

## **FAMILY PLANNING AWARENESS AND DECISION- MAKING AMONG MARRIED MUSLIM WOMEN: FROM GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract:** Family planning awareness is an important factor of safe motherhood initiatives. It is associated with positive changes in health and health related outcomes. Gender stereotype and patriarchal norm may influence on family planning matters. The study aimed at exploring awareness and decision-making assessment regarding family planning among Muslim women from gender perspective. A total of 50 married Malay women were participated from the state of Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. The results revealed that women tended to have awareness towards family planning as the majority of participants believed that practicing family planning is necessary for quality health among the children, providing quality education for children and for a healthy family. Moreover, the findings of the study showed that gender norms influenced on family planning decision among married Malay women. The study suggests that there is a necessity to take efforts for behavioral and ideological changes to men and women through either advocacy or education.

**Keywords:** Family Planning, Gender Ideology, Decision-Making, Traditional Norms.

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### **Introduction**

Family planning is important for safe motherhood as it relates to positive changes in health and positive health outcomes (Flavia & Paul, 2013). Promoting family planning would help to avoid unwanted pregnancy among reproductive women. Improving maternal health is the core to achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) (Najafi-Sharjabad, et al 2014, WHO, 2008). Despite, in many settings, fears of domestic and intimate partner abusive relationships are reported as a barrier to contraceptive use (Williams & McCloskey, 2008).

The extent to which women participate in decision-making on family planning may have a positive influence in meeting their reproductive health goals (Godswill, 2018). In patriarchal society, where men hold traditional belief system. Men being the leader of the family and more often the decision maker in Muslim society certainly has a significant influence on the practice of family planning and contraception norms (Rosliza & Majdah, 2010). It has been argued that Malay women enjoy less freedom than the counterparts Chinese and Indian women in family planning matters. A recent study showed that the Chinese and Indians had much higher Contraceptive Prevalence (CPR) rate than the Malay women (Zarinah, 2011). Wwomen are more likely to have children as the reason for not using a contraceptive method, but were less likely to mention the husband's objection (Zarinah, 2011).

In view of the high unmet need, the paper examines women's awareness and challenges in family planning matters among Muslim Malay women from gender perspective. Women's participation in family planning is much needed in every woman's reproductive health program. Although several policies have been formulated at the national level and some agencies are working to improve women's reproductive health and rights, women are suffering from lack of awareness of family planning resulting women's unwanted pregnancies, poor health condition and even maternal mortality are common. The paper attempts to discuss women's awareness and family planning from a gender perspective.

### **The Influence of Gender Norms on Women Decision-Making**

The influence of gender norms on family planning matters is becoming increasingly recognized in the demographic literature. Gender ideological constructs from traditional (conservative), or anti-feminist to non-traditional (egalitarian), liberal, or feminist. Traditional gender ideologies emphasize the value of the distinctive roles for women and men. According to a traditional gender ideology man are considered as breadwinner whereas women fulfill their roles through nurturing and homemaking activities. In addition, according to the traditional point of view, men are more assertive, competitive, decisive, confident, ambitious, and instrumentally oriented, whereas women are more nurturing, empathetic, helpful, sympathetic, gentle, affectionate, and expressively oriented (Lueptow et al., 2001; Hoffman & Borders, 2001).

From these belief systems in traditional society's men often play the dominant roles in family planning decision making. Women, on the other hand, usually expect that their husbands should be the decision-maker of important decisions such as family planning matters. In the patriarchal societies, male superiority is accepted as part of the natural order of things (Sultana, 2011). For example, in many parts of the world, domination of unprotected sex is considered as an acceptable a way of asserting male power and demonstrating manhood and male rights over women (Pulerwitz et al., 2006). Hayes et al, (2000) identified that at the individual level, the social background of women, including their labor force participation, age, education and religiosity has often proved important in influencing their health as social backgrounds affect whether a woman has modern or traditional attitudes.

