Abstract

The United Nations report “Women: Looking Beyond 2000”, states that with the current progress rate made by women, they will only obtain equality with men in decision-making by 2465. This prediction is not without validity if we examine women’s progress and performance in the construction industry. In fact, the number of females is still extremely insignificant in comparison to the males employed in this sector. To accelerate women’s progression in the construction industry profession, according to Low (Employers’ attitudes towards female graduates, 1999/2000), requires large entry of female graduates into the industry so as to create greater impact and bring about influences upon the male-domineering industry. However, before this is possible, we need to realize that there are barriers encountered by these female graduates and these invisible barriers are the determinants that hinder them from joining the industry. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify the barriers and to explore solutions to counteract them.

This research investigates whether female undergraduates' perceptions are going to affect their decision in entering the industry. In this study, components like self – perception and personal perception of construction industry are studied so as to investigate their relationship with a female undergraduate’s final conclusion in joining the construction profession.
It was found that women's entry into the construction industry is hindered by both external and internal factors. The potential barriers that prevent female undergraduates from entering the construction industry include 1) the stressful and demanding nature of jobs, 2) male dominated environment, 3) harsh working conditions, 4) long working hours, 5) the presence of glass ceiling, 6) poor public image of the construction industry, 7) the problem of sexual harassment, 8) low acceptability of women in the industry, 9) limited career development opportunities, 10) women being assigned to desk bound jobs and the fact that 11) construction careers are not family friendly.

Besides the external factors that act against the female undergraduates' favour to again entry into the construction industry, the internal factors play an important part in affect these females' decisions to join or to quit the industry. It was found that the female undergraduates, themselves would also be contributing to the problem of women's under presentation and under achievements in the construction industry. This is because the female undergraduates had expressed intentions of quitting the industry and majority of them were actually unsure of being part of the construction industry. The potential barriers rated by the female undergraduates were 1) their low confidence in establish working relationships with men at workplace, 2) their resistance towards aggressiveness and assertiveness as demanded by construction profession, 3) their low ability in supervising male contractors and subcontractors and 4) their low competence in their technical skills and knowledge.