

Socioeconomic Determinants of Highly Empowered CSO Leaders by Age Category among Rural Women in Malaysian Fisheries Community

Zumilah Zainalaludin^{1,2}, Norehan Saidi¹, Nobaya Ahmad³,
Juju Nakasha Jaafar⁴, Abdah Md Akim⁵

¹*Department of Resource Management and Consumer Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia*

²*Social Gerontology Laboratory, Malaysia Research Institute on Ageing (MyAgeingTM), Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia*

³*Department of Social and Development Science, Faculty of Human Ecology, University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia*

⁴*Department of Crop Science, Faculty of Agriculture, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia*

⁵*Department of Biomedical Science, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia*

Abstract

This paper reports on rural women leaders who are involved in civil society organizations (CSO) in Malaysian fisheries community. This paper aimed to identify the socioeconomic determinants that predict rural women leaders in highly empowered groups by age category. There were 299 respondents randomly sampled from four zones in Peninsular Malaysia - Hulu Terengganu, Terengganu (Eastern Zone), Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan (Middle Zone), Manjung, Perak (Northern Zone), and Mersing, Johor (Southern Zone). With the advice from the Department of Fisheries Malaysia, Hulu Terengganu and Jelebu were sampled for the freshwater fisheries community, while; Manjung and Mersing were sampled for the brackishwater fisheries community in this paper. Only marital status had significantly ($p < 0.05$) predicted highly empowered older rural women CSO leaders, which is less than a 90.5 percent likelihood of single leaders in the highly empowered groups. Among younger rural women CSO leaders, only water system had significantly ($p < 0.05$) predicted highly empowered young women CSO leaders, which is less than 52.8 percent likelihood leaders from the fisheries community in the highly empowered group. In conclusion, married status is the indicator of the highly empowered group among older rural women CSO leaders; and the brackishwater community is the indicator of the highly empowered group among younger rural women CSO leaders in Malaysia.

Keywords: empowerment, CSO, gender, fisheries community, older women



1.0 Introduction

Malaysia is among the urbanized countries of South East Asia. It is estimated that 7.89 million of Malaysian population resides in rural areas, and about half are women. The main issue among rural women is feminism poverty globally. Many studies concluded that women must be empowered to eradicate poverty (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) – 1). Thus, Malaysia announced a 6-trust of HARAPAN Rural Development Plan (HaRDeP) (Ministry of Rural Development [MRD], 2018), and for the first time in Malaysian history, rural women are focused on in HaRDeP (5th Trust). Following UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework (2017), the Civil Society Organization (CSO) is a non-state, not-for-profit, voluntary entity formed by people in the social sphere. It represents a wide range of interests and ties. The CSO can include community-based organizations as well as non-governmental but not have a business or for-profit associations. Nevertheless, the involvement in CSO can expose the members to many economic opportunities, business ideas, networks, and potential markets for their business products. Moreover, women may be working together in CSO for their voices to be heard by the policymakers to support them in generating income (FAO, 2017; Selassie, Alamirew & Yimmer, 2012). Following British Council (2017), participation in CSO is essential in empowering women and children, especially in education (Pounik, 2013), poverty eradication (FAO, 2017; Selassie, Alamirew & Yimmer, 2012), and leadership (IWRAW-AP, 2017; British Council, 2017).

The HaRDeP aims to enhance the development of women in decision-making and governance at the community level; three strategies focusing on rural women were announced by the Ministry of Rural Development (2018) namely to optimize the capacity and labour force participation among women; to hold women and disabled friendly programs, and to increase women's involvement in decision-making at the community level. These three strategies are part of the Women's Economic Empowerment domain, according to Golla et al. (2011). In other words, involvement in the CSO may increase the empowerment level of women to eradicate feminism poverty.

Fisheries and aquaculture communities (FAC) are always associated with rural poverty, and in addition to the masculinity of fisheries and aquaculture economic sector (FAES) activities, rural women in FAC are usually involved in FAES sub-sectors as low-pay workers. Only a small number of them are entrepreneurs who are



empowered and usually educated. This proves that empowered rural women may create many economic sub-sectors in FAES through enterprising activities suitable to them and vulnerable groups, such as homestay, handicraft, processed food, and recreational fishing. Nevertheless, fewer formal CSO have been established for rural women in Malaysia. Still, many were established in informal settings, voluntary-based social movements, and networks (Ahme, 1996), such as the Women Yassin group (WYG) in rural areas – a famous women's group to recite Yassin together.

The roles of rural women CSO, especially the leaders in assisting the management at the village level, are usually bold and significant. However, many are older women with different perspectives and working styles compared to younger women leaders. They are also seriously involved in taking care of the welfare of poor single mothers (FAO, 2017), children, and vulnerable groups (Pounik, 2013), as well as eradicating feminism poverty which is a significant concern for rural women across the world.

There are three factors why this paper focuses on women in the fisheries community. First, the fisheries economic sector involves masculine activities (Satapornvanit, 2018), high work risk (Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015), and is only suitable for men. Second, the women are usually full-time housewives and depend totally on their husbands for a living (Wahab et al., 2018; Islam, 2008). The third factor is that rural women may suffer from multiple vulnerabilities on being women, for instance, single mothers, older women, and handicapped individuals (Zainalaludin et al., 2020; Zainalaludin et al., 2017). Women in fisheries will be economically vulnerable if they get involved in fisheries activities directly due to the masculinity of fisheries activities. Therefore, being a woman themselves is already vulnerable in masculine environments.

