

## **LEADERSHIP: DOES GENDER MATTER?**

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*Questions posed on women leadership are common both in Western countries and Muslim countries. There have been many researches carried out in the past, which discussed about women's ability to become a leader. In this paper, leadership of women is discussed in a broader sense, and is does not only confine to leader in an organization or a state. In a Muslim country, appointment of a woman as a leader is generally accepted as a last choice. The issue of women leadership revolves around the competency of a woman, which also includes the religious basis that woman cannot be a head of a state or women rank second to men or women biologically weak and susceptible to so many things. So, are there any differences between a woman leader and man as a leader? This paper looks at what are the unique qualities of leadership that the most effective women leaders possess, and are they unique to women only? The paper simply highlights some important common issues revolving around the topic of women leadership especially in the Muslim context, either in leading an organization or even a political leadership based on the primary and secondary data. The special emphasis of the research is on the trend of women leadership in Malaysia and some other countries mainly Muslim countries. The basic principles of the Shari'ah on women and leadership are also highlighted. The evidence either through research data or authorities in the Shari'ah show that women are not being sidelined due to religious beliefs or because they are biologically different from men. Nowadays, reasons for not appointing men as leader are also applicable to women. The data supports that women are not appointed because they lack certain competencies and not because of their gender.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Women are born with certain traits, which make them differ from men, in some respect. Though, in many aspects, most women want to be looked indifferent from men, there are certain qualities that they themselves want to protect as the very special traits of women. Women have special ways of perceiving things, which are known as ladylike or motherhood or the different characters that make them

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look to be more soft and gentle in handling things or dealing with problems. Sometimes, they are even more approachable that make people feel more comfortable in interacting with them. These traits refer to different characteristics of the God's creation of species belongs to women. Islam recognizes that biologically, women are created to serve certain special purposes as compared to men. Other than that, men and women are similar and created to serve a similar purpose with men, which are to serve Allah (s.w.t.) as the Creator and to bring people to the right path in different or similar manner than men.

In the context of leadership in Islam, men and women are always referred to in almost similar meaning and scope of leaderships. When Allah (s.w.t.) proclaims man as *Khalifatulfil al-ard*, (the leader in this world), the message is conveyed to both men and women, without any exception. In most situations, Islam promotes shared leadership and responsibilities between men and women. Both are required to perform multifarious roles, as the '*abd*' (servant) of Allah (s.w.t.) and also the leaders (*khalifah*) of the *Ummah*. Everybody is a leader in his own way and ability. Furthermore, the concept of leadership as addressed in this paper is confined to women participation and involvement in various activities that indicate their ability to voice their views and contribute to the society at large rather than referring to how many women lead a country or big organization in this world. Having said that, this paper will also highlight women leadership in leading any organizations in Malaysia as part of evidences to show that women do contribute in the leadership of the country.

### **WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN MALAYSIA**

In Malaysia, where the majority of the population is Muslim and women form half of the total population, women leadership has become a national agenda since the 8<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan until now. The latest policy is to have 30 per cent women in decision making position in the corporate sector. The establishment of a special agency known as NIEW<sup>1</sup> which focuses solely on women empowerment witnesses the seriousness of the Malaysian government to enhance the position of women economically, politically and socially. This agency has a specific role to train women leaders for the country.

**Table 1**  
**Statistic of Male and Female Population in Malaysia in 2011**

<i>State</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Sex ratio</i>
Malaysia	14,112,667	13,453,154	105

*Source:* Department of Statistic

Politically, the 2008 Election recorded about 46 women candidates of a total of 87 candidates at Parliament seats where only 24 were then elected. The number of women candidates in election may indicate the un-readiness of the people to vote for women or the women themselves to be involved in politics despite having a balance population of male and female. Nevertheless, do these figures show that women are sidelined in leadership? The author argue otherwise.

