

# **Does Employers' Perception and Preferences Play A Significant Impact on Female Employability? An Empirical Study in Perak, Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this study is to identify the determinants of female labour force participation in Perak, Malaysia, from the employer's perspective. The instrument used for data collection is a survey form, and the respondents who participated in this study are employers and human resource officers. A total of 72 respondents participated in this study through a stratified random sampling technique. A Binary Logistic Regression Model (BRM) is used to estimate the effects of the determinants on female labour force participation. Based on the results obtained, internship experience increases women's employability by 68 times compared to those without such experience. In terms of employers' gender, male employers are more likely (33 times) to hire female workers compared to female employers. The likelihood of female employment increases for applicants with self-reliance but decreases for those with significant responsibility at home. By identifying the contributing factors, the findings of this study are expected to provide information and guidelines to the related parties in their efforts to further improve women's economic status.

## **Keywords:**

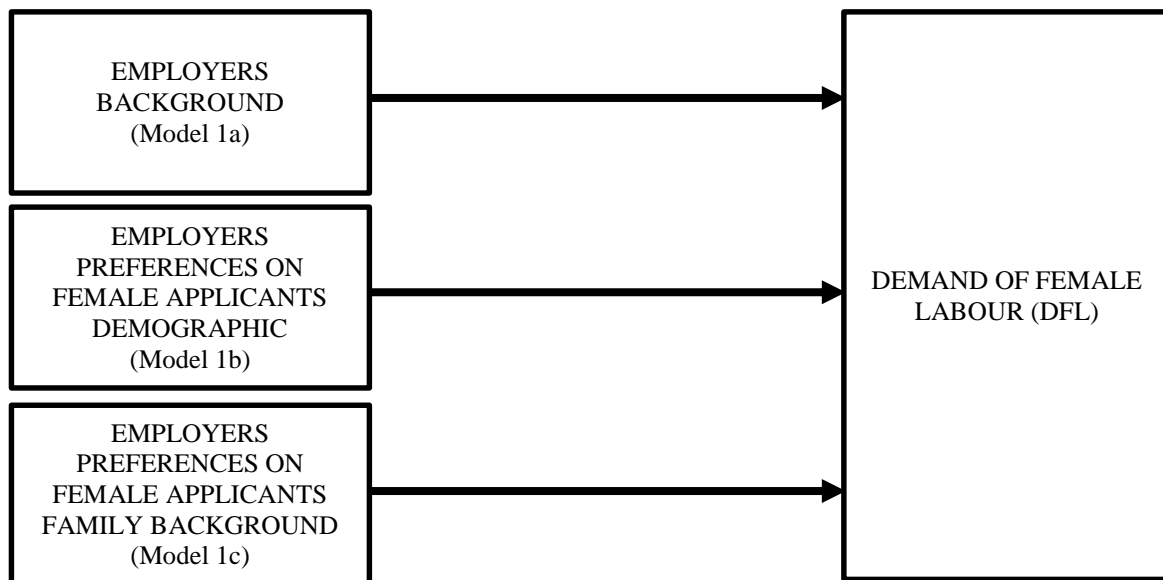
Female Labour Force Participation, Binary Logistic Regression Model, Employer, Gender, Internship Experience

## **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia is located in Southeast Asia and is classified as a developing country under the category of upper-middle-income countries, consisting of 13 states and three federal territories. Its population is expected to grow from 28.6 million in 2010 to 41.5 million in 2040 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, DOSM, 2018). In the ASEAN region, according to World Bank statistics, Malaysia has the third-highest rate of female unemployment and the third-lowest rate of female labour force participation. Malaysia was ranked 87th out of 144 nations in the year 2017 according to *The Global Gender Gap Report* by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in terms of economic participation and opportunity. According to this report, Malaysia dropped seven positions compared to the year 2016. Malaysia's ranking is much lower than that of Laos, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, and Laos, and the only ASEAN nation that is ranked lower than Malaysia is Indonesia, which is placed 108th overall. It also pointed out that, on average, women experienced larger gaps in employment loss due to temporary job disruptions brought on by Covid-19 than men, and their employment rebounded much more slowly than men's (Cheng, 2021).

