

# Islamic Leadership Behaviour Practices among Muslim Women Managers

**Mahazan Abdul Mutalib<sup>1</sup>, Siti Aishah Hussin<sup>2</sup>, Nurhafizah Mohd Sukor<sup>3</sup>, Khairunneezam Mohd Noor<sup>4</sup>, Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Wan Razali<sup>5</sup>, Rozita Abdullah<sup>6</sup>**

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## ABSTRACT

Researches have highlighted significant cultural and religious contextual differences in leadership studies. This research aims to investigate variance of Islamic leadership behaviour orientation among women managers in Malaysia government-linked companies or GLCs. This research is a survey research and was conducted between 2013 and 2015. A set of self-administered Islamic Leadership Inventory (ILI) questionnaire with 25 dimensions and 75 items were distributed to 208 Muslim women managers who hold leadership roles around Malaysia GLCs. The managerial backgrounds such as age, tenure and leadership positions were also investigated. The results of analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that Islamic leadership behaviour is understood and practiced widely by women officers across ages, years of working, and leadership positions. Future research could investigate ILI with leadership performance variables to increase the validity of the inventory.

**Keywords:** Islamic Leadership, Women Workers, Employees Profile, Glass-ceiling, Islamic Management, Leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> Mahazan Abdul Mutalib, Department of Da'wah and Islamic Management, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, Email : [mahazan@usim.edu.my](mailto:mahazan@usim.edu.my), ([Correspondent Author](#))

<sup>2</sup> Siti Aishah Hussin, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, Email: [aishahhussin.usim@gmail.com](mailto:aishahhussin.usim@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Nurhafizah Mohd Sukor, Department of Counselling, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, Email: [nurhafizah@usim.edu.my](mailto:nurhafizah@usim.edu.my)

<sup>4</sup> Khairunneezam Mohd Noor, Department of Da'wah and Islamic Management, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, Email: [neezam@usim.edu.my](mailto:neezam@usim.edu.my)

<sup>5</sup> Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Wan Razali, Department of Aqidah and Religious Studies, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, Email: [wmfazrul@usim.edu.my](mailto:wmfazrul@usim.edu.my)

<sup>6</sup> Rozita Abdullah, Department of Communication, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, Email: [rozita@usim.edu.my](mailto:rozita@usim.edu.my)

## **1. Introduction**

Prejudice for women workers to succeed as a leader is inherit in the gender role of women due to the dissimilarity of expectations about women being a leader (Eagly & Karau, 2002). There are dissimilar beliefs about leaders and women and similar belief about leaders and men. Prejudice in women managers can arise when women are judged as actual or potential occupants of leader roles. This is due to the inconsistency between the primarily communal qualities that women are often associated with and the primarily agentic qualities they believe are required to succeed as a leader (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Kennedy (2002) in the article from The Star Online (2008) reported that Malaysian managers view that gender equality has progressed to a satisfactory level, but show little support for more constructive change. He also stated the fact that companies in Malaysia generally favour men over women for top positions, women will continue to face barriers in stepping up to senior positions (The Star Online, 2008; Nurwati and Ahmad, 2012).

This article presents data of women corporate workers in Malaysia which was gathered between 2013 and 2015. The research presents a general overview of women managers' Islamic leadership behaviour by using a survey approach. The research is important to discuss the importance of women leadership roles in corporate sectors of Malaysia. Even though the survey approach is understood to be sufficient to explain the pattern of women leadership behaviour, the situation might be different for some individuals with different criteria or credentials. Therefore, the researchers recommend that a future qualitative study to be conducted to explore leadership among women corporate managers based on their age or other relevant criteria.

## **2. Women Managers in Malaysia Organizations**

In Malaysia, women make up a majority of the local workforce. The Malaysian Labour Force Report (Department of Statistics, 2015, p. 5) indicated that out of the total working female population in 2015 of 5.2 million, 73.1% were paid employees, 15.6% were own-account workers and 8.1% were unpaid family workers. Only 1.7% were categorized as employers (Ministry of Human Resource, 2015). The statistics show a considerable progress on the opportunity for women to experience professional advancement.