**Table 2**  
**State Legislative Assembly Members, 2004, 2008, 2011**

<i>2004</i>			<i>2008</i>			<i>2011</i>					
<i>total</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>%</i>
			<i>female</i>				<i>female</i>				<i>female</i>
576	536	40	6.9%	576	530	46	8.0%	576	529	47	8.2

The agenda of women empowerment in Malaysia has taken place since more than a decade ago and has been translated into various national agendas. The agendas take into consideration various factors such as the individual spiritual strength, the individual community involvement politically, socially and education. The level of women empowerment should include the ability of women to be intellectually and physically independent, self-decision making, access to sources of information and the ability to change self-perception and self-changes. The need for women leadership is obvious in Malaysia, as the women population grows higher in comparison to men.<sup>2</sup> The trend of having 30 per cent women in decision-making position is taking place as planned. Nevertheless, there are still problems occurring in certain areas of specialization. (see Table 3 and Table 4)

**Table 3**  
**Women at Decision Making Level 2005**

<i>Women at decision making level in the corporate sector 2003-2005</i>			
<i>Position</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>
Members of board of directors	10.1	9.9	10.2
President, vice President, Managing director, Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operation Officer, Senior General Manager and Gen Manager	12.3	13.5	13.9

*Source:* Statistic on Women: Family and Community 2005, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

**Table 4**  
**Minister and Deputy Minister by Sex (2009-2010)**

	<i>2009</i>			<i>2010</i>			
	<i>total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>% Female</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>% Female</i>
Cabinet Minister	28	26	2	7.1	28	26	7.1
Deputy Minister	40	32	8	20	42	35	16.7

*Source:* Source: Statistic on Women: Family and Community 2011, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

**Table 5**  
**Registered Professionals by Profession and Sex, 2011**

<i>Profession</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Dentists	37.2	62.8
Accountants	51.5	48.5
Lawyers	52.0	48.0
Medical doctors	54.4	45.6
Quantity Surveyors	59	41
Architects	66	34
Graduates Engineers	80.9	19.1
Professional architects		
Professional Engineers		
Land Surveyors		

In comparison to the other ASEAN countries, the achievement of women in Malaysia is behind. The labour force participation rate for ASEAN countries by sex in 2008 showed that Malaysia recorded

the lowest percentage of women participation as compared to other ASEAN countries.<sup>3</sup> Vietnam recorded the highest women in Parliament with 25.8 per cent, while Malaysia only records 10.4 per cent. While Singapore records 23.4% and Indonesia records 18%.

Women involvement in the Malaysian Parliament is only 24.3 per cent for 2011, while involvement in the State Assembly is only 10.4 per cent out of 222 members in 2011.<sup>4</sup> In 2010, Malaysia recorded 47.5 per cent of professionals who were women out of 706,400 registered professionals.<sup>5</sup> The data also shows that among the group of the technicians and associate professionals, women represent 39.5 per cent of the total of 1, 644,000 numbers of professionals and this trend reflects the number of female students' intake in the Malaysian universities.<sup>6</sup> In 2010, 278,323 female students managed to enroll in the government and government assisted higher learning institutions out of a total of 462,780 students registered in the 20 public universities in Malaysia. 41.2 per cent of a total of 17,718 Ph.D. candidates registered at the public higher learning institutions are female.

The above figures representing the female participation will certainly contribute to the leadership spirit and roles of women in Malaysia as a whole. By being involved in the nation building activities and able to contribute to the society, women are considered having the role as a leader in her own way and will.

### **TREND IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

In some countries where gender is no more an issue, the perception and reception towards having women as leaders do matter though the level of rejection is difficult to prove. Nevertheless, the evidences from researches and statistics about women involvement in many areas of administration and governance indicate that the issue about gender does matter.

For example, a research shows that the involvement of women in politics and main sectors in a few other states are encouraging. A data from a research shows the percentage of women involvement in policy making in various parts of the world:

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Rwanda	56.3
Afrika Selatan	44.5
Mozambique	39.2
Angola	38.6
Costa Rica	38.6
Argentina	38.5
Nepal	33.2
Equador	32.2
Uganda	31.5
Tanzania	32
Malaysia	32.5% (public sectors) 6.5% (private sectors)

*Source:* BeritaHarian

(<http://www.bharian.com.my/bharian/articles/WanitaPemangkinPembangunanNegara/>  
Article accessed on 12 March 2012)

The figures show that on average women involvement in Malaysia, especially in public, sector is satisfying in comparison to the progress in some other countries. Nevertheless, women's involvement in private sector recorded only 6.5 per cent thus it indicates the unwillingness of the employer to empower women and it shall need another phase in the circle to make changes to the trend in private sector. In this respect, there is a need for policy consideration so that women shall not be sidelined in decision-making.

