



KANITA MATTERS

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND GENDER

Malaysia's Lockdown Pays Little Attention to Women's Needs



Jokes about men shopping hide serious harm from worsening gender imbalance

By: Noraida Endut

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When the Malaysian government imposed a Movement Control Order in mid-March, requiring almost all workplaces to close and employees to work from home, after a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, the last thing it expected was jokes about men shopping.

But a specific measure of the Movement Control Order, or MCO, is to allow only one person, the "head of the family," to go out to buy groceries. Despite there being close to 240,000 single mothers in Malaysia, who are likely in charge of their households, the presumption remains strong that the head of the family is a man.

After this announcement, jokes abounded among Malaysians on how untenable it is to make a man go out to buy fish and vegetables because knowledge about these things is the woman's domain. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development did not ask how this rule might impact single mothers going out to get their home supplies, especially if they have young children and no other adults around to babysit.

Jokes aside, Malaysia's government does not appear to have considered the distinct implications of the MCO and working from home on Malaysian women, from work-life balance to domestic violence. It needs to rectify this, and fast.

Malaysians have not experienced a situation akin to a lockdown in 50 years. Few are familiar with the notions of working from home or flexible work arrangements, which have been introduced or implemented as a matter of national policy only in recent years and are not yet widespread.

The MCO means that where ordinarily during the day parents go out to work and children are sent to school or day care, all of them are now to stay in together and establish new routines.

In his speech persuading citizens to stay in, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said: "Mothers now have more time at home and they can try all sorts of new recipes to cook for the family." This remark missed the point: far from giving mothers a break, the MCO actually requires them to continue fulfilling their job obligations while concurrently playing the primary caregiving role.

The division of labor in Malaysian families, even when both husband and wife are working outside the home, is already unequal. During the MCO, women's complex burden of work and family is becoming more distinctive.

The Movement Control Order allows only the head of the family to go out to buy groceries.

In the words of a friend, a senior female professor, scientist and faculty leader: "Working from home for me is one hand on the ladle and the other on the phone."

A government reminder that all family members should equally contribute toward household chores would have better served to improve the lives of women working from home than half-jesting references to gendered expectations.

Recent public service announcements from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development further show it is fundamentally unaware about how such narratives, drawing on gender stereotypes, harm women.

The public service announcements, now widely joked about around the world, contained advice to women on preventing COVID-19 and dealing with the lockdown. They asked women not to wear "house clothes" but to dress up and put on make up while working from home.

They also guided women on preventing conflict with their husbands during MCO by avoiding nagging and by humoring the husbands' ineptitude at housework in a funny voice fashioned after magical cartoon cat Doraemon. Predictably, the announcement received much flak and the ministry has since apologized.

But even so, the government's actions, words and responses in relation to the MCO are continuous demonstrations of deep-seated misogyny and insufficient political will to effectively address gender inequality and insensitivity.

Malaysia has pledged commitments to international instruments on gender equality and empowerment, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Sustainable Development Goals, but visible change is still slow in coming in terms of translating these commitments at the national level.

Malaysia remains trailing in gender equality rankings in the world. The Global Gender Gap Index report for 2020 shows Malaysia ranks 104th out of 153 countries, the second lowest among ASEAN countries. It places 97th in economic empowerment, a fall since 2018, in the same survey.

Its female labor force participation rate is 55% compared to 80% for men. Only 16% of Malaysia's members of parliament and ministers are women.

What the government should have been doing, when thinking about the MCO, is urgently addressing its impact on single-headed households; the surge of domestic violence and child abuse reported during the period; and the unequal gender division of labor at home that affects women's productive work.

The COVID-19 crisis and the MCO could, ironically, be opportune testing grounds for the Ministry of Women's new leadership to showcase its readiness and aptitude to deal with women and gender issues. It must be said, however, that it has yet to make the grade.

The original article can be accessed via <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Malaysia-s-lockdown-pays-little-attention-to-women-s-needs>

Kanita Seminar Series 2019-2020

KANITA organizes a series of presentations bi-monthly. This platform provides an opportunity for both local and international scholars to share their knowledge and views on issues related to gender.