Moreover, Batliwala (1999) conceptualized decision-making power as the degree of control over material, human and intellectual resources exercised by different sections of society. These resources fall into four broad categories: physical resources, human resources, intellectual resources and financial resources. The study argued that there is a relation between women's resources and their family planning decision making. A growing literature has paid increasing attention on resource that effect on family decision-making. Extensive literature supported that there is a relation between women's education and their reproductive behaviors (Kritz et al.,

2000; Gage, 1995; Jejeebhoy, 1995). There is also a positive relationship between education, occupation and income, because higher levels of education provide better employment opportunities and enhances income (Yavas et al., 1994). Conversely, employment has an impact on contraception and fertility as it provides women's contribution to their families (Balk, 1994; Kritz & Gurak, 1991). In another study, Riyami et al. (2004) found some effects of women's involvement in decision making and freedom of movement on unmet need for contraception. It can be summarized women's decision-making is influenced by resources such as education, occupation and income.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are (1) to examine married women's awareness towards family planning practices and; (2) to identify the challenges faced by married Malay women in family planning matters from gender perspective and cultural perspectives and; (3) to examine women's awareness in family planning decision making.

and Research Design

### Research Design

In this study, Kuala Terengganu one of the districts in Malaysia has been selected as the study area. This area was chosen because of it is original inhabitants still maintain cultural traditions and characteristics of high religious values and cultural norms. A total of 50 married women have been interviewed by using a questionnaire. A series of questions was prepared to collect the information from the respondents. The survey was conducted by using a purposive sampling method. The married women have been considered as the participants who were housewives, full time employed and self-employed. The full time employed participants were the school teachers from SMKA Haji Abbas and SMK Ibrahim Fikri schools. The housewives and self-employed respondents participated from two villages namely, Paya Datu and Petai Bubus. The variables related to family planning awareness and decision making on reproductive health and rights were measured using 5 statements using Likert Scale ranging from 1: Total Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Undecided; 4: Agree; 5: Totally Agree.

### Results and Discussion

#### *Respondents' Demographic Profile*

In the survey conducted, the majority of respondents were (19.6 %) belonged to 30-33 years old (Table 1). Of the participants, 58.8 % were Master degree and 17.6 % Degree levels of education. A total of 72.5% respondents were fully employed. A small number of respondents (17.6%&3.9%) were self-employed and housewife respectively. The majority of the participants belonged to a very low-income group with average monthly income around RM4001-RM5500. The age at married of respondents has a great importance in this study. The majority of respondents (37.3%) had entered into marriage in early age, ranging from 21-23 years old. The highest number of participants (43.1%) belonged to 1 to 3 children only.

**Table1: Demographic Information of The Respondents**

ITEM	F	%	M	SD
<b>Age</b>			4.62	2.12
18-21	2	3.9		
22-25 years old	7	13.7		
26-29 years old	9	17.6		
30-33 years old	10	19.6		
34-37 years old	3	5.9		

38-41 years old	5	9.8		
42-45 years old	9	17.6		
46-49 years old	5	9.8		
<b>Educational Status</b>				
Primary			5.32	1.10
Secondary	1	2.0		
STPM/Diploma	4	7.8		
Degree	5	9.8		
Master	9	17.6		
PhD	30	58.8		
	1	2.0		
<b>Occupation</b>			1.78	1.36
Fulltime	37	72.5		
Part Time	2	3.9		
Self-Employed	9	17.6		
House Wife	2	3.9		
<b>Income</b>				
RM1001-RM2500			2.90	1.46
RM2501-RM4000	13	25.5		
RM4001-RM5500	6	11.8		
More than RM5501	14	27.5		
Missing Value	7	13.7		
	10	19.6		
<b>Number of Children</b>			2.30	0.81
NONE	8	15.7		
1-3	22	43.1		
4-6	17	33.3		
7-9	3	5.9		
<b>Age during marriage</b>			3.36	1.74
18-20 years	5	9.8		
21-23 years	19	37.3		
24-26 years	16	31.4		
27-29 years	5	9.8		
30 and above	5	9.8		

### ***Findings: Family Planning Awareness and Attitudes***

The current study focused on family planning awareness about the importance of family planning practices among married Malay women. Family planning awareness among married women has a significant impact on their health and family well-being. It is a critical area that needs to be focused on a great consideration. A number of studies showed that about 170 million women have no access to safe and effective methods of family planning in the developing countries. About 11/3 of population growth is due to unplanned pregnancies (Ngome & Angella. 2003). Thus, it is an important area to be examined women's knowledge and attitudes towards family planning. In this study, married women's family planning knowledge have been measured by using a total of eight statements related to the importance of family planning is necessary (1) in current economic condition (2) quality health among children (3) quality education for children (4) become a happy family (5) happy conjugal life (6) decrease the number of children (7) save the living cost and; (8) healthy family.

