

Chapter 4

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH OPPORTUNITIES

A. Women's Education

There has been rapid expansion of educational opportunities and openings for women and men to improve their economic participation. Overall, the trend shows an increase in the literacy levels of both males and females, which stood at 89 percent for males and 80 percent for females in 1990. The progress made in reducing the gender gap is attributable to remarkable increases in girls' enrollment in schooling. Concomitantly, it is therefore expected that the male and female literacy gap will be further narrowed in the years to come. The change since the 1950s, when schooling was not considered very appropriate for women, has been helped by measures such as the introduction of free primary education and changes in family attitudes. In 1994, enrollments in primary and secondary levels were 51 percent for males and 49 percent for females. The gender gap in tertiary education stood in 1994 at 54 percent male and 46 percent female, pointing towards persistent structural and attitudinal barriers to women's equitable participation at the highest educational levels.

B. Women's Health

In 1994, women constituted 49.8 percent of the total population of 19.7 million in Malaysia. While life expectancy has increased in general over the years in Malaysia, the increase in life expectancy of women has been more important from 70.5 years in 1980 to 74 years in 1995, compared to men's from 66.4 to 69.4 years.

Table 6 also shows that fertility rate has declined over the years and crude birth rate dropped from 32.2 per thousand in 1970 to 27.5 per thousand in 1990. Maternal mortality rate, which is a good indicator of the quality of health services since most maternal deaths are preventable, has decreased from 0.7 per thousand in 1970 to 0.2 per thousand in 1990, and neonatal mortality has also decreased from 14.2 per thousand in 1980 to 8.6 per thousand in 1990. Sabah and Sarawak have lower maternal mortality rates (0.1 percent) as compared to Peninsular Malaysia (0.2 percent) (Table 17). Another consequence of the improvement in women's health was the increase in the number of women over 65 years. There are now approximately 0.4 million women over the age of 65 years. There have been considerable improvements in the availability of health services. However differences remain in Sabah and Sarawak which are below the national average as regards ratios between trained midwives and population (Table 18). As regards deliveries attended by trained personnel, Sabah ranks lower (70.9 percent) than Peninsular Malaysia (77.1 percent) and Sarawak (88.5 percent) (Table 20).

Women's education is by far the most important determinant of fertility, as shown by the sharp differentials in the number of children ever born to women of different education levels. As primary education is becoming universal and more women are pursuing higher education, family size can be expected to drop further, reflecting the pattern in more developed countries.

Family planning services are provided by a network of government-sponsored clinics. Increasingly, couples are making use of family planning services through private clinics and pharmacies. The coverage of family planning services has been more comprehensive in urban areas, and has been gradually expanded to remote rural areas as an integrated package of services provided through the rural health program. As a result, regional differences exist with better coverage in Peninsular Malaysia, than in Eastern Malaysia and urban versus rural fertility rates.

**Table 6: Health Indicators of Women in Malaysia
1970-1993**

Indicators	1970	1980	1990	1993
Life Expectancy (female)		70.5	73.4	74.0
Life Expectancy (male)		66.4	68.8	69.4
Fertility Rate	5.0	4.0	3.3	-
Crude Birth Rate	32.2	30.9	28.0	27.5
Maternal Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	0.7	0.6	0.2	-
Neo-Natal Mortality (per 1,000 live births)	-	14.8	8.4	-

Source: Compiled from reports of the Department of Statistics Malaysia, 1970, 1980 and 1994.

C. Major Gender-Related Issues in Education

1. *Gender Segregation and Stereotyping in Education*

While the enrollment of women at all levels of education is equitable to that of men, their participation in the entire range of courses available is not as equitable. Gender segregation arising from gender stereotyping which mediates students' choice of courses is still prevalent. Enrollment in vocational and technical fields has been male-dominated. Strong male preference for fields related to industries like building and wood-work, metal-work, and electrical work continues. On the other hand, women have been oriented towards service courses like hotel and catering, tailoring, and commerce. In institutions of higher learning, women are more inclined to enroll in courses traditionally considered more suitable for them such as arts and education, but less in courses related to science and technology, which tend to lead to higher-paid jobs. Likewise, providers of non-formal education and training tend to conduct programs that relate to women's domestic role rather than their productive role. Entrepreneurship courses offered to women are more often limited to areas like food processing, tailoring and handicraft. Women tend also to participate highly in programs that relate to their domestic role.

2. *Technical and Vocational Education*

Since the implementation of the National Education Policy in 1960, which emphasized science and technology as important thrust areas in planning for the generation of trained manpower, government-sponsored technical and vocational education (TVE) schools increased in number and in enrollment. Increases ranged from 20,340 in 1985 to an estimated 52,180 in 1995, with about four times

more students in vocational schools than in technical schools.²⁰ However, a higher proportion of male students concentrated in science than in arts, while the reverse was true for female students. Although the enrollment rate of male students has always been greater than that of female students, both in lower and higher levels of education and training, and in vocational and technical streams, a recent phenomenon showed that the enrollment of female students in vocational courses doubled from 22.2 percent in 1990 to 45.9 percent of total enrollment in 1992 (Table 7). The provision of dormitories for women and the increase in the number of TVEI schools (as part of Government Education Policy to promote education to less privileged population) generated greater access of these schools to women resulting in their increased enrollment. The larger body of female students in the vocational courses is expected to help reduce their isolation, which was due to the low access of women to such courses earlier.