The extensive representation of women as leader in an organization is reinforced by the national agenda to include women in the workforce to accelerate the development of the country (Norliza Abdul Rahim, On Agenda Item 28: Advancement of Women of the Third Committee, 2012). As a result, the gender gap has narrowed and glass ceiling in most professions is greatly declined. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development which is responsible for addressing women's issues in Malaysia has had its budget increased from RM 1.8 million (US\$ 0.5 million) in 2001 to RM 30.5 million (US\$ 8.6 million) in 2015? and to RM 2 billion (US\$443 million) in 2016, which demonstrated the country's serious commitment to the cause (Ministry of Finance, 2015).

Despite the positive change in embracing women in the workforce, the role and function of women in an organization is often misled. Some studies, particularly in a strong patriarchal system, have shown no evidence and argument about the role of women in making managerial decisions in the workplace. In fact, the findings of the studies uncovered that women are not even being discriminated (Neale & Ozkanli, 2010). A study by Neale and Ozkanli (2010) revealed that female managers in Turkey are viewed to be more emotional (p. 9), which may hamper the process of making decision, resulting to why men are more preferred as a leader. Other studies, in a different social and economic context, found that women are still being discriminated and underestimated in terms of their involvement in managerial decision making. Women as leader were negatively perceived – they were assumed to be harsher and portrayed to be suffering from discrimination due to backlash effects and at the disadvantage in getting into leadership position (Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

However, in recent years, due to the vigorous national transformational agenda, there are studies that found women to be perceived as efficient leaders (Huda Hilal, 2015). In Malaysia, there seems to be a contradictory view about the position of female manager in organisation. For example, Huda Hilal (2015) claimed that women are perceived more positively based on their effective collaboration and being thoughtful to their subordinates. The conflicting findings from the previous studies possibly are due to diverse underpinning theoretical foundations and different social and economic context which justifies the need of future studies in this issue.

In this article, Islamic leadership is used as the overarching theoretical framework. The notion of leadership in the Islamic teaching put emphasis on leaders to understand that there are greater rewards to be sought other than financial and material gains; a concept which is greatly emphasised by the conventional leadership scholars. Islamic leadership encompasses every level of leadership roles and responsibilities and among different gender orientation. Mahazan and colleagues (2015) have identified specific inventory to measure Islamic Leadership or the Islamic Leadership Inventory (ILI). The derivation of the themes in the inventory was based on qualitative content analysis procedures from The Qur'an and Hadiths, Managerial Leadership and Servant Leadership literature, Contemporary Islamic Leadership literature as well as Classical texts of Islamic Leadership.

The 25 themes are: (1) Trustworthiness and Integrity, (2) Employees Orientation, (3) Self-evaluation, (4) Patience, (5) Outcome Orientation, (6) Empowerment, (7) Social Responsibility (8) Flexibility (9) Non-Calculative, (10) Spirituality, Religiousness and Piety, (11) Esprit De Corps, (12) Bravery, (13) Justice and Equity, (14) High Self-Reliance and High Self-Esteem, (15) Modesty and Shyness, (16) Impartially, (17) Moderation and Balance, (18) Good in Communication, (19) Free from environmental-constrains, (20) Earnest, (21) Cheerful, (22) Feared when angry, (23) Empowering Intelligent, Wisdom and Encourage Synergy, (24) Role Model, and (25) Avoid Conflict.

This article aims to discuss the understanding of Muslim women leaders who hold managerial positions in government link companies (GLCs) and their views on Islamic leadership based on the 25 themes as mentioned above.

### **3. Islam and Leadership**

Leadership is not just about position, power and influence. Leadership, in the previous scholarly researches, is also related to the questions of cognitive, behaviours, skills, capacities and culture (Wan Kamal Mujani et al., 2012). Islamic leadership is almost identical to conventional leadership besides its religious, moral, and human roots (Ali Mohammad Mir, 2010; Khaliq & Ogunsola, 2011; Abdalla, 2000). Mankind as the vicegerent of God, the Most High (*al-'Ali*), represents Him in the task of comprehending, conveying and executing the stipulated rules of Allah SWT. Man, act as leaders in its varieties of level: upon self, family, neighbourhood or state; and areas: religion, education, politics, economics and military. (Al-Zuhayli, 1418H, pp. 122-135).

