

Women's health issues such as depletion, menarche, pregnancy, menopause and ageing – and only women experience them. Talking about women's bodily changes is most definitely a challenging topic because women considered the changes as private matters and some dealt with in silence. To unravel the complexity of the topic, this book brings readers to the real stories of women who struggle with their bodily changes, how it is understood and comprehend by many. It compiles several themes related to women's issues written by academics from the field of medicine and social sciences. The increasingly pervasive influence of Western perceptions of youth, femininity and sexuality, together with the increasing adoption of biomedical treatments have altered cultural understandings of women's bodies.

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PARTRIDGE

WOMEN IN DIFFERENT PHYSIQUE THEIR STRUGGLES MATTER



EDITED

NURAZZURA MOHAMAD DIAH
SUHAIZA SAMSUDIN

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INTRODUCTION

The pervasive influence of Western perceptions of youth, femininity and sexuality among women, together with the increasing adoption of biomedical treatments, have altered cultural understandings of women's physique. It is apparent that medicalisation and the female body have been discussed extensively in the Western academic community but to a lesser extent in non-Western settings so this book adds substantially to this discussion. Women's physique is socially and culturally interpreted. Generally, many assume that women's bodies are predominantly for the purpose of production of desirable substances, primarily babies. Others described them negatively, as a process involving breakdown of central control. Based on these understanding, 15 articles related to women's physique and how they come to terms with their bodily changes are presented. This book has 13 chapters. It covers a wide range of women's struggles with pregnancy and childbirth, motherhood, menstruation management, fatigue, body ache, mental health, disabled bodies and other related issues. Their struggle with their physique is real. To some extent, women make adjustments and negotiations to allow them to live comfortably in the contemporary society, while respecting and performing the obligations of their religious belief. Readers can see that the element of holding fast to Islam, *adat* (customary law), coupled with influences of Westernisation are of prime importance in the lives of many women, and indeed in the society as a whole.

In Chapter One, Sohela Mustari and Syumya Akter looked into the loss of an unborn baby which has profound effects on the life of a woman. The study which explores the experiences of women who have experienced miscarriage indicates that partners support as well as supports of friends and families towards the mothers are very crucial in overcoming the psychological trauma. This study suggests that after miscarriage women and their families in general and their partners in specific need psychological counseling to come out from the depression and anxiety.

The issue of prescriptions and prohibitions adhered by the Sarawak Melanau women during their antenatal and postnatal periods were discussed in great detail by Salamah Omar, Shariffah Suraya and Malisah Latip in Chapter Two. The basic principle for healthcare is to improve health and prevent illnesses. These principles form the foundation for the Melanau women's health practices. This study showed that the Melanau women's healthcare practices remain valid and continue to be used until today. The beliefs, customs, values, experiences, and skills inherited from their ancestors have greatly attributed to their healthcare practices. The values, beliefs and cultural heritage of the Melanau people are still relevant and very much in existence in spite of the changing times and advent of modernity. The Melanau people's healthcare practices are invaluable, beneficial cultural heritage. These practices also act as a foundation that forms rural health development programs as well a tool that promotes healthcare to everyone in this country.

Chapter Three described the the healing efforts among the Molbog, especially among the women and young children started with simple ritual of *basumbur* (incantations), massages, medicinal plants usage, and may ultimately performing healing dance ritual. Based on her anthropological research, Pauline Yong Pau Lin discovered that healing rituals are anchored by their traditional healthcare specialists, namely the *bolayan* (local shaman), *po'ngungulin* (traditional midwife) and *ponambur* (reciter of incantation) while access to biomedicine is still

difficult. Molbog traditional understandings of the nature and workings of the universe, and belief systems encompassing the human body, health, disease, and healing will continue to be inextricably linked with three major beliefs: Islam, animism and *kod dootan* (malevolent spirits) from both land and sea. Whenever maternal illness presenting among the Molbog women, it will be treated promptly according to these three major beliefs.

In Chapter Four, Adeela Rehman to comprehend the system of healthcare for providing safe and quality healthcare services to mothers and newborns. The study has empirically investigated public hospitals in a federal capital of Pakistan. The study focused on three interrelated aspect of healthcare services i.e. structure, process and outcome of the services. The knowledge generated from the study will be beneficial for health policy-makers and management personnel working in healthcare institution to improve the services for mothers and newborns healthcare. The empirical findings of the study and theoretical contribution presented medicalization of childbirth from different perspectives. The analysis of the study initiates the foundation for a broader social discourse about the established childbirth practices in public hospitals.