In the past year, a range of topics were discussed in the Seminar Series. They are as follows:

Presenters	Affiliation	Topics
Prof Maznah Mohamad	Department of Malay Studies, and Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, NUS	The Intersectionality of Women's Identity and Implications on the Women's Movement
Prof. Rashidah Shuib	School of Health Sciences Health Campus, USM	Sex-Disaggregated Data and Gender Analysis Matter(s) in Advancing Gender Inclusion
Dr. Sharifah Zahhura Syed Abdullah	Centre for Research on Women and Gender, KANITA	Sweat is your fat crying
Dr. Belayeth Hussain	Centre for Research on Women and Gender, KANITA	Strict Policy interventions and Social Distancing in Response to the Covid-19 Outbreak
Assistant Professor Dr. Wan Wardatul Amani Wan Salim	Biotechnology Department, International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM)	Overcoming Challenges of Gender Inequality in Academia During COVID- 19 Outbreak

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Seminar Series have been conducted through online platforms as webinars.

KANITA HIGHLIGHTS 2020

International Women's Day 2020

Theme: “#EachforEqual: Realising the H.E.B.A.T. Agenda”

10 March 2020

In conjunction with International Women's Day (IWD) which falls on 8th March every year, Center for Research on Women and Gender (KANITA) celebrates the day by organising events to commemorate and highlight the challenges and achievements of girls and women worldwide.

#EachforEqual brings a lot of meaning, especially in gender issues. This is a sensitive issue not only in Malaysian society but also around the world. Therefore, KANITA USM becomes driven in research, co-creation of knowledge, advocacy and community engagement, utilizing and promoting a gender equality framework.

Along with the motto of our university, which is We Lead, the university will ensure that all graduates who are able to be leaders regardless of their gender to be given the opportunity to be encouraged and trained. USM is also committed towards achieving the fifth sustainable development goal of gender equality, for USM. On 10th March 2020, USM's Student Representative Council (MPP USM) cooperated with BHEPA and KANITA to organise the university level International Women's Day 2020 (IWD).

The event of “Touch Down with Lisa Kamal: Realising the HEBAT agenda” is the highlight of the IWD celebration. We invited a special guest, Lisa Kamal, to have a casual “chit-chat” and engage with the USM community. Lisa, who graduated from the University of Wisconsin became widely known when her valedictorian

speech on her convocation day was widely shared online. That she was chosen to represent her peers and the affirmative content of her speech gave positive impact to many young people, especially women, who watched her. She epitomises women's capabilities and potential success when given equal access and opportunities. Her conversations with the audience promoted one important message: for young people, especially women, to develop confidence, always accepting challenges to better themselves through acquiring multiple skills and conquer gender barriers. Students are also important agents of social change towards gender equality.



International Women's Day Movie Night

6 March 2020

As part of the USM IWD celebration, KANITA together with Bahagian Hal Ehwal Pelajar & Alumni (BHEPA) and MPP USM organized a movie night on 6 March 2020. This event featured movies promoting women's empowerment: 'Pink' and 'Brave'. Both movies were concurrently shown in DK V (Pink) and DK T (Brave).

The movie 'Pink' shows the legal battle of Minal and her friends to prove their innocence from allegation of prostitution and attempted murder. The movie criticises sociocultural perceptions towards women that consider women to be deviant when they don't subscribe to societal standards of thoughts and behaviour.

The other movie, 'Brave', is a computer-animated fantasy film produced by Pixar Studios which tells the story of a princess named Merida who defies an age-old

custom, causing chaos in the kingdom by expressing the desire not to be betrothed. When her mother falls victim to a beastly curse, Merida must look within herself and find the key to saving the kingdom.



Stakeholder Consultation: Driving Refugee Empowerment Through Digital Inclusion in South-East Asia 20-21 August 2019

The Stakeholder Consultation: Driving Refugee Empowerment Through Digital Inclusion in South-East Asia was held on 20-21 August 2019 in Mercure Hotel, Pulau Pinang. This programme was organized by KANITA, USM, and The Urban Institute, Heriot-Watt University and funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). This event aims to share the findings of a participatory research project on the use of digital media by Rohingya refugees, showcase innovative practical initiatives which apply digital tools to promote the empowerment of refugees, identify key areas for partnership working between the community and other organisations for supporting refugee empowerment through digital media and establish a network of organizations and individuals for promoting the digital inclusivity of refugees

Rapid technological advances have resulted in the increasing digitalization of services and communication of information on a global scale, and access to the internet has been recognized as a basic human right. In parallel with this, war and political conflict have led to the forced migration of people in many international contexts, including South-East Asia. This presents both opportunities and challenges for female and male Rohingya and other refugees.

Harpswell ASEAN Program in Women's Leadership 16-27 June, 2019

Harpswell ASEAN Program in Women's Leadership is a two-week Program conducted annually since 2016. This is a collaboration training between Harpswell Foundation and KANITA. In 2019, the Program was scheduled 16-27 June and attended by 22 accomplished young women from all ten ASEAN countries, plus Nepal. We also welcomed back some of our alumnae who helped us throughout our Program to build out the alumnae network.

