

## CHANGES IN GENDER IDEOLOGY IN DOMESTIC CHORES AMONG PROFESSIONAL MALAY MUSLIM MEN IN DUAL- CAREER FAMILIES: A STUDY IN KUALA LUMPUR AND SELANGOR

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**Abstract:** *This study focuses on professional Malay Muslim men in dual-career families in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interview with 10 Malay Muslim men in dual-career families to gather the data. Drawing upon interviews with the respondents, this study is able to highlight their understanding of the division of labour at home and how this impact upon and influences their views about the roles and responsibilities of men and women in relation to the division of labour at home and the division of categories of housework by gender. All of the respondents agreed that household tasks should be carried out together with their wives, but they had different views about the division of household chores in regard to what men and women should do. This study also found that the respondents did not face condemnation and derision from their extended family members or friends when they help their wives with the household tasks. It is generally accepted that this study shows that the gender ideology has slightly changed and negotiate. In practice, however, they stated that the household chores still are seen as under women's responsibility. Although this study reveals the acceptance of changes to the traditional gender role ideology, the traditional perspective and understanding in terms of the domestic chores continue to exist and are well sustained. While Malaysia's drive for modernization has improved Malay society, it has not radically transformed the patriarchal order as the traditional patriarchal system that prescribes specific gendered expectations for both women and men in private spheres still ingrained in their culture.*

**Keywords:** *Malay Muslim Men, Dual-Career Families, Domestic Sphere, Gender Role, Gender Ideology, Household Tasks*

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## Introduction

Rapoport and Rapoport (1971, 1976) and Hertz (1986) identified a number of specific characteristics of dual-career families or couples. According to Rapoport and Rapoport (1971), the term 'dual-career family' refers to a family that comprises both husband and wife as the heads of household and 'both husband and wife pursue active careers and family lives' (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1971: 7). Furthermore, higher educational qualifications are also vital for defining careers as different from jobs. Hertz (1986: xii) states that 'the growth of career opportunities for female college graduates have combined to make two careers in one family a more likely option'. Hicks et al. (1983) also note that, when many educational and employment opportunities are made available to women, the number of dual-career families is likely to increase. Thus, Hicks et al. (1983) and Hertz (1986) emphasise that dual-career families are those in which both husband and wife are well educated.

Understanding the definitions of family is crucial when seeking to consider how family construct the multiple roles and responsibilities among family members according to gender. Many previous studies, conducted in both the West and in Asian countries, including Malaysia, have found that more women are juggling roles as employees in the workplace and members of the family at home. However, it is less common for men to be active participants in the management of domestic chores (e.g. Hochschild and Manchung, 1989; Treas and Widmer, 2000; Abdullah, 2000a, 2000b; Ochiai, 2008a, 2008b; Ahmad, 2011; Marican et al., 2011).

The traditional patriarchal system, which unholds men's power and social status in relation to marriage, inheritance, work and family decision-making is culturally and socially derived, and its consequences for gender inequality have been widely debated in many countries (e.g. Kandiyoti, 1988; Walby, 2003; Sultana, 2010; Juhari *et al.*, 2012). Walby (2003) argues that differing forms of patriarchy or gender regime exist according to differing social structures and practices which set particular norms in particular societies. Age, class, ethnicity and region are also factors that influence gender relations within any gender regime. Women use a variety of strategies to bargain with these systems in order to make themselves visible, not only in the private sphere but also in the public sphere (Kandiyoti, 1988).

In Malay patriarchal society, domestic chores and child-rearing duties continue to be viewed primarily as a woman's responsibility, although there is a growing perception in society that men's attitudes to household duties have begun to change slightly (Zaini and Rahman, 2006; Noor, 2006). It also appears that men and women are unable to emancipate themselves from the Islamic religion and Malay *adat* when discussing these matters. In addition, there is also a lack of awareness among men of the importance of their involvement in helping working women with domestic chores, in addition to the fact that most state policies and programmes continue to be very focused on maintaining the traditional positions of women. Although several studies by anthropologists and historians have pointed to the development of bilateralism in Malay society, emphasising the idea that social relations between men and women are based on values of complementarity and equality in regard to managing the family (Ghazali, 2002), women are still frequently seen to do more than men (Omar and Hamzah, 2003; Shah, 2010). Consequently, the division of labour at home continues to be conducted along gender lines. Many Malay working women are not only become as active members of the paid labour force, but they also have been with domestic chores (Kling, 2000; Omar and Hamzah, 2003; Hosain et al., 2005; Noor and Mahudin, 2005; Sultana and Noor, 2011; Bakar, 2012).