Chapter Five looked at menstruation management in Nigeria. Aminu Zubairu Surajo highlighted that menstrual hygiene is important to the health, well-being and dignity of school girls. In Nigeria, he found that the inability of school children to manage their menstruation period is affecting their access to disposable options such as adequate water supply, clean toilets and hand washing facilities. Therefore, unavailable and inefficient changing rooms in schools exposes many girls to manage their periods with great discomfort and in unhygienic conditions such as using rags and tissues which cannot absorb the menstrual blood. Poor menstrual hygiene among school girls lead to stigma in the society as a result of cultural restrictions. Therefore, this issue is the main reason that prevent girls from attending school till the end of their menstrual period for that month and this condition create gap in their education process and lead to increase in school drop-out rates.

Similarly in Chapter Six, Nur Aizati Athirah Daud and Zaharah Sulaiman noticed that after nearly one decade, not much improvement has been reported on menstrual issue in Malaysia, while currently period poverty has been highlighted in several media reports. Perception and behaviour regarding menstruation and menstrual hygiene as well as access to sanitary pads among adolescent girls are poorly understood. Menstruation was perceived as 'dirty blood', causing them to feel less confident and have caused some of them to be absent from school.

In Chapter Seven, Munirah Mazlan reveals that aromatherapy massage is one of the most common treatments women seek when they go to spa. The narrative experience of these women indicates that every individual have their own perception and motivation when they go to the spa like to reward themselves, making new friends and rejuvenate their mind and body through spa therapy and massage using essential oil. Spa treatment and massage are among women's self-care rituals to achieve balance in body and mind. Despite the lack of clinical proves on the effectiveness of spa therapy and aromatherapy massage compared to allopathic medicine, women still seek for this alternative healing as a part of their life.

The outbreak of the Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) in 2019 has witnessed a significant increase in the demand for mental health services due to unprecedented hazards caused by the pandemic. In Chapter Eight, Nourelhoda Mazen uncovered the coping strategies used by women in Egypt during the Covid-19 pandemic. The coping strategies adopted during the pandemic outbreak largely relied on the socio-cultural and religious background of the individuals, the support they received from family and friends as well as the community they lived in, and finally, the cognitive and behavioural normalization of their illness.

Another challenge facing women is mental pressure at the workplace which has a huge impact on the psychological, emotional, social and economic well-being particularly to the females. In Chapter Nine, Fasihah Harisah, Nurazzura Mohamad Diah and Suhaiza Samsudin

examine factors that contribute to mental health condition among women who works specifically in the information technology (IT) sector. The study reveals that workplace pressure contributes to the overall mental health condition among female engineers. Working in a male-dominated occupation demands them to be fit and active like the male engineers in order to fulfil the leadership and business expectations. All these have taken a huge toll to their personal well-being.

In Chapter Ten, Nurmiati and Dewi Anggriani examine the importance of bride wealth known as *wang panai* in the life of women in Tinggimongcong, South Sulawesi. In general, the analysis suggests that *wang panai* is a symbol of pride among women as well as their families. All of them agreed that *wang panai* is often a manifestation of love and appreciation a man has for his future wife. It also indicates the commitment and hard work of the man to provide the money. Also, women felt that a man who fails to provide *wang panai* will bring shame to the family, and this should be avoided.

Chapter Eleven focuses on person with different abilities participated in digital entrepreneurship. Puteri Haslin Dyana identified some common challenges throughout women's business ventures. Data analysis illustrates that physical disable women encountered lacking customer's trust, poor internet accessibility and expose to health risk. These findings portrayed that disabled women entrepreneurs faced internal and external obstacles that prevent them from sustain their business. In fact, the new normal has lead business activities during the pandemic towards permanent changes especially for business model and strategy. suggest to expose the barriers of women with physical disabilities and provide strategies to overcome the constrains.

Chapter Twelve is based on an ethnographic report conducted by Baidruel Hairiel and Nurazzura Mohamad Diah among female students athletes with impaired vision who played goalball in Kuala Lumpur. Because of its reputation as one of the top sports for people with visual impairments, female athletes discovered that goalball could be used to

facilitate life-changing educational opportunities as well as teaching them the importance of being resilient individuals.

In Chapter Thirteen, Syaza Farhana's effort to undertake a systematic review of the literature to situate Malaysia's gender gap in voting in the larger literature is commendable. It is found that although there is no systematic or institutional gender discrimination, women do choose to prioritise their family over their right to vote. Furthermore, with limited resources and political knowledge, female voters in Malaysia may ignore this civic duty of theirs.