In recent years, women entrepreneurs have become increasingly visible to the Malaysian public. Malaysia ranked third behind Indonesia and Brazil in terms of gender equality in entrepreneurship (GEM, 2017). Out of the thirteen Malaysians that made it to Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia 2018 list, six were women entrepreneurs. At least in media representation, more and more women are becoming household and well-known names in various sectors – tech, environmentalism, retail and e-commerce, as well as social entrepreneurship. This progress, however, may belie the fact that women still have ways to go, as they face unique barriers to entry in entrepreneurship and growth in business.

The gap between women- and men-owned businesses is still very large. In 2015, from a total of 920,624 establishments, only 187,265 are women-owned. This shows that men still dominate top level positions in businesses, at approximately 80 percent (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2016).

A sizeable bulk of Malaysian entrepreneurial research revolves around small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and micro-entrepreneurs. In many of these research, the aim was to investigate whether certain micro-credit institutions or programs have been successful (or would be needed) in training future entrepreneurs (Suhaimi, Mamun, Zainol, Nawi, & Saufi, 2018; UNDP, 2008; Mamun, 2016; Hashim, Razak, & Amir, 2011). Meanwhile, Mutalib, Arshad, Syakiran, Ismail, & Ahmad (2015) provided a macro view of this area by compiling all Malaysian entrepreneurial initiatives from the government designed specifically for women.

Literature had also shown that Malaysian female entrepreneurs face negative societal perceptions associated with doing business, especially in rural areas. In an in-depth qualitative study, it was found that besides financial capital, a woman’s marital status was a major factor in her venture (Musa, Shuib, Selamat, Isad,
Osman, & Bakar, 2016). The public’s perception of a woman entrepreneur, especially a widow, tended to be negative. Alam, Senik, & Jani (2012) had women entrepreneurs citing ‘prejudice against women’ and ‘not enough support’ as their challenges. Besides that, decision-making and child care were areas where gender responsibilities hinder their progress as it increased the roles they needed to fulfil.

The glass ceiling effect is not usually mentioned explicitly in research as one of the many barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, however, a negative perception of women in business can be said to lead to discriminatory practices towards them.

Interestingly, Sharif (2015) had conducted a study to explore the glass ceiling phenomenon among women legal professionals, which found that the barriers hindering the women's progress in the organization drove them to start their own businesses. With an average of five years running their newfound business, the study stated that these women have successfully turned into entrepreneurs. It remains a question whether the glass ceiling is also present in starting an entrepreneurship – an area that future studies can further probe into.

Research focusing on the communication style, behaviors and management style of women leaders (in business) tended to be qualitative in nature, to gain rich information on the subject. Research had highlighted livelihood strategies (Musa, et al., A Study of Women Micro Entrepreneurs in Malaysia: Livelihood Strategies and Challenges, 2016), researched motivations (Alam, Senik, & Jani, 2012), and investigated communication styles (Halim & Razak, 2014).

REFERENCES