Internationally, efforts that have also been made to improve the status of women. Some of these efforts are taken through the adoption of international instruments and programmes of action aimed at committing governments to empower women in their countries. It is noted that most of the programmes are not solely focused on Muslim countries which apparently shows that problem pertaining to status of women are faced by many countries in the world, Muslim and non Muslim countries alike. One of these efforts is the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly as the International Bill of Women Rights in 1979 and came into force in 1981. CEDAW states that, "the full and complete development of the country, the welfare of the world and the cause

of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields". The convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to and equal opportunities in political and public life as well as education, health and employment. It affirms the reproductive rights of women, and targets culture and traditions as influential in shaping gender roles and family relations. In order to materialize the CEDAW agenda, many countries are invited to join the effort and asked to sign or ratify the convention in order to put provisions into practice. It basically defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. According to the convention, discrimination against women is defined as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing, nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field"

Following that, many states have put their commitments to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms including:

- To incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
- To establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- To ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing and produced an outcome document referred to as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It sets out its goals as gender equality, development and peace and constituted an agenda for the empowerment of women. The objective of the Platform for Action

is in full conformity with the purposes and principles of the charter of the United Nations and international law; and that is the empowerment of women. The full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women is essential for the empowerment of women agenda. The Beijing document emphasizes that it is the duty of states regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems to protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. In addition, the platform also recognizes that women face full barriers to full equality and advancement because of such factors such as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability.

Moreover, the same document has identified 12 critical areas of priority to achieve the advancement and empowerment of women. These were reviewed by the Commission on the Status of Women and it has since 1996 been making annual recommendations to have been adopted so as to accelerate the implementation of the platform. The twelve areas include, Women and poverty; Education and training of women; Women and health, Violence against women, Women and armed conflict; Women and the economy; Women in power and decision making, Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; Human rights of women, Women and the media, Women and the Environment; and The girl child. In 2000, the Beijing Platform for Action was reviewed in New York and states re-committed themselves to the platform and made further commitments to ensure the realisation of its goal that is gender equality, peace and development. As far as Malaysia is concerned, the message from the Beijing Declaration is being taken into account in almost all policies on women.

### **OIC AND UNITED NATION'S ROLES**

The concern about women leadership has also become the agenda of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). This is translated in its Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women under Article 27 of Tehran Declaration, which emphasizes the roles of women. The organization has organized various seminars and conferences on women. OIC reflects its recognition of all Muslim women for their tremendous achievements in various fields including economic,



political and social spheres throughout the history. Although recognizing the fact that women are still viewed as secondary beings by the many, including some of those self-appointed defenders of women's rights, OIC has moved aggressively to convey the message that Islam believes, otherwise. In order to empower women, the OIC has been working in coordination with the Member States and other stakeholders in the international community. The OIC's Ten Year Program of Action puts a heavy emphasis on improving the conditions and protecting the rights of the women. The program asked the OIC member states to revise their respective laws in order to enable the advancement of women in Muslim societies in economic, cultural, social and political fields, and in order to protect women from all forms of violence and discrimination.

The first OIC Ministerial Conference on Women held in Istanbul in November 2006 adopted the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW), and stressed the following:

- 1- Gender equality, women's empowerment, and their political, social and economic participation are central to the eradication of poverty, and to the achievement of sustainable development;
- 2- Women's participation in decision-making at all levels is desirable for the development of the OIC Member States;
- 3- The role of education for women's empowerment in general, and for poverty eradication in particular is critical in eliminating gender inequality, and in increasing women's access to socio-economic and political opportunity spaces; and
- 4- Violence as a global phenomenon.

OIC is also working hand-in-hand with the United Nations Programme, and it was reported that rural women are still socially and economically disadvantaged. Worldwide, despite there are a lot of calls for equality of rights and treatment between men and women, the studies still show that there are a lot of reasons why women issues still deserve proper debate so that the matter can be reasonably addressed.

