BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT AND FAMILY STABILITY: FEEDBACK ANALYSIS FROM FEMALE BUS DRIVERS

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ABSTRACT

Lately, the cost of maintaining a family has spiraled almost uncontrollably due to the rising tides of globalization, which have drastically altered the social and economic fabrics of today’s societies. Nowadays, it has become a norm to see many women working in a wide spectrum of professions, such as taxi or bus drivers, which were used to be seen as a male domain. In this paper, the authors discuss the findings of a study that aimed to examine factors that drive women to take up such a demanding profession and the negative impacts they have on the livelihoods of female drivers. In this study, 30 female drivers working for RapidKL were interviewed. The analysis of their responses showed that their participation in this profession was attributed to a number of factors, such as financial commitment, interest, and financial incentives. The findings also indicated that most of the respondents were able to support their families financially and emotionally, given their abilities to divide their responsibilities between their jobs and families prudently. In summation, women’s involvement in demanding professions, such as bus drivers for public transports, entails them to balance their responsibilities wisely between their jobs and families to ensure they can attain a more stable life financially and psychologically.

KEYWORDS: Female bus driver, profession, financial commitment, finance incentive and interest.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this twenty-first century, our nation is facing a myriad of challenges, both internally and externally, due to the waves of globalization, liberalization, and the explosion of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Inevitably, these have significantly impacted our societal institution, especially those living in urban areas, such as Kuala Lumpur, rendering their lives more complex and daunting. According to Eighth Malaysia Plan, this city represents the important cluster of economic development that contributes to the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by as much as eight times compared to those of other cities (Malaysia, 2010). Moreover, Kuala Lumpur is poised to become a national economic hub that contributes to the global economy by capitalizing on the strength of its cosmopolitan population, Asian unique legacy, and world-class infrastructure. The downside to these, however, is that the cost of living in this city has spiraled significantly, making it the most expensive city in Malaysia to live in.

The rapid urbanization has spiked the cost of living, which has been taking place annually. Not surprisingly, this has negatively impacted the lives of most city dwellers, as main breadwinners have not been able to support their families that eventually give rise to acute urban poverty. Based on the data of the Eighth Malaysia Plan, the rate of poverty in Kuala Lumpur rose from 0.5% in 1995 to 2.3% in 1999 (Malaysia, 2001). Thus, to help improve their livelihoods, women, including housewives, have started to venture into the working world to earn more income to support their families. Over recent decades, Malaysia has witnessed a steep increase in its workforce. Based on data reported in the Tenth Malaysia Plan, the number of women entering the workforce rose from 44.7% in 1995 to 45.7% in 2008. The number further increased to 46.4% in 2009 and slightly increased to 46.5% in 2010 (Malaysia, 2010). A year later, in 2011, the percentage of women employed in the workforce rose to 47.9%. To date, Malaysian women have been employed in various industries, including those that have been dominated by men, such as engineering, aviation, architecture, and public transport. Thus, it is not uncommon to see female taxi or bus drivers in many major cities and towns in Malaysia nowadays.
Admittedly, the above phenomenon is not something new, as Malaysian women have been making significant contributions to their families, societies, and the nation (Khalijah, 1994). Historically, women’s involvement in the nation’s economy was in the agricultural sector, specifically in food production, which helped improve the economic situations of most Malaysian families. Later, women were employed in the industrial and services sectors, which were in tandem with the structural changes in the economy (Nor Aini, 2008). In this respect, the career of a bus driver is not alien to Malaysia, as many women have become bus and taxi drivers in other parts of the world, such as China, Australia, Singapore, India, the United Kingdom, and Iran. Interestingly, a study carried out by the University of Bradford, United Kingdom, showed that female drivers were more alert and attentive than their opposite counterparts (Azizah, 2014). Arguably, the former’s superior alertness stemmed from their high level of estrogen, which partly explains why female drivers tend to commit fewer traffic violations than male drivers. Such a contention was put to rest when a study by the Edinburgh Napier University showed that the number of female drivers violating traffic rules was significantly lower than that of male drivers. In light of the former’s higher attentiveness and discipline, it is only fair for women to take up jobs as public transport drivers to ensure a more secure driving on public roads.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on Life Quality of Malaysia 1999 (Unit PerancangEkonomi, 1999), life quality in Malaysia encompasses self-advancement, a healthy way of life, achievements, and the freedom to seek knowledge, the level of living exceeding individual needs, and the fulfillment of psychological needs to attain high social wellbeing, the latter of which reflects a peaceful, comfortable, and secure condition. In general, life quality and family wellbeing share a similar concept that highlights changes in a social system or the condition of people’s lives that shifts from an unsatisfactory condition to a better one. Admittedly, several factors have compelled women to work as a bus driver, the notable one of which is education (Amla&Nila, 2012). Naturally, individuals with a high level of educationwill seek highly-paid careers deemed appropriate with their high academic qualifications. Conversely, those with low academic qualifications will have to settle with lowly-paid jobs. Generally, by being less educated, many women will be forced to take up jobs that pay less compared to those normally taken up by men. Thus, it is hardly surprising to see many women taking up jobs as a bus driver, as such a profession only needs a minimum academic qualification, such as SijilPeperiksaan Malaysia (SPM), and a valid driving license. The economic factor is also one of the contributing factors that force women to venture into the public transport sector by becoming a bus driver. Their involvements in this economic sector are consistent with Sa’adiah and Endang’s (1997) assertion that many women are entering the job market due to economic reasons, particularly to make ends meet. In this era of globalization, living in large cities has become intolerably challenging because of the high cost of living and economic uncertainties. Such a predicament makes the main income earners unable to support their families, especially those with many children.