The three national visions of Malaysia are Vision 2020, TN50, and SPV30, which emphasise the government's commitment to enhancing women's wellbeing. This is in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations. As a result, Perak state was selected due to its position in Malaysia's key region, its status as the second-largest state in Peninsular Malaysia, the highest proportion of B40 families, a well-diversified economy, and the fourth-highest population dispersion. The quality of life for families would improve and less financial stress would be placed on the economy by identifying the causes of women's under representation in the labour market. This study utilised the Binary Logistic Regression Model to analyse the factors that affect women's labour force participation from the employers' perspective.

The study's implication emphasises the possible issue of market size contraction brought on by Malaysia's high ageing rate and low birth rate. Hence, it is crucial to emphasise women's participation in the labour market. This is supported by Hassan et al. (2020), who argue that demographic and socioeconomic factors have a significant impact on educational outcomes, which in turn influence employability, particularly among female graduates. Figure 1 depicts the framework of this study. Model 1(a) looks from the perspective of employers' background, which consists of the variables of gender, race, marital status of the employers, and preferences in hiring based on working experience, internship experience, and the length of the employer's tenure in the current company. Whereas Model 1(b) looks at employers' preferences to hire female applicants based on their applicant demographic, which consists of the variables of preferences in hiring based on the self-reliance of the applicants, age of the applicant, race of the applicant, as well as the marital status of the applicant. Model 1(c) looks at employers' preferences to hire female applicants based on their family background, which consists of the variables of preferences in hiring based on salary expectation, responsibility at home, and commitment at work. The dependent variable is the Demand for Female Labour (DFL), based on the category of lower willingness and higher willingness to hire female applicants.



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework: Employers' preferences on hiring female applicants**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

More women will be hired as managers in the future as a result of today's recruiting practices, claim Bossler, Mosthaf, and Schank (2020). This is the outcome of women supporting women. It is implied that those of the same gender should help one another as a result. This also applies to male managers who hired more males. There is evidence for the "women supporting women" effect, which shows that it lessens prejudice toward women but raises it toward male employees (Lucifora & Vigani, 2016). Additionally, there are flexible policies for families and flexible work schedules. A higher level of friendliness towards female employees was demonstrated by women in management or supervisory positions. Males reported fewer challenges in employing female employees than women, and men were more likely than women to cite specific gender norms that influence employment (Booth, 2014). However, there is no evidence of gender-specific discrimination, and neither male nor female employers show a significant preference for stereotyped candidates (Paryavi, Bohnet, & Van Geen, 2019). Rice and Barth (2016) discovered the same thing: female assessors' assessments did not appear to be significantly impacted by the priming condition or the applicant's gender. This suggests that, compared to men, who favoured male applicants, women may have more equitable ideas about gender norms in the workplace.

When it comes to age discrimination, call-back rates for workers in their early 40s and those who are nearing retirement age both considerably diminish (Carlsson & Eriksson, 2019). Employers do discriminate against older workers as a result. Compared to men, women have a call-back rate that rises more rapidly with age. Employers appear to view adaptability, ambition, and the capacity to acquire new skills as the three most important justifications for age discrimination. Age prejudice is evident, especially in the preference for interviewing people between the ages of 24 and 28 over those who are 38 (Albert, Escot, & Fernández Cornejo, 2011). Women are less likely than men to have access to any employer-provided paid leave, and employer mandates could cause discrimination against workers who have children and are likely to be burdensome for firms (Doran, Bartel & Waldfogel, 2019). As a result, women are more likely to take on part-time jobs in order to gain advantages that support starting a family. If they have children, women are far more likely than men to work part-time. When it comes to hiring, there is discrimination, which is more prevalent for mothers than for those with higher levels of education. Men received more call-backs than women, candidates without children received more call-backs, and candidates with superior qualifications all received more calls. Even among women, particularly mothers, candidates with better qualifications got fewer call-backs than men (González, Cortina, & Rodriguez, 2019). Contrarily, there is no evidence that people of a certain gender or married women with children experience relative discrimination (Albert et al., 2011).

Most employers believed that the intern's internship experience had improved their performance in future employment. Additionally, the majority of respondents said they would keep their existing interns on board and hire interns from the same university in the future. Consequently, it is better to hire interns than non-interns (Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010). Performance in the interview, curriculum vitae, and internship experience were listed as the employers' top three ranking considerations for employing new graduates (Dhingra, 2018). Short-term internships completed while in college / university increase the likelihood that graduates will obtain employment. The results suggest that graduate employment is affected more by how internship experiences are structured throughout study programmes than by the internship learning experience itself (Silva et al., 2018). Creative job opportunities should be created and offered to them so that there is a balance in the economic context and job supply (Ab Wahid, Hishamuddin & Abdul Rahman, 2023).

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on the primary data collection through a questionnaire survey conducted from May 2019 to January 2020 using a stratified random sampling technique. The data collection period ends in January 2020, and no further information is collected to avoid biases in the responses due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a total of 72 respondents, and the analysis is regressed using the Binary Logistic Regression Model (BRM). Part A of the questionnaire contained demographic information, and Part B contained items to examine independent factors. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the items' reliability was assessed; the value is in the range of 0.636 to 0.929, which is appropriate for an actual study (Hair et al., 2016). This study further narrows into three models, namely Model 1(a) looks from the perspective of employers' background, employers' preferences to hire female applicants based on their applicant demographic as Model 1(b), and based on the applicant's family background as Model 1(c). The dependent variable is Demand of Female Labour (DFL) based on the category of lower willingness (coded as 0) and higher willingness (coded as 1) to hire female applicants. The positive coefficient indicates that employers are more likely (higher willingness) to recruit female applicants, while the negative coefficient indicates that employers are less likely (lower willingness) to do so. Below are the empirical equations for Model 1a, 1b and 1c.

$$\ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \dots + \varepsilon_i$$

$$DFL = \beta_0 + \beta_1DG + \beta_2Drace + \beta_3Dms + \beta_4DPHWexp + \beta_5DPHIexp + \beta_6DLT + \varepsilon_i \quad \text{--} \\ (1a)$$

$$DFL = \beta_0 + \beta_1PSR + \beta_2PAge + \beta_3PRace + \beta_4PMS + \varepsilon_i \quad \text{-----} \\ (1b)$$

$$DFL = \beta_0 + \beta_1PSE + \beta_2PRH + \beta_3PCW + \varepsilon_i \quad \text{-----} \\ (1c)$$

## FINDINGS

### Respondent's Background

There is a total of 72 respondents, including employers and human resource officers. 70.8 percent of the respondents have a higher willingness to hire female applicants, while 29.2 percent of respondents have a lower willingness to hire female applicants. Men make up 40.3 percent of respondents, while women make up 59.7 percent. Malay respondents comprise 41.7 percent of the total, followed by Chinese respondents (34.7 percent) and Indian respondents (23.6 percent). 65.3 percent of the respondents were married, 33.3 percent were single, and 1.4 percent is divorced. In all, 34.7 percent of respondents have worked as employers (decision-makers) or as human resource officers for more than ten years, while 30.6 percent have worked for three to five years. 43.1 percent of businesses have fewer than 50 employees, while 25.0 percent have between 50 and 100 employees. In order to locate and hire appropriate people for their organisation, the majority of respondents (54.1 percent) claimed that at least five recruitment techniques and three different roles were utilised.

## Empirical Findings

### Model 1(a)

Model 1(a) looks from the perspective of employers' background, employers' preferences to hire female applicants based on their applicant demographic. The variables of Model 1(a) are as follows: gender (DG), race (Drace), marital status (Dms) of the employers, preferences in hiring based on the working experience (DPHWexp), internship experience (DPHIexp), and the length of employer's tenure (DLT) in the current company. The dependent variable is Demand of Female Labour (DFL) based on the category of lower willingness (coded as 0) and higher willingness (coded as 1) to hire female applicants. The positive coefficient indicates that employers are more likely (higher willingness) to recruit female applicants, while the negative coefficient indicates that employers are less likely (lower willingness) to do so. Below is the regression equation for Model (1a\*).

$$DFL = -2.447 + 3.496DG + 0.431Drace - 3.494Dms + 1.366DPHWexp + 4.217DPHIexp + 0.026DLT$$

(1a\*)

**Table 1: Output of hiring based on the employers' background (Model 1a)**

Variables	Model 1a			
	B (Sig)	Odd Ratios	Model Summary	Chi-square (sig)
Constant	-2.447 (0.147)	0.087	-2 Log likelihood	59.820
DG	3.496 (0.012)***	32.967	Cox & Snell R Square	0.293
DRace	0.431 (0.285)	1.539	Nagelkerke R Square	0.421
DMS	-3.494 (0.061)	0.030	Hosmer and Lemeshow Test	15.125 (0.057)
DPHWexp	1.366 (0.403)	3.920	Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients	24.606 (0.000)
DPHIexp	4.217 (0.001)***	67.798		
DLT	0.026 (0.928)	1.026		

Source: Author

\*\*\*Significant at 0.01

It can be seen from the statistical significance of Model 1(a),  $\chi^2(6, N = 71) = 24.606$ ,  $p < 0.000$ , indicating that the model was able to differentiate the respondents that would report that they have a higher willingness to hire female applicants compared to those that have a lower willingness to hire female applicants. There are a total of two outliers found; one of them is eliminated to keep the model consistent. There is no multicollinearity in the data, as all the values of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) are less than two. The chi-square value for the

Hosmer-Lemeshow (HL) is 15.125 with a significance level of 0.057, whereas the chi-square value for the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients (OTMC) is 26.606 with a significance level of 0.000. Thus, this model is considered a good fit model for further analysis and interpretation. This model also explains that between 29.3 percent (Cox and Snell R square) and 42.1 percent (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance in the dependent variable (DHSD) is explained by the independent variables of DG, DRace, DMS, DPHWexp, DPHIexp, and DLT at -2 Log-likelihood of 59.820. With an odds ratio of 67.798 and statistically positive significance at the one percent level, the strongest predictor of female applicants with internship experience (DPHIexp) indicates that nearly 68 times as many employers prefer to hire female applicants with internship experience as opposed to female applicants without internship experience. Internships at colleges or universities therefore have a significant impact on the employability of women. However, the gender predictor (DG), with an odds ratio of 32.967, is statistically significant on the positive side at the one percent level, indicating that nearly 33 times as many male employers as female employers are more likely to hire female applicants.

#### Model 1(b)

Model 1(b) looks at preferences to hire female applicants based on their applicant demographic, and the variables of Model 1(b) are as follows: preferences in hiring based on the self-reliance of the applicants (PSR), age of the applicant (PAge), race of the applicant (PRace), and marital status of the applicant (PMS). The dependent variable is Demand for Female Labour (DFL), based on the category of lower willingness (coded as 0) and higher willingness (coded as 1) to hire female applicants. A positive coefficient indicates that employers are more likely (higher willingness) to recruit female applicants, while a negative coefficient indicates that employers are less likely (lower willingness) to do so. Below is the regression equation for Model 1(b\*).

$$DFL = -2.043 + 1.030PSR + 0.266PAge - 0.180PRace - 0.548PMS \quad \text{-----} \\ (1b^*)$$

**Table 2: Output of preference hiring based on the applicants' background (Model 1b)**

Variables	Model 1b			
	B (Sig)	Odd Ratios	Model Summary	Chi-square (sig)
Constant	-2.043 (0.376)	0.130	-2 Log likelihood	72.223
PSR	1.030 <b>(0.013)***</b>	2.800	Cox & Snell R Square	0.158
PAge	0.266 (0.458)	1.304	Nagelkerke R Square	0.227
PRace	-0.180 (0.632)	0.835	Hosmer and Lemeshow Test	9.900 (0.272)
PMS	-0.0584 (0.183)	0.557	Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients	12.202 (0.016)

Source: Author

\*\*\*Significant at 0.01

Model 1(b), containing the predictors, was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(4, N = 71) = 12.202, p < 0.016$ , indicating that the model was able to differentiate respondents who reported a higher willingness to hire female applicants from those who reported a lower willingness. A total of two outliers were found; one of them was eliminated to keep the model consistent. As all values of VIF are less than two, there is no multicollinearity in the data. The Hosmer-Lemeshow (HL) chi-square value is 9.900, with a significance level of 0.272, whereas the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients (OTMC) show a chi-square value of 12.202 and a significance level of 0.016. As a result, this model is regarded as a good fit for future investigations and interpretation. This model also explains that between 15.8 percent (Cox and Snell R square) and 22.7 percent (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance in the dependent variable (DHSD) is explained by the independent variables PSR, PAge, PRace, and PMS, at a -2 Log-likelihood of 72.223. According to the results of the regression analysis, the predictor PSR, with an odds ratio of 2.800, is statistically positively significant at the one percent level, indicating that employers are nearly three times more likely to hire female applicants if they can show they are independent and self-reliant during the interview process.

#### Model 1(c)

Model 1(c) looks at preferences to hire female applicants based on the applicant's family background, and the variables of Model 1(c) are as follows: preferences in hiring based on the salary expectation (PSE), responsibility at home (PRH), and commitment at work (PCW). The dependent variable is Demand for Female Labour (DFL), based on the category of lower willingness (coded as 0) and higher willingness (coded as 1) to hire female applicants. A positive coefficient indicates that employers are more likely (higher willingness) to recruit female applicants, while a negative coefficient indicates that employers are less likely (lower willingness) to do so. Below is the regression equation for Model 1(c\*).

$$DFL = 3.985 - 0.032PSE - 1.110PRH + 0.414PCW \quad \text{-----}$$

(1c\*)

**Table 3: Output of preference hiring based on the applicants' family background (Model 1c)**

Variables	Model 1c			
	B (Sig)	Odd Ratios	Model Summary	Chi-square (sig)
Constant	3.985 (0.013)	53.768	-2 Log likelihood	66.196
PSE	-0.032 (0.904)	0.969	Cox & Snell R Square	0.172
PRH	-1.110 (0.002)***	0.329	Nagelkerke R Square	0.252
PCW	0.414 (0.126)	1.513	Hosmer and Lemeshow Test	8.098 (0.324)
			Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients	13.011 (0.005)

Source: Author

\*\*\*Significant at 0.01

Model 1(c) with the predictors was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(3, N = 69) = 13.011, p < 0.005$ , indicating that the model was able to differentiate the respondents that would report that they have a higher willingness to hire female applicants compared to those that have a lower willingness to hire female applicants. A total of four outliers were found; three of them were removed to keep the model consistent. Due to the fact that all values of VIF are less than two, there is no multicollinearity in the data. The chi-square value for the Hosmer-Lemeshow (HL) test is 8.098 with a significance level of 0.324. The chi-square value for the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients (OTMC) is 13.011 with a significance level of 0.005. Thus, this model is considered a good fit for further analysis and interpretation. This model also explains that between 17.2 percent (Cox and Snell R square) and 25.2 percent (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance in the dependent variable (DHSD) is explained by the independent variables of PSE, PRH and PCW, at a -2 Log-likelihood of 66.196. According to the regression results, employers prefer to recruit fewer female applicants because of their domestic responsibilities, as indicated by the predictor PRH, which has an odds ratio of 0.329 and is statistically significantly negative at the one percent level. The warning shows that companies are less likely to recruit female candidates who have many domestic duties, particularly those related to raising children. Therefore, female candidates must express a desire to work for the organisation during their interview and maintain a high level of performance after being employed.