## **RESEARCH ABOUT WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES**

In a more developed countries such as the United States, there are many researches been carried out about the quality of women leadership. One of them is conducted by a management consultant from Princeton, USA<sup>7</sup> whose findings are summarized into four specific statements about women's leadership qualities:

- Women leaders are more persuasive than their male counterparts.
- When feeling the sting of rejection, women leaders learn from adversity and carry on with an "I'll show you" attitude.
- Women leaders demonstrate an inclusive, team-building leadership style of problem solving and decision-making.
- Women leaders are more likely to ignore rules and take risks.

According to Hilary Clinton,<sup>8</sup> there is compelling evidence that when women are free to develop their talents, all people will get the benefit including women and men, boys and girls. When women are free to vote and run for public office, governments will become more effective and responsive to their people. When women are free to earn a living and start small businesses, the data shows that they become the key drive for economic growth. The suffering of women and the denial of their rights, go hand in hand with the instability of nations. Afghanistan and Pakistan are two glaring examples.<sup>9</sup> Clinton also highlighted some of the roles played by the US government in Afghanistan is to promote a 'women's action plan' that encourages women's leadership in both the public and private sectors." As a result of the campaign, it increases women's access to education, health, and justice in these two countries, and generates jobs for them, especially in agriculture. Clinton also stressed that the principle of women's empowerment is at the heart of U.S. foreign policy.

The question is whether women in other parts of the world also share the same result especially those in the Muslim countries? What is also shown in the result of the study is that domination as a leadership style is becoming less and less popular. Nowadays, what is more important in leadership is networking and influences, academic

qualifications and achievements and the track record of good performance, integrity and respect of the subordinates.

### **WOMAN AS A LEADER: AN ISSUE IN ISLAM?**

There have been many misconceptions about Muslim women portrayed by western or even local media due to the negative perception and lack of understanding on the role of women in Islam. The basis of judgment that women is ruled and discriminated is always associated with the fact that women have to wear *hijab* and cover their faces. The situation become worst when the Muslim women themselves who lack the understanding about religion and value their life based on the foreign values voice feeling that they have been discriminated by their own people. All these accusations, to a certain extent, contribute to the perception and negative reaction of women being led and to lead.

The real issue lies in what is the concept of leadership that has been debated for a long time and what is the benchmark that has been used to measure the success of the Muslim women as a whole. In this paper, as it has been promoted earlier is that women are regarded as leader in a situation where she can freely contribute her ideas and demonstrate her feeling, values and religious belief without being influenced or oppressed by others. It happens in certain parts of the world that when a group of women are considered as enjoying her freedom when they choose not to follow their religious teaching while those who opt to practice their religious beliefs are discouraged and penalized in some ways or another. This is very sad when it happens in a country which champion equality among gender and freedom of action.

In this paper, it is submitted that the leadership quality among Muslim women must take place within the teaching of Islam and the acceptable custom and values of the community. This is in line with the teaching of the *Shari'ah*, which recognizes *'urf* (customs), which do not run contrary to the basic principles of Islam as laid down in the Quran and *hadith* of the Prophet saw. Islam has a special guideline pertaining to the role of woman. Even though it is undeniable that there has never been unanimity on this matter among

scholars in the past and present but for the Muslim, the differences among the jurists provides for variety of options for the Muslim to practice. Those who are in the opinion that women cannot be appointed as a leader have referred their opinions to the authority based on a *hadith* reported by Imam Bukhari, "A nation which placed its affairs in the hands of a woman shall never prosper!"<sup>10</sup>

The jurists have differed on the meaning of "placing affairs in the hands of a woman". Some jurists have interpreted the "affairs" as any public duties so as to prohibit women from all public duties. Imam Abu Hanifa permits a woman to hold public office, even to be a judge in matters in which her testimony is admissible- that is in all cases other than those involving fixed penalties (*budud*) and retaliation (*qisas*).

The majority of the jurists are of the opinion that women can be appointed as a leader but not as Head of State. One of them is Ibn Hazm (*Muhalla*) who is of the view that a woman is allowed to hold every office apart from that of the Head of State based on the same *hadith*. While the minority of the jurists are of the opinion that women cannot be a leader to lead or to decide matters involving public duties. A group of *Kharijites*, the *Shuhaybiyyah*, held that women are eligible for the office of Head of State as recorded by Ibn Hazm in *KitabulFisal*. At the "liberal" extreme, Hafiz Ibn Hajr indicates in *KitabFathul Bari* that Imam Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari not only supports the unrestricted appointment of woman to judgeship, he also permitted her appointment as the Head of State.

Historically, various Muslim communities at different times have been de-facto or de-jure ruled by women. For example, Sayyidatina Khadijah, before marrying the Prophet saw was a businesswoman who led the trade and hired Muhammad saw as her employee. In Malay society there is a proverb to the effect that "Hands that rock the cradle can rule the world". It shows the effectiveness of women's role in education and leadership.

The question is, what is the actual position of women in Islam is. Prophet Muhammad saw said in a *hadith*, "women are men's counterparts" (Abu Dawud, Sunan, *hdith* no 236). Al-Quran also emphasizes that men and women are equal.<sup>11</sup> Allah (s.w.t.) explains

in this verse that He was the one that created man and woman and the most honorable among all is those who have *taqwa* (God consciousness) Indeed, there is no different between men and women in the eyes of Allah (s.w.t.).

Although the historical evidences show that at the early phase of civilization period, women were treated as second class people and later, either through struggle physically and intellectually, women position has been raised to a better state until they are now being recognized as equal to men. Islam is the religion that aggressively and firmly propagates and fights for the protection and sanctity of women in clear instructions and provisions for rights, security, respect and love.<sup>12</sup> Hammudah Abdalati Abd Alati has beautifully explained about the special creation of women, which though men and women are equal but, by nature, God-creation, they are not meant to be identical. He said, "...This distinction between equality and sameness is of paramount importance. Equality is desirable, just, and fair; but sameness is not. People are not created identical but they are created equals. With this distinction in mind, there is no room to imagine that women are inferior to men..."<sup>13</sup> Based on the above discussion, it is viewed that accusation on lack of women leadership among the Muslim women or Muslim women are deprived from becoming a leader is an issue that has been misconceived and misguided. Such accusation is made based on different basis of opinions or judgments. When a Muslim women is religiously prohibited from exposing a certain part of their bodies, and refuse to take part in beauty pageant, and that become a basis of attack that Muslim women are deprived of their life. The example is probably the worst-case scenario. A Muslim woman may become a leader in any organization or society provided that she behaves and carries herself within the teaching of the Islam. Islam concerns about the creation of *fitnah* (the cause or factors that invite for evil thoughts and perceptions) or *tabarruj* (display of beauty). As such, any Muslim women who choose to go out from her house must safeguard her chastity arising from her actions, voices, attire or the way she mingles around with her male counterpart. Islam advises that woman to be accompanied by her *mahram* (an unmarried kin such as father, brother or maternal

uncles or paternal uncles). In this respect, Islam has provided a clear guideline for women who have to go out from her house in order to work to maintain her life or her family, or to be active in society or to serve the people for any activities that can benefit the *Ummah*.

So, the basis of an argument whether women can be a leader (in an organization consisting of males and females) or not, depends also on whether that may constitute *fitnah* (mischief) or not. If she chooses to uncover the *aurah* and freely mix around with male counterpart or she may need to serve the people till late at night which the situation is not safe or proper for her as a Muslim, thus, it is not obligatory for her to lead such society or organization. She may opt for a better and noble job that may be more suitable to her from the perspective of religion.

Researches have shown that there are some organizations that are having problems due to the lack of leadership skills among their leaders rather than being led by women leaders. People sorely lacking in leadership competence currently manage research evidences from Western countries about 'state of leadership' show that 50 per cent - 75 per cent of organizations. It means that there is no evidence to support the theory that problems in management are caused by women leaders. Other problems that contribute to the situation are associated with problems where the staff are hired or promoted based on technical competence, business knowledge and politics and not based on leadership skill. As a result, these people may become poor communicators, insensitive to moral issues, mistrustful, over-controlling and micro-managing or fail to follow through on commitments they've made and are easily excitable and explosive. Making things worse, they become low morale and management of the organization may increase in terms of cost.

In Islam, eligibility for leadership is based on qualification, intellectually and spiritually and skills. In the Malaysian context, the practices of the appointment of a leader, as far as men and women are concerned run according to the spirit of Islam. Thus if a woman or man possess good qualification and meet the requirement of that organization, the chances to be the leader is always open for her. When there are more than one candidate, a normal process of

selection either based on mutual consultation or voting ballot is practiced.