There has been little research undertaken on the subject of Malay Muslim men's perceptions on domestic chores and how this impacts the changes of gender ideology on gender segregation in relations to household tasks. Thus, it is important to carry out research on these topics that may lead to a better understanding of the similarities and differences of experiences among career Malay Muslim men in terms of their degree of perceptions in the management of the household, which lead to whether the gender ideology is changed or not. Based on the discussion above, this research has the following objectives (a) to examine the views of Malay Muslim men on the division of labour at home, and (b) to examine any challenges encountered by these men in doing the domestic chores.

### Methodology

In the context of this study, we used a qualitative semi-structured interview as a tool to collect the primary data. The semi-structured interview was used not only for eliciting in-depth understanding of respondents' experiences, but also because it enables the researcher to gain more private information from respondents, particularly if it relates to personal issues (Oakley, 1981; Hennink et al., 1999; Hesse-Biber, 2007), and comprehend the personal understanding and interpretation from the respondents' standpoints (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 200; Gerson and Horowitz, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Since the research needs the respondents to share their experiences, feelings, opinions, perceptions, views and expectations, this method of research has been adopted for reasons as mentioned. In this study, respondents were recruited through friendship networks and the snowballing technique using purposive sampling (Bryman, 2008). Specific criteria for the recruitment of respondents were set as below: (a) married Malay Muslim men, (b) both husband and wife had obtained at least a diploma degree and possibly a master's or doctoral degree, (c) aged between 24 and 40 years old, (d) both husband and wife work in professional occupations and (e) both husband and wife work in either the Kuala Lumpur or Selangor areas. Only married couples, both of whom held at least a diploma, were selected in order to meet the definition of dual-career families established by Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) and Hertz (1986). The characteristics of the respondents and their wives in terms of age, level of education, occupation and length of marriage are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Respondents and Their Wives by Age, Level of Education and Types of Occupation**

No	(Respondents) Pseudonym	Age	Education	Occupation	Wife's Occupation	Wife's Age	Wife's Level of Education	Length of Marriage
1	Elias	32	Degree	Engineer	Lecturer	31	PhD	7 years
2	Basir	32	Degree	Teacher	Lecturer	32	Degree	4 years
3	Rahimin	37	Degree	Engineer	Lecturer	37	Degree	12 years
4	Hamdan	38	Master	Lecturer	Lecturer	35	Master	13 years
5	Alias	35	Degree	Government Officer	Lecturer	35	Degree	10 years
6	Mustakim	37	Degree	Businessman	Lecturer	37	Degree	7 years
7	Yasir	35	Master	Government Officer	Lecturer	37	Master	10 years
8	Umar	30	Degree	Site supervisor	Lecturer	31	Degree	7 years
9	Junaidi	31	Degree	Businessman	Lecturer	27	Degree	6 months
10	Sani	40	Degree	Engineer	Lecturer	40	Degree	15 years

Two urban areas, which are Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, have been chosen after considered the economic structures, the majority population, job and education opportunities, big cities and differences in social stratification. These two urban areas not only represent the most modern and metropolitan cities, but also provide many higher educational institutions, as well as having Malays as the biggest ethnic group. This Malay ethnic group is also includes many

young urban educated middle class women and men, as well as dual career families. Name of respondents according to location are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Name of Respondents According to Location**

Name of Location	Name of Respondent
Kuala Lumpur	Ehsan
	Basri
	Rohaizat
	Hamid
	Ahmad
Selangor	Musyrid
	Yusry
	Ubaidillah
	Junaidi
	Syed

With the explanation above, the results of this study only represent a small sample of married Malay men in dual-career families. This research was about Malay Muslims and is therefore not representative of all men in the multiracial population, who have different cultures and religions. The rationale for limiting our study was so that we could obtain a clear understanding of our respondents' stories relating to men's involvement in domestic chores. In fact, small samples are the norm in qualitative research and are necessary in order to achieve an in-depth understanding, as 'the goal is to look at a 'process' or the 'meaning' individuals attribute to their given social situation, not necessarily to make generalizations' (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 119).

## **Results and Discussions**

### **The Views of Married Malay Muslim Men in Dual-Career Families on the Division of Labour at Home**

As the title suggests, the goal of this section is to meet the first objective research: *To examine the views of Malay Muslim men on the division of labour at home.* We explored how respondents draw upon their understanding of the division of labour at home and how this impacts on and influences their views on the roles and responsibilities of woman and men in relation to it. In exploring their views in relation to the division of labour at home, this section begins with a discussion of themes in the category of household chores by gender.

#### *Category of household chores by gender*

All of the respondents agreed that household chores should be carried out together with their wives, but they had different views about the division of household chores in regard to what men and women should do. For instance, Elias (age 32) mentioned that grocery shopping, cooking and laundry can be shared responsibilities. He said:

*Man can do the grocery shopping, cooking and laundry and I don't think doing those tasks is difficult. I did these tasks together with my wife and sometimes if she doesn't have time, I can do them alone.*

Ehsan's view was also similar to those of Rahimin (age 37) and Alias (age 35) who mentioned that some tasks that are usually carried out by women can also be done by men. In fact, they made a point of stressing how modern technologies can assist men in completing the tasks:

*Basically, cooking is often related to woman, but I think man also can do the cooking at home. Laundry also can be done by man. With the advance technology, I think these tasks can be done by man easily. (Umar, age 30)*

*I always see man doing the cooking at home. So cooking is not only woman's responsibility. Man can become a cook at home too. Another chore that I think man can do is laundry. The technologies that we had now can make all these tasks quite easy to be done by man. (Mustakim, age 37)*

Two respondents claimed that cooking is a woman's responsibility and they stressed that every woman should know how to cook. Their views are consistent with a proverb that describes the word 'womanhood' from a Malay perspective: '*sebijak mana pun perempuan itu, tempatnya tetap di dapur*' (literally translated as: 'regardless of how smart a woman is, her rightful place remains the kitchen'). Their views also strengthen the idea that a woman should be in the kitchen, as stated in Ibrahim and Hassan (2009). According to Ibrahim and Hassan, this proverb shows 'the importance of domesticity for a woman' (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009: 398; see also Ghazali, 2002: 105). In general, these statements from both respondents in the study stress that Malay women continue to bear the majority of the responsibility for cooking and that this needs to be done by them regardless of their social and employment status. However, they also mentioned a few outdoor activities they considered to be the man's responsibility at home. Elaborating further on this, they said:

*For me, women should do the cooking and a wife should know how to cook. Normally, man do some activities outside the house such as gardening and heavy house cleaning such as cleaning the windows. (Rahimin, age 37)*

*Man's responsibilities in relation to household chores are mowing the lawn, shopping groceries, washing car and all heavy outdoor activities. Women must be a good cook as they have to do the cooking for family. (Hamdan, age 38)*

### Responsibility for childcare

When talking about childcare, all respondents agreed that a father needs to be involved in childcare. They also agreed that childcare should be a shared responsibility between husband and wife in the family, although they also stressed that the primary caregiver is still the woman. Their views are based on their understanding of the position and role of the mother according to Islam and as the foundation of the family. They stated that mothers must always be concerned with the betterment of the family and the upbringing of their children. Junaidi, Sani and Basir explained this as shown below:

*As a father, man must help his wife to take care of their children since they are still at a young age, although the primary responsibility is still with the mother. This responsibility is clearly stated in Islam and Malay adat. This is because woman is needed to provide a warm,*

*conducive and loving environment, which acts a concrete foundation for happy family. (Junaidi, age 31)*

*Position of the mother in Malay society is follow what has been stated in Islam and been adhered in Malay adat. Islam commands respect, obedience and to do well for both parents. Thus, a father should also be involved in taking care of the children although it gives preference to mother. (Sani, age 40)*

*Taking care of children should be a shared responsibility between the father and the mother. The father should be involved in taking care of their children, although normally Malay society will address this responsibility to the mother. This is because they follow the Islamic teachings and Malay adat. (Basir, age 32)*

These statements clearly show that respondents understood childcare to be a privilege accorded to the mothers because they hold a high position in the family, as stated in Islam. Supporting these statements, Ibrahim and Hassan (2009) described mothers from the perspective of Malay society using the Malay proverb: *syurga letaknya di bawah tapak kaki ibu* (literally translated as ‘heaven lies under a mother’s feet’). This proverb has always been related to women’s status as mothers in Malay families, and it carries the meaning of ‘the high status granted to a mother’ (Ibrahim and Hassan, 2009: 398).

### **Challenges Encountered by Malay Muslim Men in Dual-Career Families in Doing the Domestic Chores**

This section focuses on the challenges faced by Malay Muslim men in dual-career families when they help their wives at home. As the title suggests, the goal of this section is to fulfil the second research objective: *To examine any challenges encountered by these men in doing the domestic chores*, and to answer the fourth research question: *What are the challenges encountered by these men in managing their dual-career lifestyle?* In this study, it is generally accepted that the view of respondents on household work shows that most of household work are still under women’s responsibility. However, at the same time, they mentioned that both men and women sometimes shifted the household duties from one to the other or to other people, for a variety of reasons. Thus, it is important to know whether the men face any challenge in helping their wives with housework and childcare. In relation to the issue of helping a wife doing the domestic chores, some Malay husbands faced insinuations from their friends and relatives (Abdullah, 1987). In contrast, none of respondents, who helped their wives with the household chores in this study, faced condemnation and derision from their extended family members or friends. In fact, both sides of the family supported them in the way they coped with their domestic chores.