In this Program, we have covered topics such as gender studies, Southeast Asian government and society, women's health, leadership skills, critical thinking, debate, civic engagement, and communications & technology. We were so fortunate to have amazing local and international trainers. Throughout the lectures, the trainers give the participants the insight on how to tackle the barriers that has been created by gender inequality and discrimination.

The outcomes from this programme are to develop a deep understanding of the current uses of digital technology by Rohingya refugee communities, to enhance awareness of gaps in current service provision for Rohingya and other refugee communities, to increase the accessibility of digital tools in enabling refugees to gain access to crucial information, including about their rights and available services, to increase understanding of how online services can be made more accessible and appropriate to promote the human rights of Rohingya and other refugee communities, to identify new partners to work with within Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the UK to promote refugee empowerment through digital media and advanced understanding of the scope for building strategic alliances within South East Asia



Besides activities, the participants shared their experiences as women and talk about the issues that women face in their countries due to lack of knowledge about gender equality.

This year, we had this opportunity to have one of notable female speakers in the Philippines, Professor Dr. Aurora Javate de Dios. Professor De Dios is a Professor in International Relations, Migration and Gender studies. She had an inspiring presentation about the gender discrimination that has been imposed on women and she also shared her experience in fighting against inequality.

As their extracurricular activities, the participants had a visit to Trip to Mengkuang Titi village to meet female entrepreneurs and at the same time experienced the authentic life in a Malaysian village. They also had a visit to the Women's Center for Change (WCC) and learned about the activities that the centre does to help women.



A Visit by Universitas Airlangga Surabaya, Indonesia 23 January 2020

On 23rd January 2020, a team led by the Professor Emy Surambi from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Political Sciences, has visited our centre with the aim of initiating long term research and academic activities between the two universities. The team, which included Professor Mustakim Mosfud and another four members met our Director, Prof. Dr Noraida Endut and all the academic members. They have been briefed by our Director about the centre and discussed the possibility of collaboration in near future. For the first collaboration, this meeting has agreed to a joint venture in this year conference, KANITA International Conference on Gender Studies (KICGS2020).



Workshop on Ethnography 14 November 2019

Workshop on Ethnography was held in Rafidah Aziz Conference Room on 14 November 2019. Often people have a misleading conception that performing an in-depth interview or a focus group discussion is considered Ethnography. This workshop aims to help participants understand what ethnography is; comprehend different types of ethnographic research; the ways in which ethnographic research differ from other research approaches; the comparison between in-depth interviews and participant observation with structured questionnaires; ethnographers' challenges in building trust and rapport; the minimum time of stay in the field when ethnography is used as a mean of data elicitation and finally the methods to analyze ethnographic data.

Professor Emerita Dato' Dr. Wazir Jahan Karim, the first KANITA Director and also the first woman to conduct anthropological research on the Orang Asli (indigenous minorities) in Malaysia was invited to give a keynote speech entitled *Ethnography through Time*. Prof. Wazir had to live for two years with the Ma' Betsise' (popularly known as the Mah Meri) on Carey Island, off the west coast of Malaysia. This workshop continued with a presentation by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nor Hafizah Selamat on *Ethnographic Approaches and Research Design* and sharing session by three experts sharing their experiences in conducting ethnographic research in three different communities using classical ethnographies approaches. The presenters were Dr. Sharifah Zahhura Syed Abdullah on *Immersing with the Orang Asli community*, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatan Hamamah Yahaya on *Dealing with the stigmatized (HIV community)* and Dr. Shariffah Suraya Syed

The participants then were asked to conduct an observation around campus based on their own interest during their lunch hour. The workshop continued with another sharing session by two experts sharing their experiences in conducting ethnographic research in two different communities using contemporary ethnographic approaches. They were Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nor Hafizah Selamat on *'Step-in-step-out' ethnography (tourist community)* and Dr. Lai Wan Teng on *Documenting the everyday lives of the migrant community*. The workshop ended with a presentation from Assoc. Prof. Nor Hafizah Selamat and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fatan Hamamah Yahaya on *Making Sense of the Data*.



Research in KANITA

KANITA has been working within the framework of gender equality and social justice. It prides itself on the research that is based on the lived reality of society especially women. However, KANITA acknowledges that the evidence acquired during the process may not immediately leave an impression in policy but will empower women and men for a better tomorrow.