Table 7: Lower Secondary Female Graduates by Stream and Year, Malaysia

Year	Science		Arts		Vocational		Technical	
	Female (%)	Total (No)	Female (%)	Total (No)	Female (%)	Total (No)	Female (%)	Total (No)
1983	45.1	41,001	51.5	110,107	27.6	6,836	32.6	2,672
1985	45.9	50,527	51.3	106,708	25.8	7,250	35.8	2,832
1988	24.9	44,992	54.1	122,721	21.1	9,877	35.8	2,672
1990	48.2	41,860	55.5	125,640	22.2	13,555	34.8	2,729
1992	47.1	38,044	54.9	130,476	45.9	27,689	38.0	2,508

Source : Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1993.

Female participation in TVE increased steadily in the 1970s and 1980s and 1990s, as reflected in enrollments (Table 8) and the proportion of female teachers employed in the secondary vocational schools (SVS) and secondary technical schools (STS). In the early 1990s, female participation continued to increase in real terms but leveled out proportionately.

Table 8: Female Enrollment in TVE (Percent of Total)

	1970	1980	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
SVS	16.3	30.4	23.1	23.6	25.5	25.1	24.0	24.1	25.5
STS	4.3	27.1	36.1	37.2	38.4	40.2	39.0	39.5	32.2

Source: Ministry of Education

Table 9: Female Enrollments in TVE

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
SVS	5 777	6 260	7 122	9 076	10 054	10 184	9 614
STS	2 125	2 135	2 089	2 199	2 223	2 324	3 352
Total	7 902	8 395	9 211	11 275	12 277	12 508	12 966

Source: Ministry of Education

Table 10: Female Teachers in TVE (Percent of Total)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
SVS	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0
STS	65.1	65.1	64.6	64.6	65.0	65.0	65.1
Total	39.5	39.6	38.8	38.8	38.6	37.8	37.7

Source: Ministry of Education

Table 11 also shows the continued and increasing predominance of women in teacher training resulting in the relatively larger number of female teachers.

Table 11: Percentage Female Enrollment by Type of Institution of Higher Learning, Malaysia (1980-1993)

Institution of Higher Learning	1980	1985	1990	1993
Teacher Training Colleges	39.3	44.8	56.1	65.9
Other Colleges	48.3	62.7	45.5	49.2
Polytechnics	20.3	22.3	25.5	24.9
University	35.5	40.3	45.7	48.3
Total	38.6	44.9	45.7	47.5

Source: Compiled from Statistics of Department of Statistics Malaysia, 1990, and Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1995

Female participation as a proportion of total enrollment is higher in the technical stream than in the vocational stream, while a very small proportion participated in skill development courses. Female students account for a high proportion of commerce and home economics

enrollments, and a relatively low proportion of engineering courses. While female participation in engineering subjects has been low, it has increased in absolute terms. In 1993 only 922 women in STSs (42 percent of female enrollment) were enrolled in engineering courses; in 1996 the corresponding figure was 2,095 (63 percent of female enrollments). Female participation in different SVSs, STSs, and skill courses is given in Table 12.

Course	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
STS courses							
Engineering courses	23.6	22.6	24.4	25.3	26.3	25.4	23.9
Commerce	71.4	73.5	72.9	77.6	72.5	77.9	77.6
Agriculture	55.9	62.4	65.6	59.4	62.7	70.2	72.2
Others	41.7	48.2	49.9	58.9	48.6	55.8	69.4
Total STS	36.1	37.2	38.4	40.2	39.0	39.5	32.2
SVS courses							
Engineering trades	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6.2	7.9	8.9	9.2
Home economics	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	92.6	92.1	90.9	89.9
Commerce	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	76.0	82.4	83.1	83.8
Agriculture	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	34.4	44.0	49.3	44.7
Skill courses	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	24.0	16.9	14.9	12.2
Total SVS	23.1	23.6	25.5	25.1	24.0	24.1	25.5
Total TVE	25.5	26.0	27.6	26.9	25.8	26.0	27.0

Source: Ministry of Education

While there has been development in terms of female participation in TVE, more needs to be done in order to address problems of gender stereotyping in education. This is prevalent not only at the upper secondary (vocational and technical education) but also at the pre-university level. A comparison of enrollment in the arts and science stream in pre-university education shows a distinct predominance of males in engineering (science) while females prefer commerce and agriculture (arts) (Table 13).