According to Rafik Beekun (2012), for the past decades, different approaches to leadership have been proposed to improve leaders' effectiveness. These diverse approaches include transactional leadership, transformational leadership, responsible leadership, servant leadership and character-based model leadership. In his conclusion for character-centric model of leadership of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, he states: "We all have character, but it needs to be developed and nurtured – in the manner Muhammad (pbuh) did with himself and his followers. At the same time, that proponent of practical wisdom, Aristotle, would say that we also need to become virtuous realists" (Rafik Beekun, 2012). The life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is rich with diverse wisdoms and virtues for the use of many respects, including leadership (Muhammad Tewfik Ramzi, 1949).

In the Islamic teachings, the whole Quranic and Prophetic (*sunnah*) wisdom on leadership are considered as general values, which could be applied by both men and women. However, there is certain specification (*takhṣīṣ*) or precise exemption (*istithnā'*) on gender roles such as in the issues of *fiqh al-Nisā'* (Islamic laws on women matters), which are discussed by the Muslim jurists (al-Shāfi'ī, 1939, 53-73; al-Zuhaylī, 1986, vol.1, 204-218; al-Shirāzī, 1988, 341-357 and 399-415; al-Shirāzī, 1995, 76-92 and 95-99). Therefore, values and specific rules on gender roles are considered as unique to certain gender and not for its counterpart, such as in the issues of leading the congregational prayer, marriage, divorce, inheritance and many more. Many authorities among modern Muslim scholars have discussed women and their role in leadership such as al-Būṭī (1996), al-Qardawi (2000) and Ṭāriq Muḥammad al-Suwaydān and Fayṣal 'Umar Bāsharāḥīl (2003). Women were among some of the most respected leaders and valuable religious scholars during the early years of Islam. Renowned names such as Khadijah Khuwailid, Aisyah and Hafsa bint Umar (may Allah be pleased with them) are not alien in the Islamic historical lineage and contribution.

Thus, identifying desirable, stable and effective behaviours of women leaders are important in Islam. In today's modern era, the understanding of leadership in Islam has always been confused with the misbehaviours of Muslim leaders' themselves (al-Attas & Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, 2007; Malik bin Nabi, 2012; The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2012; Abadalla, 2000; Ahmad, 2004; Abuznaid, 2006; Shah, 2005). Most importantly, the behaviours of leadership in Islam should also be consistent with the positive behaviours of organizational leaders that have been found on observations conducted in organisations across the globe (Rafik I. Beekun & Jamal Badawi, 2009; Kasim Randeree, 2009; Shah, 2005). As said by the Prophet PBUH, "each of you is a leader, and each of you will be held responsible for your leadership" (al-Bukhārī, 1998, hadith no. 2409, 451; Muslim, 1998, hadith no. 1829, 763).

#### **4. Women and Leadership**

Professional women are entering the workforce at the same rate as men. However, the number of women involvement is scarce in the corporate board. In Fortune's 2011 list of the largest U.S companies, women hold only 12 of the 500 CEO positions, down from a peak of 20 in 2006 (Mondy & Mondy, 2014). Meanwhile, around the world, a study conducted in nearly 4,000 companies found that only 10 per cent of the directors were women. There are arguments indicating the lack of diversity in the board of directors in most of the companies which have contributed to the financial crisis that began in 2008. The research done by Catalyst found that companies with three or more female directors have more significant returns on equity in comparison to the companies with no women directors (Lawrence & Weber, 2014).

In the case of Malaysia, the female labour participation rate has increased from 44.7 per cent (1995) to 45.7 per cent (2008). This percentage has further improved to 46.4 per cent in 2009 (Tenth Malaysia Plan). In 2010, also according to the Tenth Malaysia Plan, the national policy on women has improved the representation of women in decision-making positions from 18.8 per cent in 2004 to 30.5 per cent in 2010 for the public sector. Meanwhile, the national policy has increased participation of women from 13.5 per cent in 2004 to 26.2 per cent in 2010 for the private sector. Nevertheless, in April 2011, Bank Negara Malaysia reported that only 6 per cent or 45 women were appointed as board members of financial institution (The Star Online, 2011; Nurwati and Ahmad, 2012). Tan Sri Zarinah Anwar, Chairman of the Malaysian Securities Commission has reportedly said, women are still under-represented in the board of directors in Malaysian public listed companies, which represents only 7.5 per cent of the total number of directors although women consist almost 50 per cent of the workforce (The Edge Financial Daily, 2011; Nurwati & Ahmad, 2012).

As disclosed in the Global Gender Gap Report 2015, Malaysia is placed at the 95<sup>th</sup> position in the economic participation and opportunity and 134<sup>th</sup> in the political empowerment from the total 145 countries. Malaysia is also ranked at the 95<sup>th</sup> placed in legislators, senior officials and managers with the score of female to male ratio 0.28 (0.00 = inequality, 1.00 = equality). Malaysia is placed at the 122<sup>nd</sup> for the women in parliament and 132<sup>nd</sup> for the women in ministerial positions, both with the ratio 0.12 and 0.06. The Global Gender Gap

Report is accounted for measuring gender gap in the economic participation and employment, educational attainment, political empowerment, outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio (World Economic Forum, 2015).

Leadership role is undeniably monopolised by male prerogative in the sector of corporate, military, political and other sectors in society. Although the current trend has witnessed an increased number of women's participation in the middle management and supervisory position, they are still rarely appointed as elite leaders and top executives (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

In the interview with 50 senior women managers by Linehan et. al. (2001) as cited by Boon (2003), these managers believed that corporate barriers still exist, and appear to be strong in many European countries. According to the interview results, the factors which often prevent many women from reaching senior managerial positions occurred particularly during recruitment and selection processes. The organisation formal policies and informal processes also hinder women managers to step up in the corporate ladder. These women managers also felt that women are still judged based on the male model of career development in the field of selection and promotion (Boon, 2003).

The literature describes women leaders to be more focused on building and maintaining relationships, comfort with direct communication and diversity, refusal to compartmentalise skills, talent and lives, innate scepticism of hierarchy and most importantly desire to lead from the middle. According to Sally Helgesen (1990) as cited by Boon (2003), the attitudes, skills, talents and experiences that women bring with them are precisely those needed in the evolving post-industrial economy. This confluence of key attributes and required leadership capacities is creating unprecedented opportunities for women to play a vital role in leading transformational change in organisation and communities (Boon, 2003).

According to a study, that compared the management styles of 900 female and 900 male managers by Management Research Group in Portland, women managers are more results-oriented at work, while their male counterparts engage in more business analysis and strategic planning (Kabacoff, 1999; Boon, 2003). Meanwhile, in a study by Hagberg Consulting Group (1998) in California of 425 high-level executives, female managers were rated higher than their male counterparts in 41 of 47 skills measured, including leadership and problem solving (Brokaw, 1999; Boon, 2003).

In another survey conducted by a marketing consulting and research firm in the USA, 73 per cent respondents from 293 marketing executives perceived men as making decisions without input from others, whereas only 20 per cent said the same of women. Female executives were also perceived to be more effective in building consensus when making decision (84 per cent of women versus 60 per cent of men). Furthermore, female executives are

more thoughtful in their decision-making processes where they are more careful in examining many options before acting (90 per cent of women, 71 per cent of men) (Boon, 2003).

The review of previous studies has highlighted the different qualities of women managers as leaders from their male counterparts. Patterson (1998) and Boon (2003) stated that women leaders have what it takes to perform their roles and responsibilities through different kind of management styles, which may not be found in male leaders (Boon, 2003).

## **5. Method**

Data presented in this article were collected from randomly selected women leaders employed in Malaysia government-linked companies (GLCs). About 210 questionnaires were distributed to the selected samples of women leaders from diverse industries of GLCs including oil and gas industry, plantation and finance. Upon completion, 208 women leaders completed and returned the ILI questionnaires. The questionnaire consists of 25 themes of ILI. The demographic information of the respondents is age, management level and length of service were also obtained.

In the initial step of data analysis, data collected from the 208 samples were first examined to obtain a statistically clean data (Hair et. al., 2010). The analysis section is divided into two subsections, firstly, the reliability of each item and inter-variable correlation and secondly, the analysis of normality.

### *5.1 Reliability of the Instruments*

This article presents the reliability score of the scales in Islamic leadership inventory using Cronbach's coefficient alpha analysis (Sekaran, 2003; Osman, 2004; Pallant, 2001). The procedure of coefficient alpha checks for internal consistency of scale, assesses whether the items in the scale is measuring the same underlying constructs, and whether the scales are free from measurement error (Pallant, 2001; Sekaran, 2003; Thorndike, 2005). The scales used are considered reliable if the Cronbach's coefficient alpha scores of each tool exceed the minimum scores highlighted by scholars which are 0.60 to 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010; Nunally, 1978). Based on this definition, the scales that were used to measure the Islamic leadership inventory have a high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficient values of 0.988.

### *5.2 Normality Findings of ILI*

The assumptions of normality are 'a prerequisite for many inferential statistical techniques' (Coakes, Steed & Ong, 2010), as it is important for the results of statistical tests to be accurate (Tharenou, Donohue & Cooper, 2007). According to Pallant (2001), normality is used to describe a symmetrical, bell shaped curve, with the greatest frequency of scores in the middle, and smaller frequency towards the extremes,

There are many ways to explore this assumption of normality graphically as suggested by Coakes, Steed and Ong (2010), Pallant (2001), Saane et al. (2003), and Tharenou, Donohue

and Cooper (2007). Specifically, several normality tests were implemented for this study or 5% trimmed mean value, Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic, Histograms, Normal probability plot, Detrended normal plot, and Boxplot.

Based on all normality tests conducted on all variables, there are significant variations in all 25 constructs in the Islamic Leadership Instrument (ILI). The results of this test implied that all the investigated variables were normally distributed. Therefore, inferential statistical tests could be done to test the hypotheses of the quantitative study. Summary of the tests is presented below.

#### *5% Trimmed Mean Value*

The overall mean of the original value of ILI is 4.35, while trimmed mean is 4.38. Hence, because the extreme scores do not have a strong influence on the original mean and the two mean values are not highly different, normality of the instrument is there in ILI.

#### *Kolmogorov-Smirnov*

Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test assesses the normality of the distribution of scores. A non-significant result (Significant value of more than 0.05) indicates normality. In this case, the significant value is .000, suggesting a violation of the assumption of normality. However, this is common because of the large samples as obtained in the current study (Pallant, 2010).

#### *Histogram, Normal Probability Plot and Detrended Normal Plot*

According to the figure of Histogram below, data collected in this research were reasonably normally distributed.

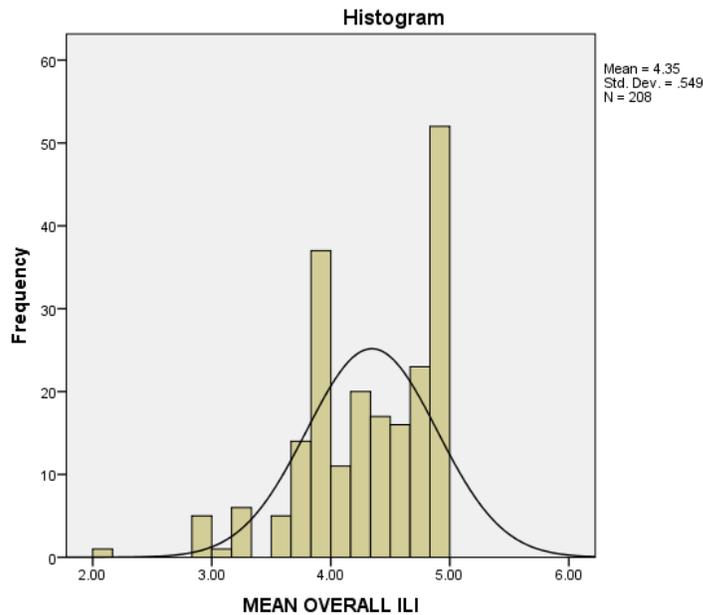


Figure 1: Normality Pattern of Islamic Leadership Inventory (ILI)

The normality assumption of ILI was also supported by the findings of an inspection of the normal probability plots in the figure of Normal Q-Q Plot below. It was found that, the observed value for each score is plotted against the expected value from the normal distribution. According to Pallant (2010), the current study's reasonably straight line suggests a normal distribution.