## **DISCUSSION**

According to Model 1(a), a woman's employability is significantly influenced by her internship experience and the gender of her potential employers. At the 1 percent level, both factors were positively significant. When applicants have internship experience, companies are nearly 68 times more likely to recruit them (Rizwan et al., 2021; Lisa, Hannelova, & Newman, 2019; Dhingra, 2018; Silva et al.; and Liyanage, Kumara & Withanawasam, 2016), as it bridges the gap between candidates and hiring managers. This could be a positive development for educational institutions and the requirement for student internships, which allow direct interaction with companies and the job market and encourage the development of self-management skills such as self-awareness. In addition, nearly 33 times more male employers have a higher willingness to hire female applicants compared to female employers. This could be due to opposite-gender attraction. This finding contradicts Bossler et al. (2020) and Lucifora and Vigani (2016), who found that the same gender supports one another, also known as the “women supporting women” effect.

According to Model 1(b), the factor of a female candidate's independence and self-reliance is positively significant at the 1 percent level. This factor increases the likelihood that employers will choose to hire female applicants by almost three times. Employers seek applicants who can work independently and effectively complete the task at hand. This finding is consistent with those made by Rizwan et al. (2021), Tarananum and Mohammad (2021), Anicic and Buselic (2021), and Lisa, Hannelova, and Newman (2019), who found that a person's self-perceived employability increases their confidence and ability to find employment in the labour market, which fosters a sense of career control. In contrast, Model 1(c) indicates that the factor “responsibility at home” is negatively significant at the 1 percent level. This factor has made employers less likely to hire female applicants. This is because employers believe it is harder for female applicants to concentrate on the task at hand, especially given the obligation of caring for their children (Doran et al., 2019; Raihan & Haque, 2018). Additionally, employers must deal with significant costs if they wish to offer transportation and childcare (Booth, 2014). Employers feel that women have other



“responsibilities”, hence they are not looking for work and are not prepared to accept a job offer (Scott-Jackson, 2014). This is particularly true for young mothers who suffer from the “motherhood penalty” (Haijing et al., 2018). Mani & Wan Mustaffa (2024) suggested five competencies for namely threshold competencies, distinguishing competencies, task requirements competencies, communication and language competencies, and creativity and innovation competencies that will make an outstanding and competent female applicant. Therefore, female applicants must demonstrate interest in working for the company during the interview process itself, such as by learning about the company’s operations, as well as maintaining a high level of performance once they are recruited.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study could be beneficial to women's career development, thereby improving their standard of living and socioeconomic status. In addition, support from partners or parents has a significant impact on how successfully women secure jobs. Therefore, when women are able to gain employment, it signifies that they have their own source of income, which may lessen their dependence on their families. Indirectly, the money they earn could raise their family’s standard of living as well as their own. Additionally, employers and human resource departments should promote the broadening of job duties so that they can hire more female employees. This study is also helpful for policymakers, including the government and administrators of universities and colleges, in developing curricula and soft skills to ensure that their graduates, particularly female graduates, are ready to enter the labour market and align with employers’ preferences and perceptions. Focus should be placed on increasing female labour force participation to counteract Malaysia’s ageing population and low birth rate, which are factors contributing to a declining labour force. The advancement of the country depends on the presence of women in the workforce. This is in line with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals – SDG 5, “gender equality”, and SDG 8, “decent work and economic growth”.

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