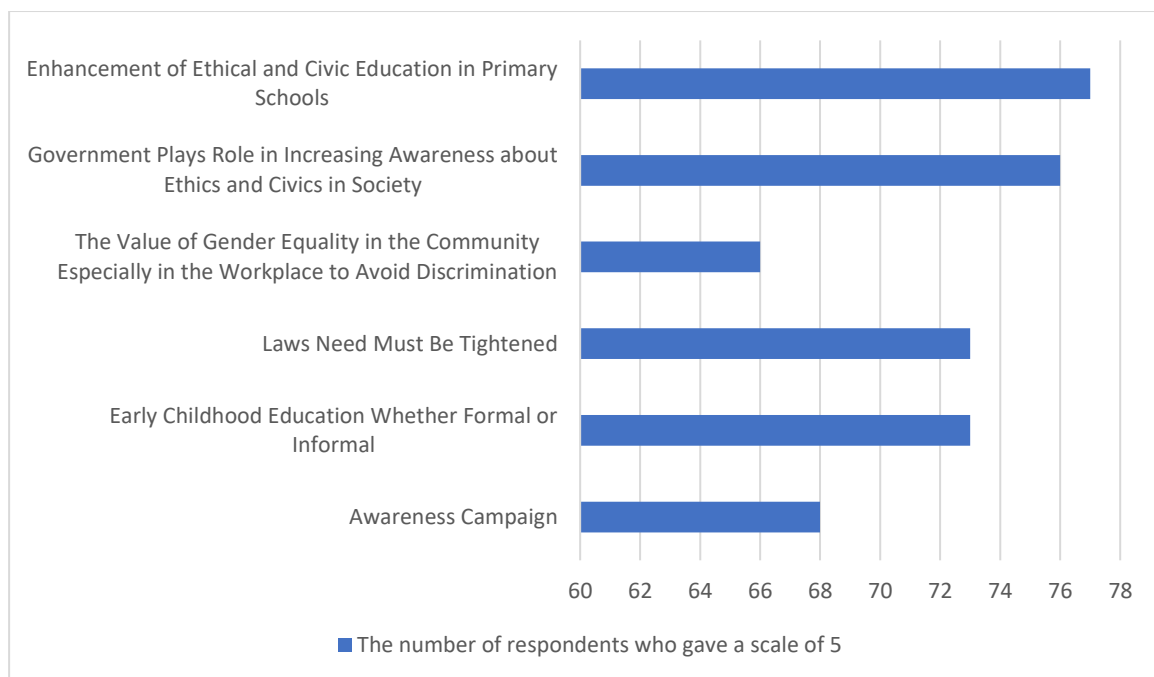


Figure 2. Preventive measures and a number of respondents with a scale of 5.

Other than that, among the preventive measures that need to be focused on is the strengthening of laws related to the offense of oppression against women. Gender equality is also essential in protecting human rights for all. Nevertheless, laws of discrimination against women remain in every corner of the world while new laws of discrimination are enacted. Aziah (2012) mentioned that most women are still unaware of their legal rights. Many women experience oppression issues at work, at home with their husbands, family members, and even neighbours. However, most of these incidents are suppressed or left prolonged.

### Conclusion

The main factor of women's oppression is due to a stigma or stereotype of society that women are weak and men should dominate. Women's weakness is one of the reasons that makes them victims of crime and violence, namely sexual violence. Ethical and civic education in primary schools is very critical to overcoming this issue, as knowledge can shape one's mind. Each human skill has its own specialties to influence and give additional intelligence to an individual. Besides, laws need to be strengthened by the government to assist women in understanding the law and related issues as well as creating awareness of their rights in the Malaysian legal system.

To address the problem of oppression, the government is not the only institution that holds the responsibility of overcoming women's violence. On the contrary, the responsibility is equally shared by many parties such as the government, NGOs, private agencies, and the community. It also requires a unification of efforts between men and women. Hence, the success of policies and programs in addressing the crime of oppression depends on the strong commitment and cooperation of all parties.

The findings of this pilot study play an essential role in providing an initial overview of the current understanding and awareness of the public on this issue. As we know, women's oppression is an act that uses force, threats, or coercion to harm women's freedoms and

rights. The issue of women's oppression has occurred in any place, including homes, public places, schools, and workplaces. Despite much progress in promoting women's rights, particularly in Malaysia, but many women in this country still experience discrimination. Therefore, this study is recommended to be continued for large-scale research, so that the findings can be the primary source of reference in dealing with the oppression of women. Contributions of this study and future studies will provide space for women to make changes and instill a competitive spirit among themselves in order to change the existing situation.

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