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Problems Faced By Women In Advancing In Newspaper Management

By

Thana Bte Hj Abdullah
LIKE ANY OTHER CAREER, JOURNALISM HAS ITS FAIR SHARE OF PROBLEMS AND THIS INCLUDES DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS.

I HAVE WORKED IN BERNAMA -- THE MALAYSIAN NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY -- FOR ALMOST SIX YEARS. THE WORKING CONDITIONS AND SCOPE OF WORK THERE ARE MORE OR LESS THE SAME AS IN THE NEWSPAPERS.

I HAVE FOUND IN MY YEARS WITH BERNAMA, THAT WHILE THERE IS NO ILLICIT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS, THERE HAVE BEEN INSTANCES WHEN EDITORS HAVE GIVEN PREFERENCE TO MALE JOURNALISTS.

FOR EXAMPLE, EDITORS WOULD HAND CERTAIN ASSIGNMENTS TO MALE REPORTERS ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT WOMEN JOURNALISTS, ESPECIALLY MARRIED ONES, WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO WORK LATE, OR WERE UNWILLING TO GO ON OUTSTATION ASSIGNMENTS.

ANOTHER REASON IS THAT A PARTICULAR ASSIGNMENT, SUCH AS A RIOT, MIGHT BE "HAZARDOUS" TO A FEMALE REPORTER AND IT WOULD BE "SAFER" TO SEND A MALE.

THERE IS ALSO A MISCONCEPTION THAT WOMEN JOURNALISTS WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO HANDLE ADEQUATELY THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT COMES WITH HOLDING A HIGH POSITION BECAUSE THEY ARE "MORE EMOTIONAL", HAVE PROBLEMS COPING WITH THEIR FAMILY LIFE, OR MIGHT FACE PROBLEMS FROM THEIR MALE SUBORDINATES.

THIS LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN A WOMAN JOURNALIST'S PROFESSIONALISM HINDERS HER FROM ACHIEVING HER BEST IN HER WORK.

HOWEVER, WHEN A WOMAN HAS BEEN PROMOTED TO A HIGH POSITION, SHE SOMETIMES HAS TO PUT UP WITH ACCUSATIONS OF BEING TOO BOSSY.

AS FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA, NOT MANY ARE PROMOTED TO HIGHER POSTS. MANY OF THEM ARE STILL AT THE REPORTING AND SUB-EDITOR LEVELS.

IF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES WERE GIVEN, I FEEL WOMEN JOURNALISTS WOULD BE ABLE TO PERFORM AS WELL AS, IF NOT BETTER THAN THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS.

IF SUCH DISCRIMINATION PERSIST, WOMEN JOURNALISTS WOULD NOT HAVE THE CHANCE TO PROVE THEMSELVES AND THIS WOULD AFFECT THEIR PROMOTION CHANCES.

IN FACT, THEY ARE ONLY A FEW WOMEN WHO ARE IN THE HIGHER RANKS OF NEWSPAPER COMPANIES IN MY COUNTRY INCLUDING BERNAMA, DESPITE THEIR HAVING THE NECESSARY QUALIFICATION AND EXPERIENCE.

AS FOR JOURNALISM EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA, NEARLY ALL HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS OFFER DEGREE AND DIPLOMA COURSES IN MASS COMMUNICATION. THERE IS NO DISCRIMINATION AGAINST FEMALE STUDENTS ENROLLING FOR THESE COURSES.