

Childcare helps keep women at work

LEVERAGING on the government's support and initiative, many organisations have pledged to champion for more women to join the workforce.

It is perplexing that even though women's educational attainment has significantly improved over the past 20 years, their participation in the labour force is still lower than men's.

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As of April 2022, according to **Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM)**, Malaysian women's labour force participation rate was at 55.5% in 2022, compared to 55.2% in 2021 with just a 0.3% increment.

The low number of women going to work is believed to be due to the burden of doing housework and caring for children and the elderly, which most women feel like they need to shoulder.

Therefore, measures that could ensure a work-life balance must be taken to encourage women's participation in the labour force while continuing to fulfil their roles at home.

If there is an increased access to childcare services, and these services are made available to those who work in the private sector, this will benefit the promotion of women's employment.

Apart from expanding the availability of the childcare centre or services, it is also crucial to ensure their affordability, quality and safety.

With that in mind, Kiddocare, an online platform which connects parents with trained babysitters, is collaborating with the government via the Malaysia Short Term Employment Programme (MySTEP) for young women.

MySTEP has been put in place to equip the Malaysian youth with a globally recognised certificate and on-the-job training opportunities.

Kiddocare was founded by Nadira Yusoff in 2019 as Malaysia's first babysitting mobile platform to connect busy parents with reliable, trustworthy babysitters to care for their children.

Commenting on improving women's participation in the economic sector, Nadira said the No 1 priority is a woman's support system.

"Having done a lot of other businesses and getting involved in various women's organisations, I realised that as a woman, you need a very strong support system," she said during an interview with The Malaysian Reserve (TMR).

Nadira is a familiar name in the entrepreneurial space, leading her own technology company, Nadi-Ayu Technologies since 2002.

Currently, she is the chairman of the Economic Development & Entrepreneurship Committee, an affiliate of the National Council of Women's Organisations Malaysia (NCWO).

Nadira said working mothers would often find it very difficult to focus on their jobs while being pressured to comply with what mothers should be doing.

Hence, she developed the idea to build Kiddocare as a support network for women while also diving into childcare.

She explained that it not only provides job opportunities to women, but also allows mothers peace of mind knowing that their children are in safe hands while they are at work.

Nadira emphasised that trust from parents is the most important part of childcare services.

“Before becoming a ‘Kiddo-carer’, we will do comprehensive background checks on potential candidates, including a security check on criminal records, medical check-up and psychometric assessment before a one-on-one interview with us,” she told TMR.

Once qualified, carers will receive training from childcare industry experts including cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and safety aid certification.

Furthermore, with the MySTEP collaboration, Nadira hoped to build and develop local talents into quality childcare service providers.

“A career progression plan for carers to start as a babysitter at entry level and take on a professional babysitter role is also one of the many programmes we intend to put in place,” she said.

Meanwhile, commenting on encouraging women’s participation in the workforce, Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) ED Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said that the federation supports the equal opportunity to all.

“We strongly believe women are equally capable to work alongside men.

“Moreover, higher economic engagement among women could lower poverty in developing nations such as Malaysia, increase women’s access to higher-productivity industries and workforces, and accelerate global economic growth,” he said to TMR.

On the small number of female leaders in the workforce, Syed Hussain said there are various reasons including women’s preference for humane and collaborative leadership styles over transformational and charismatic leadership styles.

“Perceptions and expectations about women often lead to stereotypes and biases that are then seen as incongruous with women being a leader,” he said.

He added that women are frequently questioned about their legitimacy as leaders, evaluated more negatively than men doing the same job, and face performance expectations that are often associated with their social identities rather than their leadership.

“Women are equally capable as leaders, but gender stereotyping has created perceptions that women lack qualities of effective leaders. This results in a ‘glass ceiling’ and a motherhood penalty for women seeking leadership positions.

“However, it is important to note that today, we have many women leaders in the government, private sectors and NGOs. We have many female candidates for the upcoming 15th General Elections as well, which shows the ability of women in leadership positions,” he noted.

Syed Hussain also acknowledged that women leaders are more collaborative and contribute to problem-solving.

He said bringing women into the workplace helps to diversify the environment with new ideas and suggestions for reaching core company goals and creates an effective working environment

To help elevate women in the workforce, he said MEF encourages the adoption of flexible work arrangements which allow for work-life balance.

“Women with young children need flexible working hours, without which, female employees may be forced to quit their jobs. Once they resign, it is unlikely that they will go back into the labour market.

“MEF also promotes women role models to whom female employees can reach out with questions and concerns. Recently, MEF established a committee on women’s affairs,” Syed Hussain told TMR.

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