

## Women representation in the Malaysian Parliament : The Constraints

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Women are underrepresented in the parliament in most countries worldwide including Malaysia. They currently constituted approximately below 20% in both houses combined in parliaments worldwide. Therefore, their representation is highly significant to ensure that women's interest and concern are represented in the parliament because they are expected to "stand for" or "act for" women. Any interest was only considered an "interest" inside the parliament, hence, women representation really matter. From the textual analysis of Malaysian parliamentary debates in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Dewan Rakyat, thirteen women representatives have been identified to represent women issues or interest out of nineteen women backbenchers. The texts were coded under "feminist issues" as well as "social issues".

The focus of this paper was to examine the constraints faced by the women representatives in the *Dewan Rakyat* in representing women issues or interest. From face to face interviews, it was revealed that there were several factors emerged as constraints in women representation in the Dewan Rakyat. First, culture was the biggest hurdle for the women representation. Culture operated in several areas, in the political parties as well as in the society. In the former, it produced less opportunities for women to be elected as election candidatures or at the apex position of respective parties, while in the latter, it challenged the position of women as political leaders making them to be expected to work harder and perform better than the male MPs. Culture also could be seen through the non-acceptance or "silence policy" from the male MPs when women issues were raised. Second, was the institutional factor. The women MPs stated that the number of backbenchers women were few, making their voices less stronger in the Dewan Rakyat. The roles played by the backbenchers women were crucial in representing women issues and concerns. However, they preconditioned only women with certain qualities must add to the numerical representation of women in the *Dewan Rakyat*. Third, it was lack of awareness among the public about the roles played by the MPs, especially by the women MPs. The women MPs voices were not strong enough in the *Dewan Rakyat* without the support from the public about the issue, as the "external pressures" for the issues to be heard or considered. The last factor was the support system. The support system comprised of personal as well as formal type of support. Personal support system was crucial in making women representation possible in the *Dewan Rakyat*. Formal support was equally significant in making the representation of women issues by the women MPs effective.

In conclusion, this paper will conclude that, these problems should be tackled in order to make women representation in the *Dewan Rakyat* much more effective. The women MPs are crucial as they are expected to act for half of the population in the country. Hence, factors that hinder their effective representation should be legally or politically corrected.

