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SELF-EFFICACY, WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT, SOCIAL SUPPORT, GENDER ROLE ATTITUDE AND ROLE MODEL AS ANTECEDENTS OF CAREER ASPIRATION AMONG WOMEN IN MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

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By

WU HWEI MING

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,
Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirement for
the Degree of Master of Science

February 2007

**Dedicated to all my family members
with affection and gratitude**

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the partial requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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February 2007

Chairman: **Professor Aminah Ahmad, PhD**

Faculty: **Educational Studies**

Overall, most of the studies on career aspiration were focused on college students and very rarely on working adults. There were yet very few empirical investigations that studied about factors that contributed to aspiration of advancing to upper level position especially the aspiration to top management among working women in middle management. The purposes of this study were to find out the relationship of self-efficacy, work family conflict, social support, gender role attitude, role model and career aspiration to top management among women in middle management at the manufacturing line. Besides, this study intended to determine the contribution of each factor to career aspiration.

Using questionnaires, data were obtained from 109 married women in middle management at eight private manufacturing companies located in Bangi and Nilai. The staff in middle management included executives, senior executives and

assistant managers. Descriptive statistical analysis, Pearson Product-Moment correlation and regression analysis were employed to analyze the data.

This study found that self-efficacy, social support, gender role attitude and role model were significantly related to career aspiration ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, self-efficacy and gender role attitude were the most significant antecedents of career aspiration among women in middle management at the manufacturing line. Overall there was 41.4% of the variability in career aspiration was explained by self-efficacy, work family conflict, social support, gender role attitude and role model influence.

Strengthening support system and confidence stimulation program could be the most effective way to improve the career aspiration among working women in the middle management. Given the importance of self-efficacy, it is crucial for career counselors to develop interventions that build up the middle management women's confidence and increase their self-efficacy.

Further studies are expected to compare the antecedents of career aspiration among different age, religious or ethnic groups of middle management women. Nevertheless, future studies should be carried out for other service sectors such as banking, education and insurance in which female staff are the major composite.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sanis

EFIKASI KENDIRI, KONFLIK KERJA-KELUARGA, SOKONGAN SOSIAL, SIKAP TERHADAP PERANAN GENDER DAN MODEL PERANAN SEBAGAI PENYUMBANG KEPADA ASPIRASI KERJAYA DI KALANGAN WANITA DI PERINGKAT PENGURUSAN PERTENGAHAN

Oleh

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Secara keseluruhannya, kebanyakan kajian untuk aspirasi kerjaya memfokuskan kepada pelajar kolej dan amat kurang kepada pekerja dewasa. Malah, amat kurang penyelidikan yang mengkaji faktor yang menyumbang kepada aspirasi terhadap jawatan tinggi terutamanya aspirasi terhadap pengurusan tinggi di kalangan wanita di peringkat pengurusan pertengahan. Oleh yang demikian, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan hubungan antara efikasi kendiri, konflik kerja-keluarga, sokongan sosial, sikap terhadap peranan gender, peranan model dan aspirasi terhadap tahap pengurusan tinggi di kalangan pengurus pertengahan wanita dalam bidang pengilangan.

Data dikutip dengan menggunakan soal-selidik daripada 109 orang pengurus pertengahan wanita yang berkahwin dari lapan kilang swasta di Bangi dan Nilai. Pekerja pengurusan pertengahan termasuk eksekutif, senior eksekutif dan

penolong pengurus. Analisis statistik deskriptif, Korelasi Pearson Product-Moment dan analisis regresi digunakan dalam data analisis.

Kajian ini mendapati bahawa efikasi kendiri, sokongan sosial, sikap terhadap peranan gender dan peranan model mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan terhadap aspirasi kerjaya ($p<0.05$). Terutamanya, efikasi kendiri dan sikap terhadap peranan gender adalah dua penentu yang paling signifikan terhadap aspirasi kerjaya di kalangan wanita di peringkat pengurusan pertengahan dalam pengilangan. Secara keseluruhannya, efikasi kendiri, konflik kerja-keluarga, sokongan sosial, sikap terhadap peranan gender dan peranan model menyumbang lebih kurang 43% daripada variasi dalam aspirasi kerjaya.

Penguatkuasaan sistem sokongan dan program stimulasi keyakinan mempunyai potensi yang tinggi untuk meningkatkan aspirasi kerjaya di kalangan wanita di peringkat pengurusan pertengahan. Memandangkan kepentingan efikasi kendiri, adalah penting bagi kaunselor kerjaya mempertingkatkan keyakinan wanita di peringkat pengurusan pertengahan dan efikasi kendiri mereka. Adalah diharapkan kajian lanjut dapat membandingkan penentu aspirasi kerjaya di kalangan kumpulan pengurus pertengahan wanita mengikuti umur, agama dan bangsa. Selain daripada itu, kajian lanjutan perlu dijalankan dalam sektor perkhidmatan lain seperti pembankan, pendidikan dan insurans di mana kebanyakan pekerjanya adalah wanita.