Interestingly, the respondents’ attitudes towards domestic chores were connected with their familial backgrounds and their own upbringing. Many of these men explained that their parents had taught them to do the household tasks without gender bias and this had played a crucial role in influencing their attitudes towards household duties. They added a few additional factors which they categorised as: ‘not against the religion and culture’, ‘having only sons as children’ and ‘an understanding that there is a need for men to be involved in domestic chores today because wives also work’ as reasons for why they are able to accept men doing the household tasks. Some of them said that their parents never stopped them from being involved in domestic

chores because it was not against their religion or culture. For instance, Ubaidillah (age 30) shared his experience with both sides of his family where most of his family members and in-laws, both married and unmarried, worked and had their own careers. Thus, it was common for both sides of the family to accept men doing the household chores, and they were even supported by both sides of the family in doing so. Moreover, those husbands who helped their wives also said that men's participation in household chores was a normal phenomenon and had become part of everyday life, especially among dual-career couples in modern-day life. They also said that, although they knew some of their friends and relatives refused to do the chores due to the traditional division of gender roles at home, they personally no longer accepted that belief. Syed explained:

*I didn't feel weird helping my wife doing the housework before we had a maid. I knew some of my friends rejected doing these chores but at the same time, I also knew many of them did the same thing as I did. (Syed, age 40)*

Like Syed, two respondents described the matter as follows. Junaidi pointed out that all his brothers had been taught to help their mother with the domestic chores because his mother has no daughters. Therefore, he and his brothers felt it was their responsibility to help their mother. In another example, Ehsan explained that he did not think doing domestic chores would be a huge problem for him but that it was a common thing to do:

*Some of my male friends did not want to do these chores because they said that was the women's responsibility. I think that was because of men's ego. I will have no problem to tolerate and compromise with the household chores when I have my own family in the future because she [his future wife] will also work. (Junaidi, age 32)*

*My parents allowed me to do the laundry, dish washing and cooking simple food when I was primary and secondary school age. I think that was because they did not see them as against our beliefs. I am still doing those things now so I don't mind doing it when I get married. (Ehsan, age 31)*

The discussion above shows that the families' methods of educating their children were similar to those seen in a study conducted by Ghazali (2002), who found that Malay families in suburban villages, where both spouses were working, had involved their children regardless of gender in doing the domestic chores directly and indirectly. Based on the experiences of the respondents in both this and Ghazali's study, these differences are most likely due to the socio-economic changes being experienced by our respondents in the modern era, compared to the experiences of the generation cited in the other studies. However, it also shows that the findings of the current study are contradictory to those of several other studies that focused mainly on the traditional division of domestic labour between Malay men and women in different age groups and occupations (Borhan and Abu Hassan, 2006). These studies revealed that Malay women and men have been trained since a young age about their respective roles and responsibilities in the family, where the role of women is to focus on household chores, with that of men related to social activities outside the home.

## Summary

The discussions above pointed to the fact that the views of the majority of Malay men in gender ideology in domestic chores showed a more egalitarian gender ideology that had been accepted by both the men in this study. All respondents have changed their perceptions of the division of labour at home and showed their interest in being involved in chores such as cooking, laundry, cleaning and also grocery shopping, which would not commonly be seen in traditional Malay families. In fact, they are also involved in taking care of their children. Their wives received assistance from the respondents and a live-in maid in doing the housework and childcare. Therefore, in this study, an acceptance of women as career wives and mothers has transformed husband and wife relationships, leading to them becoming more egalitarian, particularly when men devote their time and energy to becoming involved in household tasks. Most of the men's attitudes to domestic chores changed when they can accept sharing household tasks with their wives, especially when their wives were not able to fully manage them because of their own career commitments. In regard to managing domestic chores, and childcare arrangements, whether their wives did them alone or delegated them to other people, both family responsibilities were still expected to be under women's supervision and this was ongoing, although family responsibility arrangements have changed. This study also reveals that men did not facing negative perceptions or challenges from their extended family or friends when discussing the men's assistance in helping their wives with the household chores. Their positive attitudes towards domestic chores were connected with their upbringing in their family of origin. Overall, a more egalitarian gender ideology has been accepted by men due to the changing times. However, it is also important to note that domestic chores still constitute one of the major areas that are considered women's responsibility, although the men claimed that it is shared with their wives.

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