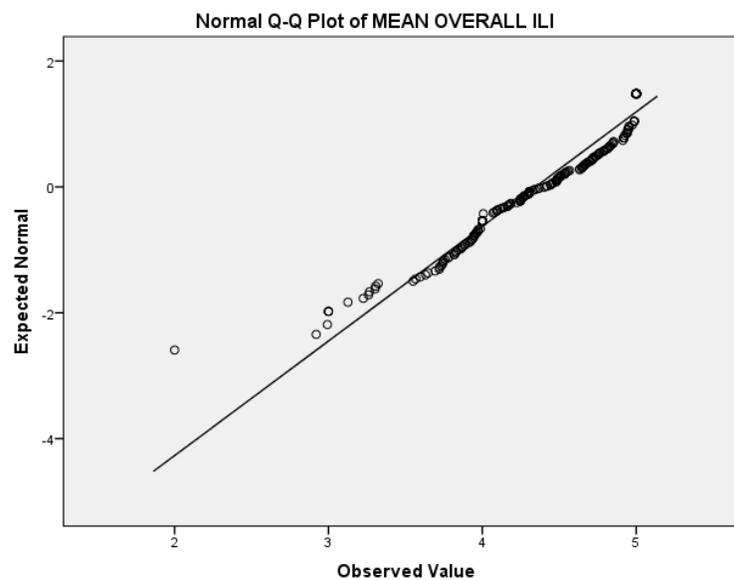


Figure. 2: Q-Q Plot Pattern of Islamic Leadership Inventory (ILI)

The normal Q-Q Plots are obtained by plotting the actual deviation of the scores from the straight line. According to Pallant (2010), there are no real clustering of points, with most collecting around the zero line as shown in the figure below.

*Boxplot*

In the current study, the output of boxplot, which is a distribution of scores of ILI, shown a reasonable normal data. The Boxplot output are as shown in the figure below. According to Pallant (2010),

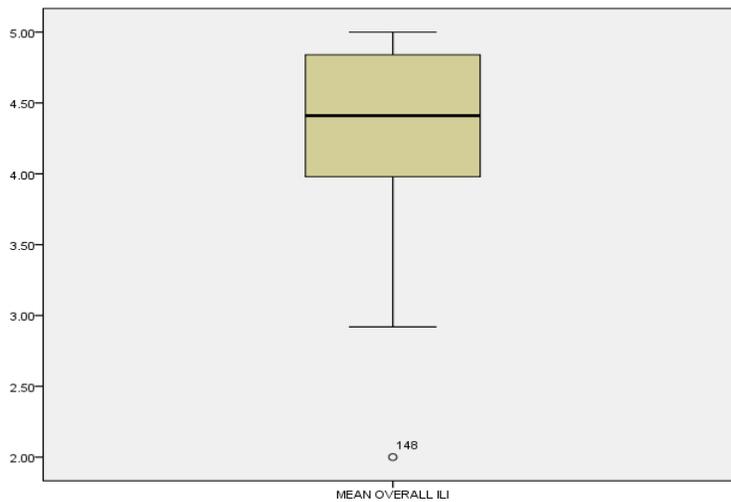


Figure 3: Box Plot Pattern of Islamic Leadership Inventory (ILI)

**6. Results and Discussion**

Based on the analysis of respondents’ backgrounds, this article found that 159 respondents (76.4%) are between 20 – 39 years of age, and 49 respondents (23.6%) are from the age of 40 – 60. In terms of the respondents’ management positions, this research found that 66 respondents (34.7%) are holding non-executive position, 93 respondents (48.9%) are holding executive position and 31 respondents (16.3%) are in the managerial position. In the aspect of length of service in the industry, the respondents are equally distributed between senior and junior management post. A hundred and eight respondents reported to work mostly in junior managerial level (51.9%) and 100 respondents (48.1%) reported to work mostly at senior level. In sum, the data show that the respondents mostly work as either in executive or senior management post.

To understand further on the pattern of leadership behaviour, a series of independent sample t-tests were conducted to test the three hypotheses of this research. The three hypotheses assessed the practice of Islamic leadership behaviour of women officers according to their age, management level, and length of service in the industry. Results of the independent sample t-tests for the three constructs are presented below.