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge the interaction that I had with my fellow colleagues throughout my studies in sharing their knowledge and experience.

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on **2nd February 2007 of viva** to conduct the final examination of **Wu Hwei Ming** on her **Degree of Master of Science** thesis entitled **"Self-Efficacy, Work-Family Conflict, Social Support, Gender Role Attitude and Role Model as Antecedents of Career Aspiration among Women in Middle Management"** in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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The thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

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Date: 10 May 2007

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

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WU HWEI MING

Date: 28 Mar 2007

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SCCT   Social Cognitive Career Theory

SME   science, mathematics and engineering

AWS   Attitudes toward Women Scale

CAS   Career Aspiration Scale

SSS   Social Support Scale

IRMS   Role Model Scale

CA   Career Aspiration

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

There are an increasing number of women who are preparing themselves for management and professional careers. Women achieved their goals by working hard, enrolling into and graduating from higher education institutions, obtaining additional professional qualifications, working long hours and acquiring the years of experience necessary for entering into higher ranks of corporate management. Despite their increasing numbers, the numbers of women who have advanced to top management level are still low worldwide and women have tended to retain at lower-ranking and lower paying jobs (Morrison, A.M. and Von Glinow, M.A., 1990; Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin & Frame, 2005).

Over the years, there have been numerous studies on the low proportion of women in top management. Some hypothesized that this is due to their lack of qualification in education, training, skills and experience for top positions but there has been little evidence to support this (Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1987). On the other hand, there are more evidences shown that this is due to bias and discrimination against women, corporate policies and procedures that hinder women from reaching higher positions (Wentling, 1996; G. Maxwell & S. Ogden, 2005).

According to the 2004/2005 statistics from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in Malaysia, there are more women enrolled for higher

education than men. 58.8% were female students at diploma level and 64.1% were female at degree level. These reflect that the academic qualifications of Malaysian females were higher than males but they are hindered by certain factors from accessing to the top management. In 1986, Hymowitz and Schellhardt first used the term "glass ceiling" in a Wall Street Journal report on corporate women. The glass ceiling is a concept that most frequently refers to barriers faced by women who attempt, or aspire, to attain senior positions as well as higher salary levels in corporations, government, education and nonprofit organizations.

In 2004, female employment rate in Malaysia was 47.3% of total employment compared with 24.5% in 1957 (Malaysia Labour Force Survey Report, 2004). The growing rate shows that women's participation in employment has increased but significantly there are still more men than women across all tiers of management regardless of the gender domination of the field. In 2004, women only filled about 24.6% of senior official and management positions in Malaysia. Such disparity is also noted in other sectors in Malaysia. The percentage distribution of females as legislators, senior officials and managers in Malaysia was 5.9% in 2004 whereas for males was 10.1%. In general, women are still concentrated in lower ranking jobs such as clerks, secretaries and receptionists; or feminine orientated lower pay jobs such as nurses and teachers.

According to Holland, Gottfredson & Baker (1990), career aspiration has predictive value in identifying future occupational choice and as an important

mediator of motivation and development (Lent et. al, 1996). Researchers (Gottfredson, 1981; Holland et al, 1990; Lapan & Jingeleski, 1992) have used the knowledge of career aspiration as a way to gain a better understanding of individual's career development and their progress in making appropriate career decisions.

Self-efficacy in career refers to one's confidence in pursuing career-related tasks (Bandura 1997). The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal aspirations people adopt (Bandura, 1991). As such, women who have lower self-efficacy in mastering a male-dominated occupation or position will ultimately aspire less for it.

In this century, most working women are facing the dilemma of balancing both family and career. However, balancing these two values at optimal levels is difficult to achieve. Company consider those women who emphasis family by working part-time or by asking for flexible hours as uncommitted (Marrujo & Kleiner, 1992; Margaret, P. & Fill, K., 2004). Furthermore, married women who aspire for top management positions while raising a family usually find that they do not have enough time for both family and work. Ultimately they feel guilty towards the family and experience extra stress at work.

Role conflict is negatively related to higher level of career aspirations (Dukstein & O'Brien, 1995; Hite and McDonald, 2003). Most of the organizations in Malaysia expect long working hours for those in senior management positions.

Working long hours is considered as an evidence of job commitment. In Asian cultures, women have the primary responsibility for child care and house work (Rana, Kagan, Lewis & Rout, 1998). As such, they could not comply with long working hours and subsequently have less aspiration for top management positions. They may choose lower or middle level positions for the sake of flexibility to balance their work and family time.

Gender role attitude have been shown to relate to the career choices of young women (Betz, 1994; O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993; Flores & O'Brien, 2002). Women with traditional gender role attitude exhibited lower levels of career aspiration than those who are holding liberal gender role attitude. In most of the Asian societies, women's major roles are still expected to be wife and mother with less decision authority instead of a leader in an organization (Rana et. al., 1998). Such perception will become a psychological barrier for women to aspire to top management.