Table 13: Female Enrollment in Assisted Technical Schools by Type of Course, Malaysia, 1989/1992

Type of Course	1989	1992
Engineering	7.2	18.7
Building	41.1	39.9
Agriculture	52.6	65.6
Commerce	69.5	72.9
Services	49.3	51.3

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1994

It is clear that over a decade from 1983 through 1992, the vocational and technical field had been male-dominated in terms of enrollment rate. On the other hand, even when women joined TVE and skill courses, female enrollment was higher in the so-called 'feminine' courses, such as home economics and hotel and catering. Despite the absence of any known educational policies which limit female enrollment in vocational and technical schools, females seem to demonstrate reluctance to go for these fields compared to their male counterparts. In vocational training, there was also a considerable segregation with respect to the types of training courses undertaken. The trend of male preference for fields related to industries like building and wood-work, metal-work and electrical work is observed. On the other hand, females were more oriented towards service courses that included hotel and catering, tailoring, and commerce.

It appears that the low enrollment rate of women in vocational and technical schools is

Table 14: Percentage Distribution of Female Teachers in Technical and Vocational Schools, and Polytechnics, Malaysia (1970-1993)

Year	Technical	Vocational	Polytechnics
1970	18.4	8.1	-
1975	31.4	21.7	-
1987	41.1	22.8	16.6
1990	46.0	29.7	21.1
1993	52.5	34.3	20.9

Source: Ahmad, Aminah, "Status of Education of Women in Malaysia", Report Prepared for the Education of Women in Asia Project, ADB, 1993. Data for 1993 are taken from Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1995.

reflected in the employment of teachers in these schools. Data presented in Table 14 shows that the percentage of female teachers in vocational and technical schools was lower than male teachers from the year 1970 through 1993 (except for technical school teachers in 1993). Although there is an increasing trend in the number of female teachers over the years, with 52.5 percent of female teachers in technical schools in 1993, males are still predominant in such fields. As it appears, this fact holds true even in the case of institutions of higher learning too. For instance, the

proportion of women lecturers in polytechnics was only 16.6 percent in 1987, although this figure increased to 20.9 percent in 1993. In terms of fields of specialization, the female lecturers were least represented in mechanical engineering, while the highest representation was recorded in the field of electrical and electronics engineering. Table 15 reveals 58 and 23 as the highest number of university trained and college trained female lecturers, respectively, in the field of electrical and electronics engineering. In contrast, the highest number of university trained and college trained male lecturers were 127 and 132 respectively in the field of mechanical engineering. Overall, it is apparent that except for food technology field, the number of university trained as well as college trained lecturers in polytechnics shows the prevalence of high male dominance.

In light of the foregoing discussion, it appears that segregation in education arising from gender stereotyping, perpetuated by the socialization process, continues to prevail. Evidently, females are more inclined to enroll in courses traditionally considered more suitable for women. To enroll in male-dominated courses, or to deviate from the accepted norm, may mean risking social disapproval. Conformity then becomes important as a means for gaining social support, as well as avoiding feelings of isolation. The training received determines the employment one takes up eventually, and as a general observation, female-dominated training courses tend to lead to relatively lower-paid jobs of lower status. Self-selection and access rather than Government Policy is responsible for continued enrollment in traditional courses, perpetuating employment patterns, and concentrating women in low technology, low skill, or low status occupation. However, parents and girls are responsive to efforts geared to changing traditional education patterns. Efforts to increase access by building dormitories for girls in technical and vocational schools enabled increase in female enrollment. Other efforts such as introduction of vocational counseling, gender-based assessment of recent secondary and tertiary school graduates in terms of time to first job, unemployment rates, salaries, and suitability of job to education can provide important inputs towards improving the efficiency of the educational system.

**Table 15: Lecturers in Polytechnics and their Respective Area of Specialization
Malaysia, 1993**

Areas of Specialization	University Trained		College Trained		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Civil Engineering	111	42	101	34	288
Electrical and Electronics Engineering	94	58	98	23	273
Mechanical Engineering	127	14	132	5	278
Commerce	108	25	16	3	152
Food Technology	11	5	3	3	22
Total	451	144	350	68	1,013
Gender Ratio (M/F)		3:1		5:1	4:1

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1993.

3. *Geographical Disparities in Access to Education and Health Services – The Case of Sabah and Sarawak*

The expansion of educational facilities in the 1970's have benefited women and helped reduce the literacy gender gap to 89 percent for men and 80 percent for women (1991 population census).²¹ However, the literacy rate was lower for the rural (80 percent) than the urban (90 percent) population, and in the states of Sabah (72 percent) and Sarawak (76 percent). School attendance, as a correlate of literacy, showed that 74 percent of rural women compared to 84 percent of men aged six years and above had ever attended school in 1991. The states of Sabah and Sarawak had the lowest percentage of population aged six years and above who had ever attended school in 1991, 71 and 76 percent respectively, as compared to 90 percent in the state of Selangor. This suggests that special attention in terms of access to education should be given to women, especially those in the rural stratum, in the states of Sabah and Sarawak in order to improve the level of literacy.

Similar observations can be made about disparities between the rural and urban sector, as well as among ethnic groups of the population regarding the health conditions of women, especially in terms of maternal mortality and fertility rates. The high maternal mortality rates among rural Malays reflect their poor access to health services and facilities as well as education, resulting in low health status, which could constrain their advancement and participation in development.

²¹ Social Statistics Bulletin, Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1995.