**Table: 2: Family Planning Awareness**

Item	F	1	2	TD	3	4	5	TA	T	M	SD
1	F %	2 3.8	11 21.2	13 26	5 9.6	20 38.5	12 23.1	32 64	50 100	3.58	1.20
2	F %	0 0.00	6 11.5	6 12	2 3.8	29 55.8	13 25.0	42 84	50 100	3.98	0.89
3	F %	1 1.9	7 13.5	8 16	2 3.8	28 53.8	12 23.1	40 80	50 100	3.86	1.01
4	F %	2 3.8	14 26.9	16 32	3 5.8	21 40.4	10 19.2	31 62	50 100	3.46	1.22
5	F %	1 1.9	17 32.7	18 36	2 3.8	22 42.3	8 15.4	30 60	50 100	3.38	1.18
6	F %	5 9.6	13 25.0	18 36	5 9.6	18 34.6	9 17.3	27 54	50 100	3.26	1.31
7	F %	5 9.6	15 28.8	20 40	7 13.5	13 25.0	10 19.2	3 46	50 100	3.16	1.33
8	F %	2 3.8	6 11.5	8 16	10 19.2	21 40.4	11 21.2	32 64	50 100	3.66	1.08

Indication:

1: Total Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Undecided; 4: Agree; 5: Totally Agree

T: Overall Total; TD: Total Disagree; TA: Total Agree; M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

As shown in Table 2 the highest number of participants (84%) agreed that practicing family planning is necessary for quality health among the children. The majority of the respondents agreed that practicing family planning is necessary for quality health among the children. Secondly, the majority of respondents (80%) agreed that practicing family planning is necessary for providing quality education for children. Thirdly, a largest number of respondents (64%) believed that practicing family planning is necessary for healthy family. However, a largest number of participants (64%) agreed that practicing family planning is necessary in current economic condition. Most of the participants had knowledge and awareness on the importance family planning is for quality health among the children. The other factors influencing on women's awareness towards practicing family planning are quality education for children and healthy family. It can be summarized that married women are concerned about family practice in order to maintain healthy family and children health. It is also observed that current economic condition is one of the factors that influence them in practicing family planning.

#### ***Findings: Challenges Facing by Married Women in Practicing Family Planning***

This section assesses whether married women face any challenges in using family planning methods. The common challenges are faced by the married women in their families which are categorized as (1) lack of knowledge about family planning (2) unable to receive doctor advice (3) support from husband (4) religion (5) husband's willingness (6) culture and (7) family tradition. Results revealed that the most of respondents (80%) practicing family planning is depending on husband willingness. On the other hand, the majority of respondents disagreed that they do not get any support from their husbands. Knowledge about family planning was considered as one of the factors that contribute to challenges of married women about family planning since a larger number of respondents (58%) agreed on the statement "I do not have enough knowledge about family planning". These findings are not surprising because in respective rural areas/villages are generally having lack of basic health facilities and

information about family planning and reproductive matters. It was found that the majority of women do not have available sources of information related to family planning matter. Moreover, the average distance to a reproductive health facility in rural areas is larger than that to urban.

**Table: 3 Challenges Faced by Married Women about Family Planning**

Item	F	1	2	TD	3	4	5	TA	T	M	SD
1	F %	3 5.8	15 28.8	18 36	12 23.1	17 32.7	3 5.8	29 58	50 100	2.6	1.31
2	F %	16 30.8	16 30.8	32 64	6 11.5	6 11.5	6 11.5	12 24	50 100	2.4	1.37
3	F %	14 26.9	12 23.1	13 26	11 21.2	12 23.1	1 1.9	26 52	50 100	2.48	1.20
4	F %	5 9.6	0 0.0	10 20	6 11.5	22 42.3	17 33.5	39 75.8	50 100	3.38	1.14
5	F %	11 21.2	20 38.5	8 16	11 21.2	5 9.6	3 5.8	31 62	50 100	2.38	1.12
6	F %	14 26.9	15 28.8	29 58	13 25.0	5 9.6	3 5.8	8 16	50 100	2.36	1.17

Indication:

1: Total Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Undecided; 4: Agree; 5: Totally Agree

T: Overall Total; TD: Total Disagree; TA: Total Agree; M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

The other factors such as culture (62% agree) and religion (52 % agree) have much influence on married women family planning matters respectively. These findings are supported by literatures which showed that there is an influence of culture and religion influence on women's family planning and reproductive behaviors.