KANITA members who are both trained gender researchers and advocates, have continuously and actively applied for various grants to conduct research that would contribute to the corpus of knowledge in gender studies as well as bringing change to society through influencing policy decisions. Research done in KANITA ventures into diverse disciplines and issues but consistently utilises the gender lens that deeply inquires into sociocultural impact of structures, norms and practices on women's lives.

Current projects in KANITA since 2019-December 2020:

No .	Title of the project	Principal investigator
1	Piloting Health Interventions to Advance the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women Migrant Workers in Malaysia Funder: Newton Ungku Omar Fund –British Council	Prof. Dr. Noraida Endut
2	Research On Technology-Facilitation Violence Against Women Funder: Due Diligence Initiatives, INC	Prof. Dr. Noraida Endut
3	Harpwell ASEAN Program in Women's Leadership Funder: Harpwell Foundation, Cambodia	Prof. Dr. Noraida Endut
4	A trial-implementation of the toolkit on sexual and reproductive health and rights for migrant workers: a case study of a local employer workplace Funder: United Nation Gender Theme Group	Dr. Lai Wan Teng
5	Impact of Cultural, Nutrition and Lifestyle Transition on Human Milk Composition of the Orang Asli Communities in Peninsular Malaysia Funder: Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS)	Dr. Sharifah Zahhura Binti Syed Abdullah
6	Due Diligence in Cases of Sexual Harassment in The Civil Service in Malaysia: Towards models for sustainable intervention Funder: Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS)	Prof. Dr. Noraida Endut
7	Conceptualizing the Visibility and Political Ambition of Women in Political Parties in Malaysia Funder: Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS)	Dr. Zaireeni Binti Azmi
8	Women's Visibility at the Decision Making Level: The Case Study of Women in Public University in Malaysia Funder: Research University Grants	Dr. Zaireeni Binti Azmi
9	Promoting Family Friendly Work Environment: A Study of Maternity Protection Relating to and Beyond Pregnancy Funder: Research University Grants	Prof. Madya Dr. Nor Hafizah Selamat

There are also other grants waiting for ethical clearance and at the final phase of signing contract.

No	Title of the Project	Principal investigator
1	Malaysia Demand Study -Upper B40 and Lower M40 Funder: Miliman	Dr. Zaireeni Azmi
2	Achieving the targets for Gender Equality (SDG5) and Decent Work (SDG8) through the creation of family-friendly workplace (FFW): A study of policy and practice in public and private organisations towards a FFW Funder: Research University Grants	Prof. Dr. Noraida Endut
3	Addressing the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of women migrant workers in Malaysia- in the factory Funder: Research University Grants	Dr. Lai Wan Teng
4	Fighting against divorce through positive enforcement in the Malaysian context Funder: Short term Grant	Dr. Leila Mohajer

KANITA FAMILY NEWS

Farah Syazwani Binti Hayrol Aziz

KANITA takes this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Farah Syazwani Binti Hayrol Aziz for her graduation on 25th September 2019. She received the Master of Social Sciences (Gender Studies) degree through her study (by research mode) in KANITA. She was supervised by Assoc. Prof. Dr Nor Hafizah Selamat (Main Supervisor) and Prof. Dr. Noraida Endut (Co- Supervisor). She is currently in the process of applying for her PhD study in KANITA. We wish her the best of luck in her future undertakings.

Nur Zafifa Binti Kamarunzaman

KANITA takes this opportunity to congratulate Dr. Nur Zafifa Binti Kamarunzaman for her graduation on 24th September 2019. She received her PhD (Gender Studies) degree through her study in KANITA under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr Nor Hafizah Selamat (Main Supervisor) and Prof. Dr. Noraida Endut (Co- Supervisor). She is current Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM. We wish her the best of luck in her future undertakings.

Senutha A/P Poopale Ratthinan

KANITA takes this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Senutha A/P Poopale Ratthinan for her graduation in October, 2020. She received her PhD (Gender Studies) degree through her study in KANITA under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nor Hafizah Selamat (Main Supervisor) and Dr. Leila Mohajer (Co- Supervisor). She is currently, the administrative and diplomatic officer in the Public Service Department in Putra Jaya. We wish her the best of luck in her future undertakings.

Ameer Ali Buriro

KANITA takes this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Ameer Ali Buriro for his graduation in October, 2020. He received his PhD (Gender Studies) degree through his study in KANITA under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Noraida Endut. He is current Lecturer at University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Hyderabad, Pakistan. We wish him the best of luck in his future undertakings.



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