According to Marrujo and Kleiner (1992), even though women comprise 70% of the US workforce, a traditional upbringing still leads men to perceive that women should be in full time taking care of their home and children. Men think women should give low priority to their career but should be more focus on their family. As such, men tend to depend solely on women for the housework and child-care. Men hardly share the housework or provide interpersonal support to their wives' career.

On the other hand, many women expect their husbands to take care of them and perceive that most of the men have to be sociable to complete their education, pursue careers, climb the corporate ladder and provide a safe and financially stable environment for the family (Marrujo & Kleiner, 1992). Hence, married women may work but only to supplement the male breadwinner's income. In western society as well as eastern society, it is perceived that husband's status as the breadwinner will be threatened if wife has higher earnings and higher social status. With such perceptions of the different gender roles, women tend to have lower career aspiration and choose to maintain at the lower pay or lower status regardless of their capabilities and qualifications.

Ely (1994) found that a higher proportion of females in a law firm influenced attitudes among female associates. Hence, organizations with relatively few women in top positions will have negative effects towards middle management women's career aspiration. The sense of alienation and isolation will reduce women's self-efficacy and subsequently de-motivate their aspiration in reaching the higher rank in the organization.

Organizational behavior and career behavior have suggested that identification with role models is critical to individual growth and development (Schein, 1978; Erikson, 1985; Krumboltz, 1996; Perrone, Zanardelli, Worthington & Chartrand, 2002). There are countless examples of programs showing the talents or successes of a superior individual that is designed to boost the aspiration of a particular target group. Hence, the boosting of aspirations is a key function of

role models, but this area has been largely neglected in the social comparison literature (Lockwood & Kunda, 1999).

Some researches claim that women managers who possess certain distinctive feminine talents may be better prepared to cope with challenges of the future than many males (Sharma, 1990). Women tend to be more responsive to people's needs, better ability to communicate and create more open and participative work environment (Handley, 1991). Some corporations have tried to become supportive of the career aspirations of management and professional women (Konrad, 1989). Barnett and Hyde (2001) postulated that women actually could thrive psychologically while holding multiple roles that include highly achieving careers and active family lives. More recent studies refuted earlier findings and asserted that females demonstrated an interest in a greater number of careers and displayed more flexibility in their career aspiration than males (Francis, 2002; Mendez & Crawford, 2002). Hence, it is important for the organizations to foster the career aspirations of female employees especially the women in management.

Problem Statement

Women have increasingly become more involved in the workforce following World War II. Paid employment of women has shifted from primarily traditional female-oriented job to more non-traditional or male-oriented careers. Despite their increasing numbers, women have tended to retain at lower-ranking and lower paying jobs (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin & Frame, 2005). Researchers (Gottfredson, 1981; Holland, Gottfredson, & Baker, 1990; Lapan & Jingeleski,

1992) have used the knowledge of career aspiration as a way to gain a better understanding of individual's career development and their progress in making appropriate career decisions. As such, the study of career aspiration is important for a number of reasons. Careere aspirations are among the most significant determinants of eventual career attainment and career advancement (Haller & Virkler, 1993). Hence, women's participation in the workforce has lead to the study of career aspirations of women (Hackett, Esposito & O'Halloran,1989; Nauta, Epperson & Kahn, 1998; Flores & O'Brien, 2002 and Colaner & Warner, 2005).

Replications in the 1980s of earlier studies showed female had broadened their career preferences, yet their career aspiration remained low, especially for higher ranking and traditionally male jobs (Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). Women's career aspirations have evolved steadily during the twentieth century, resulting in their increased workforce participation rates (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Since career aspiration is a major driving force in female's career development, continues research on the lifelong processes of women's career aspirations and career development is necessary to explain their unique occupational paths (Rainey & Borders, 1997; Schoon, 2001).

Although there is a great deal of literature on aspirations to select certain career, there have been few empirical investigations of factors that contribute to aspirations to advance to upper level positions. In 1980's, career aspirations have frequently been studied in vocational literature (Farmer, 1985; Gottfredson & Becker, 1981) but this typically focused on aspirations to select a career. The

factors in their study mainly were focused on gender, age, social economics status and parent's influence. More recent researches (Nauta et al., 1998; Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Colaner and Warner, 2005) have examined career aspirations to leadership or advanced position within the chosen occupation among college students. The investigated factors were self-efficacy, work family conflict, gender role attitude, parental support and role model influence. However, there were yet very few studies on antecedents of career aspiration among women in middle management especially in Malaysia. Overall, most of the studies of career aspiration were focused on college students and very rare were on working adults.

The lacking of studies on career aspiration to top management has inspired the researcher to find out the relationship of self-efficacy, work family conflict, social support, gender role attitude, role model and career aspiration to top management among women in middle management. Subsequently, this study intended to understand the major factors that relate and contribute to career aspiration of Malaysia's women in middle management in manufacturing line.

In order to study the relationship of self-efficacy, work family conflict, social support, gender role attitude, role model and career aspiration to top management among women in middle management, the research questions to be addressed are: