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Chapter Six: Employment and Unemployment of Females

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ABSTRACT

The decline in the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) between 1970 and 1980 was notable in the under 20 and 40-45 age groups, especially in rural, agricultural and related occupations, for Bidayuh and Other Indigenous ethnic groups. The decline was in part due to improved data collection, definition of LFPR, and increased retention in the expanding school system. Related to labour force participation are the unemployed, both active and inactive. This chapter showed that compared with males, female unemployment rates were higher in both urban and rural areas in the 10 and over, 10 to 14 and 65 and over age groups.

CHAPTER SIX

Employment and Unemployment of Females

“There is a tide in the affairs of women which, taken at the flood leads God knows where.”

LORD BYRON, *Don Juan*, Canto V, St. 2.

SUMMARY

The decline in the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) between 1970 and 1980 was notable in the under 20 and 40-54 age groups, especially in rural, agricultural and related occupations, for Bidayuh and Other Indigenous ethnic groups. The decline was in part due to improved data collection, definition of LFPR, and increased retention in the expanding school system. Related to labour force participation are the unemployed, both active and inactive. This chapter showed that compared with males, female unemployment rates were higher in both urban and rural areas in the 10 and over, 10 to 14 and 65 and over age groups.

6.1 Employment of Females in Sarawak, 1970-1980

INTRODUCTION

Where would the women of Sarawak be in years to come? Only God knows. While it might appear to be a "heresy" to venture foretelling the women's future, it has been accepted as a professional necessity to scientifically describe and explain past structure and trends so as to estimate, project or interpolate future patterns of growth. These have become possible not only because of the increasing sophistication in analytical techniques; and they have become necessary because they provide the perspective background and statistical base for rational decision-making, be it in terms of policy and strategy formulation or in terms of long-term and short-term planning.

Multidimensional and interdisciplinary as the problems of woman are, it is this paper's objective to trace and describe certain major patterns of development among the female labour force in Sarawak, in particular, it will focus its scope on the employment structure of females in the State. The reference period will be limited to the decade between 1970 and 1980, while the figures used will be based on available data published in the 1970 and 1980 Population Census Reports. And, the term "female" will be used in preference over "woman", because the analysis below includes females aged 10 and over, irrespective of marital status; after all, young females of today will become the women of tomorrow.

FEMALE LABOUR FORCE

Figures from the 1980 Population Census show that the female labour force, defined as those aged 10 and over who were employed or actively/inactively unemployed in the reference week prior to the interview date, made up of only 36.9 percent of the Sarawak labour force in 1980, a drop from its 39.5 percent share in 1970. This decline is reflected in the low annual growth rate of female labour force between 1970 and 1980; its rate of 2.7 percent, lower than the state population growth rate of 2.9 percent, is very much lower than the male's rate of 3.8 percent. During the 1970 – 1980 decade, the state labour force grew annually at 3.4 percent from 346,000 to 485,210 persons, with 69.7 percent of the growth contributed by males, and only 30.3 percent by

females; the average annual increase for males was 9,702 persons, while that for females was only 4,218 persons. (see Table 1)

Table 1: Growth of Labour Force (aged 10 and over), Sarawak, 1970-1980

Census Year	Sex	Males	Females	Total
	1970 ^(a)		209,366 (60.5)	136,643 (39.5)
1980 ^(b)		306,384 (63.1)	178,826 (36.9)	485,210 (100.0)
1970-1980 Annual Growth	Persons	9,702 (69.7)	4,218 (30.3)	13,920 (100.0)
	Percents	3.8	2.7	3.4

Notes : (a) Figures include "Employed but not classifiable by occupation" and "Not working but looking for first job"

(b) Figures include 23,115 persons inactively unemployed. It also includes "Activities inadequately described/unknown" and "Looking for first job". The resultant figures is commonly referred to as "work force"; i.e. all employed plus actively unemployed but had previously worked plus first time job seekers.

(c) All figures in bracket refer to percentages.