### **A LEADER: A MUSLIM WOMAN PERSPECTIVE**

In this paper, the authors wish to highlight a few points such as how to become a better leader from the perspective of women. It is agreeable that women can be a leader but can they be the leader as entrusted on them? What are the benchmarks of a best leader? It is promoted in this paper that firstly a woman must be a leader to herself. By this it means, women must strive to lead themselves so that they become role models to others. A woman leader must have control of herself so that she may not deviate from the normal course intellectually, socially, culturally as well as religiously. The actual fact is that it is important to understand that people judges others from various perspectives and circumstances.

The issue is how to be a good leader at an appropriate place. When Islam recognizes every Muslim as a leader in its own group and circumstances, it indicates that everyone has a role to be a leader at one place or another and at the same time she is also a servant or an employee in another situation. As such, it is important to realize that a leader must be able to adjust herself depending on the situation. A good leader will easily transform herself to suit the needs of the circumstances. A woman may be a boss in her office but the moment she comes back home, she is a wife and a mother of her children and the father shall be the leader in the family and as a wife she must show a good example of how to respect the leader i.e. the father or husband. Women must be smart enough to plan for her future life.

Choosing a right organization is crucial for any women to assume the role of a leader and the organization must suit to her values in life. One of the common mistakes many women make is to accept a position in an organization with values contrary to their own. As a result, she may not be able to lead but instead create problem to the organization. One of the possible consequences is she may end up having misery at worst, and job change at best. Thus, the most important thing is that, women are much less likely to achieve a

position of leadership in an organization that has value different from theirs..

A woman leader should try to become the sculptor of her own career and life and not the sculpture. Leaders are authentic and women leader should become the authors of their own lives. Everyone is responsible to mark whatever investment in her life. As a woman one should not depend upon the traditional management structure of an organization, instead she should strive to create her path to achievement. Women are self-responsible to direct and protect their own careers and to develop their potentials.

Similarly it is important for women leaders to know what their needs in life are and be prepared to take action to make them happen. As such, women need to know and build their strengths. Leadership is fundamentally about belief, knowledge and character building thus it is important for any women to know their strengths that enable them to find ways to select work environments and work assignments that allow them to express their views and principles. There are many people having job changes a few times within a short period. This is an example of a person having loyalty crisis and lack of teamwork. In many aspects, women are always seen as being approachable, friendly and sociable persons thus they may fit the quality of favorable leader among all. Women must love to learn and should avoid feeling bored and easily become frustrated in work. Women should always exert themselves to master new skills and bodies of knowledge. Good leaders develop talent by matching peoples' strengths with their strengths and work tasks. They recognize contributions and celebrate accomplishments. Among other strategies women should focus is to develop clear and achievable vision and mission. This will reduce the blame that women are some times short sighted.

Research indicates that among the most important characteristics of effective leaders are compassion, nurturance, generosity, altruism and empathy. "Agreeableness" is a social trait and leadership takes place in a social context, so it's not surprising that these characteristics are so important for effective leaders. A recent PsycINFO search revealed that 1,738 of the 15,000 articles (12 per cent) published



since 1990 on the topic of leadership included the keywords personality and leadership.<sup>14</sup>

Result of a study conducted in in the USA on senior executive perception on men and women leaders shows that there are extreme perceptions about women to be leaders. The result shows that some believe that the women are too soft, too tough, and never just right. This finding seems to show that women leaders are not so much favorable in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

It was also shown that when women act in ways that are *consistent* with gender stereotypes, they are viewed as less competent leaders. When women act in ways that are *inconsistent* with such stereotypes, they are considered unfeminine. The research also looked at the issue that women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than men. The respondents' comments revealed that women leaders are subjected to higher competency standards. On top of doing their job, women have to prove that they can lead, over and over again.<sup>16</sup>

It was also found out from the research that the respondent generally agrees that women are competent but disliked and women leaders are perceived as competent or liked, but rarely both. Respondents' comments revealed that when women behave in ways that are traditionally valued for men leaders (e.g. assertively), they are viewed as more competent, but also not as effective interpersonally as women who adopt a more stereotypically feminine style. It could be seen that gender stereotypes misrepresent the true talents of women leaders and can potentially undermine women's contributions to organizations as well as their own advancement options.<sup>17</sup>