**6.1 Islamic Leadership Behaviour of Women Managers based on Age**

Referring to Table 1, according to Pallant (2001) and Hair et al. (2010), based on Sig. > 0.05, this article interpreted the results of Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances by using line 1 or equal variances assumed. This signifies that research 1 accepts the null hypothesis of equal variances. In other words, the null hypothesis or “There is no significant difference in Islamic leadership behaviour among women managers above and below 60 years” is accepted. Specifically, mean difference in leadership behaviour practices of the two groups is around -1.82. Moreover, the results signify that the chance of finding larger absolute difference between the two mean is about 74.8% which rejects “There is significant difference in leadership behaviours among women managers above and below 60 years”. The analysis in Table 1 shows that women managers below and above 60 years did not practice a different level of leadership behaviours at  $t(205) = -0.321, p = 0.748$ .

**Table 1:** Difference of Islamic Leadership Behaviour Practice among Women Officers according to age (Below and above 60 Years Old)

ILI	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t.	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal Variances Assumed	1.268	.262	-	205	0.748	-1.82485	5.68269
Equal Variances Not Assumed			-.321	205	0.748	-1.82485	5.68269

**6.2 Islamic Leadership Behaviour of Women Managers based on Management Level**

Referring to table 2, based on Sig. > 0.05, this article interpreted the results of Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances by using line 1 or equal variances assumed. This signifies that the article accepts the null hypothesis of equal variances. There is no significant difference in Islamic leadership behaviour among women managers based on management level. Specifically, mean difference in leadership behaviour practices of the two groups is around -5.93123. The results signify that the chance of finding larger absolute difference between the two mean is about 36.1%. The analysis in Table 2 shows that women managers based on management level did not practice a different level of leadership behaviours at  $t(120) = -0.917, p = 0.361$ .

**Table 2:** Difference of Islamic Leadership Behaviour Practice among Women Officers according to Management Level (Junior Executives and Senior Executives)

ILI	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t.	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal Variances Assumed	3.083	.082	- .917	120	0.361	-5.93123	6.46923
Equal Variances Not Assumed			- .848	45.818	0.401	-5.93123	6.99262

*6.3 Islamic Leadership Behaviour of Women Managers based on Length of Service*

Finally, referring to table 3, based on Sig. > 0.05, this article interpreted the results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances by using line 1 or equal variances assumed. This signifies that the null hypothesis of equal variances of the study is accepted. There is no significant difference in Islamic leadership behaviour among women managers based on length of service. Specifically, mean difference in leadership behaviour practices of the two groups is around -4.916. Moreover, the results signify that the chance of finding larger absolute difference between the two mean is about 30.9%. The analysis in Table 3 shows that women managers, regardless of their length of service in the organisation did not practice a different level of leadership behaviours at  $t(205) = -1.02, p = 0.309$ .

**Table 3:** Difference of Islamic Leadership Behavior Practice of Women Officers according to Length of Service (Work mostly at junior management post and senior management post)

ILI	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t.	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal Variances Assumed	.014	.907	- 1.022	205	.309	-4.91667	4.82462
Equal Variances Not Assumed			- 1.022	201.68	.310	-4.91667	4.83322

The analysis in the tables presented above show that in general, there is no difference of Islamic leadership behaviour practice of women managers based on their age, management level, and length of service.

## **7. Conclusion**

This article draws several conclusions. First, this article found that 16.3% women from the total respondents in government-linked companies in Malaysia is holding manager position. Second, about half of the women managers (48.9%) are holding executive position in management level. Third, most of the women officers are in their junior level in accordance to their length of service in their respective department. Finally, this article found than women managers based on age, management level and length of service practise the same Islamic leadership behaviours. These findings signify that the values of Islamic leadership behaviour are practical to be applied by women managers across different level of age, management posts, and seniority. The findings revealed that women managers practise Islamic leadership behaviour. The pattern should be further investigated to identify the implications of Islamic leadership behaviour to important organisational variables such as performance of organisations, job satisfaction of employees, and other aspect of organisational behaviours. Future research of this nature could assist the understanding of pattern and process of Islamic leadership behaviour in organisational setting. Furthermore, a specific study to investigate the difference of Islamic leadership behaviour and other value-based leadership behaviour theories should be conducted to understand the importance of values in organisations and leadership practices.

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Correspondent Author: mahazan@usim.edu.my (Mahazan Abdul Mutalib)