Sources : (1) *1970 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Vol. 1 - Basic Population Tables, Part XIII - Sarawak*, Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Jan. 1976 (Table 2.17)

(2) *1980 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Part 2 - State Population Report - Sarawak*. Department of Statistics, Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur, Oct 1983 (Table 6.1)

DECLINING PARTICIPATION RATES

Table 2 shows that the state labour force participation rates (LFPR) for both males and females declined during the 1970 – 1980 period. Behind this overall decline, it is interesting that the declines for both sexes happened only in the rural sector; increases were recorded for both sexes in the urban sector.

Table 2: Labour Force Participation Rate by Strata and Sex, Sarawak, 1970 – 1980 (Aged 10 and over)

STRATA	SEX	MALES		FEMALES		TOTAL	
	RATES	1970 ^(c)	1980	1970	1980	1970	1980
URBAN	L ^(a)	62.3	67.1	20.1	25.9	41.1	46
	U	-	5.4	-	11.3	-	7.1
		(3.2) ^(b)	(1.4)	(9.2)	(2.6)	(4.6)	(1.7)
RURAL	L	74.1	71.5	52.9	44.3	63.5	57.9
	U	-	5.3	-	7.4	-	6.1
		(1.6)	(1.3)	(3.1)	(1.5)	(2.2)	(1.4)
TOTAL	L	72.0	70.3	47.0	40.8	59.5	55.7
	U	-	5.3	-	7.9	-	6.2
		(1.8)	(1.4)	(3.6)	(1.7)	(2.5)	(1.5)

- Notes : (a) L means Labour Force Participation Rate (%), and U means active plus inactive unemployment rate (%); population excludes "unknown".
- (b) Figures in bracket refer to active unemployment rate.
- (c) The 1970 unemployment figures refer to active rates only.

- Sources : (1) *1970 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Vol. 1 - Basic Population Tables, Part XIII - Sarawak*, Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Jan. 1976 (Table 2.17)
- (2) *1980 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Part 2 - State Population Report - Sarawak*. Department of Statistics, Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur, Oct 1983 (Table 6.1)

The urban increase was partly due to higher unemployment in 1980; higher unemployment was caused mainly by the number of inactively unemployed, a labour force component not identified in the 1970 Census. Although no comparable figures were available in 1970 for active and inactive unemployment, 1980 figures showed that the rates for this component of labour force were much higher in urban than in rural areas; this was especially so for females whose unemployment rate of 11.3 percent in urban areas compared with only 7.4 percent in rural areas. Also, as could be expected of unemployment incidences in developing countries, the unemployment rate for Sarawak female in 1980 (7.9 percent) was nearly one-and-a-half times

higher than that for males (5.3 percent); this sex differential was even greater in urban areas where the female's rate was twice as high as that of the males.

The overall decline in LFPR for both sexes during the seventies was due partly to the increased retention of youths aged 10 – 19 years within the school system.

Table 3: Female Labour Force Participation Rate^(a) (aged 10 and over), Sarawak, 1970-1980

Age Group	Census Year	
	1970	1980 ^(b)
10-14	21.3	11.9
15-19	51.8	41.2
20-24	54.7	52.2
25-29	53.5	45.2
30-34	54.8	48.0
35-39	55.2	50.7
40-44	57.7	52.7
45-49	57.0	52.5
50-54	53.0	50.7
55-59	44.8	46.3
60-64	39.3	39.1
65 & over	22.4	28.0

- Notes : (a) All figures are in percentages.
(b) Include inactively unemployed.

- Sources : (1) *1970 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Vol. 1 - Basic Population Tables, Part XIII - Sarawak*, Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Jan. 1976 (Table 2.17)
(2) *1980 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Part 2 - State Population Report - Sarawak*. Department of Statistics, Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur, Oct 1980 (Table 6.1)

Table 3 shows the level and pattern of female LFPR in 1970 and 1980 for different age-groups. Fairly similar to the case in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah, age curves from this table will show a bimodal pattern in Sarawak