Other myths about women is that women are sometimes described as lack focus, but good multi-tasker, Medically, observation on stress hormone test showsthat the chances for women to get stressed are double and they are more prone to stress related disorder. EI: Simon Bar-On Cohen, Cambridge University, says that there's an extreme "female brain" which is high in emotional empathy nevertheless women are not so good at systems analysis. By contrast, the extreme "male brain" excels in systems thinking and is poor at emotional empathy.

As shown in the preceding discussion, a similar argument has been put forward by some Muslim jurists who are of the view that women can only lead in certain areas of work field. Some of the Muslim jurists believe that women cannot be a judge for *hudud* cases or become a *Khalifah* (head of the state) as women should not be given such a big task and sensitive roles.

### **CONCLUSION**

In general, in many parts of the world women are given the opportunities to play their roles effectively. In Malaysia, the Malaysian women are also moving at par with women in other parts of the world despite having differences in backgrounds, cultures, religions as well as values. The awareness on the important of roles of women is taking place even in the Muslim countries. While in certain parts of the developed countries, researches have shown that problem of having different perception and treatment for women exist despite having well drafted policy, campaign or emancipation for the roles of women. It shows that the question of having less number of women as leaders does not reflect a policy and practice or even culture of giving a second class treatment to women. As such, though having an accurate data about women achievements is welcome, the data should not be used as a basis to judge whether the women in a particular country is enjoying freedom in life and are giving equal treatment with men. Similarly, there is always a misconception about having a Muslim woman as leaders. The negative perception results in different interpretation about the authorities on the *Shari'ah* sanction. It is important to note that differences of opinion are blessing for Muslims as they may have basis to recourse in differences of opinions. A basis for judgment whether Muslim women have been given equal and appropriate place in their society should not be judged merely on the basis of other western values. It is also reiterated in this paper that understanding the biological as well as the emotional nature would help one to become a better leader. In actual fact, women leader is leading but less recognition due to differences of benchmarking value.

**Notes**

1. NAM Institute of Empowerment of Women, Malaysia.
2. Women population represents half of the total population in Malaysia. In certain states in Malaysia, the number of women outnumbers the total of men. See statistics on Women, Family and Community Malaysia 2011.
3. See, Labour Force and Social Trends in ASEAN 2008.
4. Statistic on Women: Family and Community 2011, Published by Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.
5. Source Department of Statistic, 2011 and the occupation is classified according to Malaysia Standard Classification of Occupations 1998.
6. Statistics of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011, First Edition, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia.
7. Report of the Steering Committee on Undergraduate Women's Leadership, [http://www.princeton.edu/reports/2011/leadership/documents/SCUWL\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/reports/2011/leadership/documents/SCUWL_Report_Final.pdf) (retrieved on 14 August 2012).
8. [http://www.rferl.org/content/Empowering\\_Women\\_Benefits\\_All\\_Clinton\\_Says/1982763.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Empowering_Women_Benefits_All_Clinton_Says/1982763.html) (retrieved on 10 August 2012).
9. *Ibid.*
10. Al Bukhari, Al-Jami' as Sahih, *hadith* no 4425.
11. Qur'an, *Al Hujurat* (49):13.
12. See Qur'an, *Surah An Nuur* (24): 30-31.
13. H, Abdalati, *Islam in Focus*.in <http://www.islam-infocus.com/> (retrieved on 12 August 2012).
14. Bono E.J and Judge A T, Personality and Transformational and Transactional Leadership: A Meta-Analysis, *Journal of Applied Psychology* Copyright 2004 by the American Psychological Association 2004, Vol. 89, No. 5, 901–910, retrievable at <http://www.timothy-judge.com/Judge%20Bono%20personality-TF—JAP%20published.pdf>, (retrieved on 12 August 2012).
15. Research Report, the Catalyst, “The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don't”, at <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/83/the-double-bind-dilemma-for-women-in-leadership-damned-if-you-do-doomed-if-you-dont> (retrieved on 12 August 2012).

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

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