

**Closed-Door Roundtable Discussion
on
Issues Impacting the Malay community in Singapore
Session Four: The Lived Experiences of Singaporean Malay Women: Issues
and Challenges**

Monday, 5 December 2022

Conference Room, Level 1
Oei Tiong Ham Building
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
National University of Singapore (*Bukit Timah Campus*)

PROGRAMME

2.45 pm – 3.00 pm

Registration

3.00 pm – 3.05 pm

Welcome and Introduction

Dr Mohamad Shamsuri Bin Juhari
Research Fellow
Institute of Policy Studies

3.05 pm – 3.35 pm

Presentations

Speaker

Dr Suriani Suratman
Senior Lecturer
Department of Malay Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences &
Convenor
Gender Studies Minor Programme
National University of Singapore

Discussant

Ms Hamidah Bahashwan
Chief
Happy Heart

3.35 pm – 4.45 pm

Discussion

- What are the challenges faced by Malay women in wanting to excel in their careers?

- What current initiatives have been undertaken to overcome these challenges?
- What more can we do as a community and as a nation to enhance these existing efforts?

4.45 pm – 5.00 pm

Summary Remarks

5.00 pm

End

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SYNOPSIS

Recognising the significant role played by women in society, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) dedicated 2021 as the Year of Celebrating SG Women. Despite the progress that women in general have achieved, Singaporean Malay women nevertheless continue to grapple with a myriad of challenges such as gendered perceptions of marriage, motherhood as well as the many other traditional roles imposed on women.

In the area of employment, a challenge faced by Malay women pertains to efficacy in performing their jobs. While official statistics reflect that labour force participation for Malay women has been on the rise, many Malay women nevertheless tell us that they continue to struggle with longstanding biases arising from negative societal norms. For example, mothers often bear the brunt in performing caregiving and housekeeping duties at home while at the same time attempting to fulfil their responsibilities at their workplace. As a result, many Malay women end up withdrawing from the workforce due to domestic commitments, thereby depriving the nation of this group's potential in contributing to the country's economy.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

HAMIDAH Bahashwan is the seed planter for many social services initiated in Singapore addressing the woman's role and challenges. Firstly, through PPIS (formerly known as Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapore — Young Women Muslim Association) that is the champion for Muslim Women, she noted that many of them do not know their rights from legal and religious standpoints that led to them suffering in silence and bearing the abuse and neglect by their partners who are supposed to be their providers and protectors. Mdm Hamidah took on the challenge to set up the first single-parent family service for Malay-speaking clients funded by NCSS — now known as As-Salam Family Service Centre, a specialist centre run by PPIS. In 1992, Ms Hamidah took on a bigger challenge to address the Muslim community needs under AMP (formerly known as Association of Muslim Professionals), to support families in crisis where majority of the clients were women who are burdened with the extra responsibility of coping with multiple roles — being a wife, mother and caregiver for their own parents. Since 1981, Ms Hamidah continues to serve women who are typically the ones who reach out to get service for their family members — dealing with real issues such as financial burden, marital issues and psycho-social-emotional and mental health issues. Currently, Ms Hamidah is the country representative for International Muslim Women Coaching Academy, where she has been trained as Master Coach and continues to support women in managing their personal and relationship challenges.

SURIANI Suratman is a social anthropologist and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Malay Studies and Convenor of the Minor in Gender Studies at the National University of Singapore. Her teaching covers areas in Malay culture and society, lived experiences of families and households as well as artmaking in the Malay and Indonesian archipelago. Her research focuses on Malay ethnic identities and the (re)production of portrayals of Malays, gender relations and inequalities in Malay families and households as well as politics of remembering. Her recent article, “Skills for ‘Marriage of Lifetime’: An Examination of Muslim Marriage Preparation Handbooks in Singapore, 1974 to 2018” was published in *Religions* (2021), an online journal. She is currently a member of a research project funded by the NHB Heritage Research Grant, which analyses representations and constructions of being and becoming female through colonial photographs of former British and Dutch colonies in the Malay world.

MOHAMAD SHAMSURI Bin Juhari is Research Fellow in the Society and Culture Department at the Institute of Policy Studies. Prior to his foray into the field of research, Dr Mohamad Shamsuri had acquired a wide range of work experiences in the education service, ranging from classroom teaching to senior management and leadership positions in various academic institutions. He has taught students across diverse backgrounds and abilities, from at-risk youths to those in the Gifted Education Programme. He has also designed and facilitated curricula at the Secondary, International Baccalaureate Diploma, Undergraduate and Masters levels. Following a previous portfolio where he headed the Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs, Dr Mohamad Shamsuri’s scope of research at the Institute of Policy Studies focuses on issues pertaining to the local Malay-Muslim community, specifically in relation to identity, family and education. He received his PhD in education from the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. He also holds a bachelors and masters in sociology from National University of Singapore as well as a postgraduate diploma in education from National Institute of Education.

Last modified on 23 November 2022