Essentially, an income made by the head of a family is the salary or wage paid by his employer that is used to support his family’s daily needs. Typically, most of these main breadwinners have low academic qualifications and economic mobility. Their incomes barely help them to buy foods, let alone meet other necessities, such as proper clothing, decent dwellings, and children’s school needs. Family dependents refer to the number of family members that are supported by the head of a family, usually a husband. As such, the family dependents that the latter has to take care of are his wife, children, including his parents and siblings. Hence, the size of a family has a huge impact on the ability of the main income earner to support his family – the higher the number of family members, the more daunting to support the family. As one of the solutions, many women, particularly housewives, have been compelled to work to help support the families. Lately, many women have taken the main role of supporting a family due to several economic and marital issues, such as the demise of their husbands that leaves them as single parents or the breakdown of their marriages. According to Abdul Rahim (2011), the number of children in a single-parent family determines the weight of family support that a woman, who is a single-parent, needs to bear. Thus, such a person will find taking care of her dependents will become unbearably challenging if she has many children. Moreover, living in a big city, such as Kuala Lumpur, can further exacerbate her economic woes. Given such a scenario, more women, especially single parents, have now taken up many positions in various sectors, such as drivers of public transport, to support their families.

Becoming a bus driver is not limited to single-parent women, as housewives (with surviving spouses) have also taken up such a profession. Their involvement in this sector is primarily motivated by the desire to supplement their husbands’ incomes to support their families. In fact, there are many cases in which both working husbands and wives send their children to their parents, who willingly babysit their children when they are working. This
kind of support helps working women as they do not have enough time to bring up their children, given that most of the time they are out working to earn a decent wage. Furthermore, some women seek work because of their deep affections for a certain job, not purely because of economic reasons. Such women, according to Abdul Rahim (2011), are those who want to enhance the quality of their lives. Surely, they will be able to have a successful career if they have a strong passion to work and have a solid support from their children and spouses. Having been able to support their family financially, they will indirectly attain blissful lives with their loved ones.

A household income refers to a shared income among family members. In this respect, the combined income of a working husband and a working wife can certainly contribute to meeting their family’s needs. In other words, the latter’s income can help supplement that of the former in taking care of their family. The findings of a study by The Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) showed that working women spent 51% of their earnings to support household needs, 19% for their children’s education, 10% for their personal needs, and 6% for non-essentials (SaurabhSinha, 2013). Such a distribution of income can surely help a family to attain a comfortable, blissful life. Undeniably, women’s role as an important agent of development cannot be downplayed in today’s challenging societies. They can certainly help extricate their families from the viciousness of poverty by getting involved in the working sector. In particular, families of extreme poverty need their female members to also work to help them improve their economic situation and help them exit the financial quagmire (Lukman et al., 2002). Arguably, any improvement in one’s household income can have a profound impact on a family’s wellbeing, enabling them to unshackle the clutches of poverty that leads to a better life financially. In some cases, such an improvement has helped many families to overcome their financial woes, notably their mounting loans.

Of course, working women can fulfill their personal needs and meet their families’ needs to a certain extent. Based on Maslow’s theory, human needs consist of five levels of necessities, which can be represented by a pyramid (Kotler, 2009). The first being physiological needs, which are the most basic needs, such as the need for food, drink, clothes, and shelter. The second level of human needs is the need for security, such as the needs for personal protection, health, and finance. The third level of human needs is social needs, involving the needs for love and to be loved by families, partners, and friends. The fourth level of human needs is the need for self-esteem, which relates to the need to be respected by others. The final level of human needs is the need for self-achievement, which concerns the needs for the fulfillment of one’s ambitions or hopes. Thus, the fulfillment of the above five needs can help an individual to attain a satisfactory life that contributes to the wellbeing of his or her family.