### ***Findings: Gender Perspective of Women Awareness and Family Planning Decision-Making***

The study argued that women's involvement in family decision making is one of the important indicators that contribute to their awareness and well-being. There is a relation between women's resources and reproductive behaviors and decision making. However, a growing literature has paid increasing attention on resource that effect on family decision-making awareness. There is also a positive relationship between education, occupation and income, because higher levels of education provide better employment opportunities and enhances income (Sultana, 2011). It is believed if a woman is able to contribute to the family income; she would obtain more respect from her husband.

**Table 4: Women Awareness in Family Planning Decision-making**

Item	F	1	2	TD	3	4	5	TA	T	M	SD
1	F %	8 15.4	27 51.9	35 70	5 9.6	7 13.5	1 1.9	8 16	50 100	2.3	0.95
2	F %	14 26.9	23 44.2	37 74	4 7.7	7 13.5	2 3.8	9 18	50 100	2.2	1.13
3	F %	4 7.7	11 21.2	15 30	7 13.5	19 36.5	9 17.3	28 56	50 100	3.36	1.24
4	F	19	19	38	9	3	0	3	50	1.92	0.90

	%	36.5	36.5	76	17.3	5.8	0.00	6	100		
5	F %	10 19.2	27 51.9	37 74	5 9.6	7 13.5	1 1.9	8 16	50 100	2.24	1.00
6	F %	11 21.2	25 48.1	36 72	5 9.6	7 13.5	0 0.00	7 14	50 100	2.17	0.95
7	F %	11 21.2	16 30.8	27 54	5 9.6	12 23.1	5 9.6	17 34	50 100	2.67	1.35

Indication:

1: Total Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Undecided; 4: Agree; 5: Totally Agree

T: Overall Total; TD: Total Disagree; TA: Total Agree; M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

The results revealed (Table 4) that most of the respondents (70%) tended to have non-traditional ideology on the aspect of “Husband is the decision maker how many children should have”. They believed on mutual understanding on number of children should have. Similarly, the majority of women (74%) disagreed on “It is mother’s responsibility to give bath o and feeding kids.” However, a large number of participants (56%) showed traditional attitudes “A woman should obey her husband in all family planning decisions. Overall, this study showed that women tended to have positive awareness and attitudes towards their family planning decision making. However, these findings have a link to previous studies which showed that there is a relation between women's education, employment and their decision-making awareness. In this study, most of participant had Master's degree level and Degree levels of education. These findings are supported by a study conducted by Sultana (13) on measuring gender role identity and awareness among women. The study showed that education, occupation, and income awareness have significant effect on women awareness towards their rights in their family. In her study, women's education was found to be a key indicator in enhancing the level of women awareness towards their right in family. The present study showed that women tended to have positive awareness and attitudes towards their family planning decision making.

## Conclusion

The study examined family planning awareness among the Malay women in their families in the state of Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. The findings showed that women have positive awareness towards family planning. However, while the study examined whether married women face any challenges in using family planning method, the findings showed that knowledge about family planning, religion a was considered as one of the factors that contributes to challenges of married women. With respect to results on the influence of gender norms on women’s family planning decision making although most of the respondents tended to have non-traditional ideology and enjoy the greater power on the aspect of the number of children should have, a large number of participants showed traditional ideology on aspect “A woman should obey her husband in all family planning decisions”. Despite the importance huge benefits of family planning and equal decision making, the study showed that in a conservative and patriarchal society, women accept the male authority that causes unequal gender relation. Moreover, it may cause to gender related violence such as sexual, physical, or psychological harm and maternal mortality. The study suggests that there is necessary some efforts for behavioral and ideological changes to men and women through either advocacy or education.

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