In the twenty-first century, the status and role played by men have changed significantly, which have also impacted the role played by men. What used to be in the women’s domain has been taken up by men and vice-versa. For example, nowadays, there is nothing strange to see a man changing his child’s diaper — something unthinkable several decades ago (Sa’adiah&Endang, 1997). Likewise, many men have taken up some of the household chores, such as cleaning the house or cooking for a meal. Clearly, men are compelled to take some of their responsibilities of their working spouses in bringing up their families, a trend that has become a norm in today’s challenging societies. As acknowledged, women taking the job of a public bus driver will have to deal with several implications, such as marital and family conflicts. According to Sa’adiah and Endang (1997), most working women face such conflicts in balancing their responsibilities between their work and families. They need to manage these conflicts carefully, lest they escalate to bigger problems that can harm their families. Admittedly, most working women would be overwhelmed with pressure if they were required to perform all the household chores after returning home. As such, their husbands must acknowledge their predicament and share some of the burdens in taking care of their families. Hence, men must have the empathy to appreciate their working wives’ sacrifices in terms of energy and time in helping to support their families.

Inevitably, there will be some men who do not share such a sentiment, as they strongly believe that household chores and the task of mending children are solely the responsibilities of a woman (Siti Fatimah, 2000). Given this mindset, a working housewife will eventually become physically and emotionally exhausted. Unmitigated, it can lead to more serious problems, such as physical abuse and broken homes due to separations. Undeniably, working women do not have enough time to take care of or educate their children. The little time that they have when they return home from work is not enough to enable them to spend quality time with their children. Having a family dinner, praying together, or conversing leisurely with their family members are considered a luxury to most hard-working women. Ultimately, the failure to provide the care and love for their children can give rise to a myriad of social problems. For example, a lack of attention and care by their parents can make young children
look for solace outside their homes, putting them at risk to many negative elements, such as smoking, drug additions, and illegal racing (Sa’adiah & Endang, 1997), which can culminate in tearing their family apart.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main method used in this study was based on the interview method. Such a method is deemed effective in eliciting detailed information pertaining to a research topic of interest (MohdNajib, 2009). Specifically, this method helped the researchers to obtain appropriate answers from a group of female bus drivers in Kuala Lumpur. The interview was carried out in an informal setting to ensure the female respondents would not feel any pressure or burden in answering the interview questions. In such a manner, they would provide answers that were not only honest but also relevant to the research. Initially, on December 21, 2015, information on the number of female bus drivers was obtained from PrasaranaBerhad, which is located Kuala Lumpur. Later, a series of interviews were conducted on-site on 28, 29, and 30 January 2016 involving 20 female bus drivers.

Findings

The analysis of the interview data elicited from 30 female bus drivers, who worked for PrasaranaBerhad, was carried out in Kuala Lumpur. The analysis showed that 20% of the drivers were in the age range of 15 and 34. The same analysis indicated that almost half (46.7%) of those interviewed were in the age range of 35 and 44. The remaining one-third (33.3%) of the drivers aged from 45 to 64. In terms of marital status, one-third (33.3%) and 40% of the bus drivers were single and married, respectively. The remaining eight (26.7%) of those interviewed were widows.

The analysis of data in terms of academic qualifications showed that only one driver (3.3%) had no formal education. Also, the analysis showed two (6.7%) and 23 (76.7%) drivers had primary and secondary school qualifications, respectively, signifying that the majority of the female drivers interviewed had gone through a formal education up to the secondary level. Interestingly, 4 (13.3%) drivers were found to be university graduates.

The interviews revealed that slightly more than one-third (36.7%) of the respondents hailed from Kuala Lumpur. The rest came from other states in Malaysia, such as Melaka (10%), Perak (3.3%), Johor (6.7%), Selangor (6.7%), Kedah (6.7%), Terengganu (6.7%), Negeri Sembilan (6.7%), Pulau Pinang (3.3%), and Pahang (3.3%). Surprisingly, 10% of the respondents were from Indonesia. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profiles of the respondents in terms of age, marital status, education, and state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>15-34</td>
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<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widow</td>
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<td>26.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>No formal education</td>
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<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University/College</td>
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<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of origin (State)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selangor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kedah</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Terengganu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negeri Sembilan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pulau Pinang</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pahang</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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</table>
Contributing factors that motivated women to become bus drivers

The interviews helped reveal several contributing factors that compelled those interviewed to become public bus drivers, such as interest, family support, and financial incentive, as summarized in Figure 1.

As shown, a majority (83%) of those interviewed indicated the reason that made them choose the profession of a bus driver because of their interest. The following are some of their responses that show interest was the factor that made them choose such a profession.

“Yes, I really like to be a bus driver … it does not matter what kind of vehicles that I have to drive” (Driver H, informal interview in 2016)

“… I like this job because I like the challenges, and I like tough jobs” (Driver Z, informal interview in 2016)

“I like doing this work … each day, the situations are different. That is the best thing! (Driver K, informal interview in 2016).

Revealingly, only one respondent (Driver B) indicated that the reason for her being a bus driver was to support her family, as exemplified her response as follows: “… I have to work as a bus driver to support my family. Without it, there will be no food for us to eat!” Oddly, two respondents gave financial incentives as the reason for them to involve in this profession, which was made tellingly evident by the response of one of the drivers, namely Driver N, as follows: “The salary is higher than that of my previous occupation”.

Certainly, individuals’ involvement in any type of work may be influenced by others, such as the latter’ families or friends. Or, their involvement may not be attributed to anybody, but to themselves. Figure 2 shows the responsible persons who were influential in motivating the respondents to become a bus driver.
As shown, there were three kinds of people who were influential in motivating the respondents to become a bus driver. Seventeen (17) respondents, representing slightly more than half (56%) of the respondents, indicated that they made their own choices to become a bus driver. For example, one of the respondents, namely Driver A, made a comment that highlighted such a choice as follows: “No one forced or urged me to become a bus driver. I really love doing this job”. On the other hand, 12 respondents (40%) indicated that their family members were instrumental in helping them to become a bus driver. Their responses provided some indications of the people who had motivated them to take up this profession, such as that expressed by Driver K’s as follows: “My family really helped me to involve in this profession. If that was ok for them, then it is ok for me. Besides, I really like this job”. Likewise, Driver F’s response was also revealing when she said the following: “At first, it was awkward, given the general perception of the job being male-dominated. Luckily, my family provided me the support to deal with it”. Surprisingly, only one respondent (4%) said that it was her friend that motivated her to take up such a job.

Problems faced by the families of female bus drivers

Admittedly, families consisting of working women, such as those of female bus drivers, will face a myriad of problems. The following are some of the problems highlighted by the respondents during the interviews.

A lack of leisure activities with families at home

As revealed in the interviews, 26 respondents, forming a majority at 86.7%, could only spend quality time with their children and husbands during weekends. The following are the responses given by Drivers C, K, and B, respectively, indicating that they would only be able to see their families on weekdays.

“…on working days, there is simply no way I can spend time with my family. Even if such a possibility did arise, I can see them only for a brief moment”. (Driver C).

“Only on holidays, I can really interact with my family. On other days, it is impossible for me to spend time with them” (Driver K).

“The only time I can see my family is on holiday. Nonetheless, I did see them, only briefly, on working days before I go to work”. (Driver B).

Interestingly, four (4) respondents, representing 13.3% of those interviewed, indicated that they could see their families between working shifts. For example, Driver C said that she could spend some time with her children after she had finished her work at 5.00 am by watching TV and having dinner, as surmised by her answer as follows: “When my working shift ends at 5.00 am, I can watch TV as well as have dinner with my family. As revealed in the interviews, most respondents would and could only spend quality time with their families only on weekends. Table 2 summarizes the activities carried out by the respondents on such occasions.

Table 2. Activities carried out by the respondents on weekends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting parents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having holidays with families</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mending children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resting at home</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking trips</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Household management

Household management refers to activities that involve caring for children, preparing meals, housekeeping, and cleaning clothes, among others. In the interviews, the respondents were asked the question, “Who manages your household when you are working?” to elicit information on the management of their households. The responses gathered revealed that 21 respondents (70%) indicated they themselves managed their households. This was particularly true for those who were still single, as highlighted by Driver A’s response as follows: “I manage everything because I am not married yet”. Likewise, Driver N (who was a single parent) indicated that she managed her household on her own, which was made quite clear by her response as follows: “Before going to
work, I cook some food for my child, which he can eat after getting back from school. Besides, he is a grown kid!” Similarly, Driver B gave an interesting answer when she said, “I am so used to managing my household … before going to work, I take care of the family’s needs”. A close examination of the above responses showed that respondents who managed the needs of their households were primarily those who were still not-married, single parents, and those whose parents lived far away from them. For those who were married, they had the skills to enable them to divide their time in managing their households and career efficiently.

There were also cases where their husbands helped them to manage their homes. For example, Driver D indicated that her husband was very helpful in this regard, as revealed by her response as follows: “Sometimes, we took turns to manage, as our working hours are not the same”. By contrast, five respondents indicated that their parents and siblings helped them to manage their households. As an example, Driver N’s response was insightful when she said the following sentences: “I live with my parents. So, I am not worried about taking care of my home needs”.

Wage utilization
A question concerning the way in which they allocated the wages or salaries was also asked. As revealed in the interviews, 22 respondents, representing 73% of those interviewed, indicated that they used their salaries for home expenditures. Such allocation of wages was evident in several of their responses, such as those of Driver K and Driver C as follows: “The wage that I earned was mainly spent on buying daily essentials like foods and drinks” and “I work because I have to buy household essentials, as this can support my husband”.

On the other hand, six respondents (20%) indicated that they used their wages to support their children’s schooling, as exemplified by Driver A’s response as follows: “I am the one who provides my children’s financial needs and school fees”. The remaining respondents stated that they used their earnings to support their parents, pay loans, and make some savings for the future, the former of which was indicated by Driver’s C response as follow: “I give a portion of my salary to my dad and mum who live in a village … this is the time for me to repay my sacrifices”. Overall, the above responses suggest that the salaries that they earn are mainly used to support their households, including their parents.

The impacts of work pressure on the living quality of female bus drivers and their families
In the interviews, they were also prompted with the question as follows: “Does your work pressure adversely affect you and your family?” Their responses to this question helped highlight possible impacts of the pressure that they experienced at their workplace on the wellbeing of their families. Based on their responses, 20 respondents (66.7%) lamented that they did experience some form of work pressure; however, they were able to cope with it to avoid any negative impacts on their families when they returned home. Driver C’s response was indicative of their ability to deal with their work pressure as follows: “Of course, there is work stress. But, there is no point to whine about it when you return home”. Others gave their thoughts on how to deal with work pressure, as highlighted by Driver D’s response as follows: “We need to separate our problems to their rightful places – at the workplace and at home. We need to take care of our own feelings too!”

The remaining 10 respondents (33.3%) indicated that their work pressure had affected them emotionally and physically, which was made more intense when they encountered problems at home. Their predicaments were evident in their responses, such as Driver S’s comment as follows: “Sometimes, the work pressure I experienced at my workplace resurfaced at home when I found it was littered with all sort of stuff. This really made me mad!”

The above responses suggest that some of the female drivers will have difficulty in managing their work pressure to the point that it will negatively affect them emotionally, especially if they also have to deal with a range of problems at home.

The negative impacts of the profession of bus drivers on family institution
The last question posed to the respondents was aimed at determining whether or not their careers as a bus driver had adversely affected their families. Overwhelmingly, 28 respondents indicated that such a profession had not harmed their family institutions. This promising feedback could be gleaned from most of their responses, such as those of Drivers F, H, and A as follows:

“I work to help my family, thus, there is no reason for me to say that it badly affects my family. But, I have to properly manage my responsibilities between my job and my family” (Driver F).
“There are no interruptions! They (my family) can accept me as a bus driver as long as I do not neglect my responsibilities” (Driver H).

“Before taking up this job, I had discussed with them. So, the institution of my family is no compromised, as we all help each other” (Driver A).

Based on their responses, it is reasonable to argue that their careers as a bus driver will have no adverse impacts on their families’ wellbeing if they can devote their responsibilities to their jobs and families wisely. Thus, it is their obligations to prioritize their responsibilities in such a manner that the institution of their families can remain solidly intact.

IV. CONCLUSION

Over recent decades, women performing all sort of jobs has become commonplace. Inevitably, their involvements in the job market have been spurred by economic necessities, which are becoming more acutely demanding in today’s challenging world. Due to the high cost of living, especially for city-dwellers, more women have begun to enter into professions that were used to be dominated by men, such as taxi and bus drivers, which would be considered a taboo decades ago. As acknowledged, women’s participation in these types of professions is attributed to many factors, such as family commitment, interest, and financial incentive. Their involvement in what used to be male-stereotyped careers, however, will have several implications that can adversely affect their families. Thus, to avoid any conflicts, female drivers need to strike a fine balance of their responsibilities between their careers and families. As learned from this study, those who can manage well their obligations toward their families and jobs will be able to have a more blissful life.

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