Thus, with involvement in CSO, women can be empowered through leadership and participation. Nevertheless, rural women are usually associated with poor academic backgrounds (Zainalaludin, 2012), particularly older women. There may be a gap in empowerment levels between older and younger groups due to socioeconomic indicators such as academic background, marital status, fisheries community by the water system, geographical location, etc. The respondents in this paper are rural women CSO leaders in the fisheries community – younger and older categories. They can be empowered socially and economically through their involvement in CSO (British Council, 2017; Pounik, 2013; FAO, 2017). Despite that, the



socioeconomic determinants may differ by age group. Therefore, this paper aimed to identify the socioeconomic determinants that predict highly empowered respondents by age category.

The research objectives of this paper were: -

- i) to profile the backgrounds of respondents by age category
- ii) to identify the socioeconomic determinants that predict highly empowered respondents by age category.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Civil Society Organization (CSO)

CSO refers to non-governmental organizations, associations, or groups that pursue a common interest among their members (Schoenefeld, 2021; WHO, 2019; Fischer, 2011) involved in the development and social activities such as community project implementations and social programs. In this study, community refers to the people involved in Malaysian fisheries economic sector. In general, CSO, often at the forefront of social justice and human rights advocacy, is playing an increasingly influential role in setting and implementing agendas around the world (Kleintjes et al., 2013; UNDP, 2005). According to Mansuri and Rao (2012) and Malhotra et al. (2002), community participation through CSO activities helps people to be actively involved in the decision-making process and control community resources.

There are many informal rural women CSO groups found in this paper, but the most popular one is the Women Yassin Group (WYG) at village level. This is because Malaysia's rural areas are usually associated with the Malays, mainly Muslims. This group usually has a weekly gathering to recite Surah Yassin from Al Quran together at the mosque or a member's house if they are invited to a special religious event. The WYG is considered a CSO because it is a group that pursues a common interest among its members (Schoenefeld, 2021; WHO, 2019; Fischer, 2011). Almost all rural Malay villages in Peninsular Malaysia would have their WYG, which conducts many socioeconomic activities within their communities besides reciting Surah Yassin together. According to Hayat (2014), WYG is a transformed agenda into the social life of society in various aspects such as togetherness, sensitivity to social dynamics, care, and mutual appreciation between the group and community members. WYG



becomes a medium for community members to uphold the value of unity in the community, with regular meetings intensifying the relationships between members and increasing sensitivity to the situation and social conditions in the community (Hayat, 2014).

Since WYG is informal, it is not registered with the Registrar of Society Malaysia (ROS), and there is no representation in formal decision-making. Nevertheless, the roles of these types of CSO, especially the leaders in assisting the village management, are usually bold and significant. For example, they were taking care of the welfare of poor single mothers (FAO, 2017), older people, disadvantaged children, and vulnerable groups in the community (Pounik, 2013). Though WYG is popular among older rural women, the younger group, especially married women will always join this group which may be due to the important roles of this group in the community.

2.2 Rural Women Empowerment through CSO

Empowerment refers to a process that involves group participation (Perkins, 2010; Ruechakul et al., 2015), as well as an approach to have positive outcomes in life (Trott et al., 2020; Ruechakul et al., 2015; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) besides developing and nurturing leaders (Perkins, 2010), and have control over community resources (Purnamawathi, 2019; Zimmerman, 2000). According to Mayoux (1998), there are five elements to consider in empowering women - wealth, the right to access resources, gender roles, participation in decision-making, and gender equality. Thus, empowered women can be leaders in the community (Moyo & Francis, 2010) and are free to assess, develop and articulate their aspirations (Oxaal & Baden, 1997).

In addition, women's involvement in CSO builds their leadership capabilities (WHO, 2019, IWRAW-AP, 2017; British Council, 2017), decision-making skills (Ashford et al., 2009), communication, and human skills (Salgado, 2018). These are the main components of empowerment that can boost the confidence level of women to reduce gender-based as well as social and cultural barriers in their social involvements (Menhas et al., 2013; Naz & Ahmad, 2012; Norris & Inglehart, 2001). High leadership positions are always associated with a high academic background (Teague, 2015; Lafreniere & Longman, 2008). However, in rural areas, women are associated with low academic background (Zainalaludin, 2012), and low education is a significant problem for development (Doepke & Tertilt, 2019; Bayeh,



2016; Lafreniere & Longman, 2008) which answers why rural areas are always associated with feminism poverty. Thus, CSO leadership can be nurtured even among members with low academic backgrounds.

Empowerment also refers to an attempt to improve the dignity of the vulnerable groups in society who are poor and marginalized (Purwani & Arvianti, 2020), which are mainly rural women (British Council, 2017; FAO, 2017; Pounik, 2013). The CSO activities will expose them to economic opportunities (Awan, 2020) and a positive social circle (Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019; WHO, 2019) that accept, value and assist them economically. In rural areas, men are more involved in the community than women (Ginting & Siregar, 2020; Kwok et al., 2020; Rohe et al., 2018); therefore, women need a different mechanism to get involved in economic activities. By promoting empowerment through CSOs, women's participation in the community can be improved according to their needs (Madsen, 2015). In other words, CSO activities are empowering their members socially, economically (Awan, 2020; Malhotra et al., 2002; FAO, 2017), and academically (British Council, 2017; Pounik, 2013). Nevertheless, there may be a different impact on the empowerment level by age group because younger and older groups often have different socioeconomic backgrounds.

A study by Latu et al. (2019) identified three factors that contribute to the empowerment of women in fisheries – women champions (leaders), supportive men (husbands and male community members), and organization (CSO). The empowered women will participate in all phases of management (Madsen, 2015), collaborate (Boley et al., 2017), learn, and promote changes. For example, in the FAC, leadership was cited as the most important factor in achieving the sustainability of the CSO (Torre et al., 2019). This could be because CSOs play an important role in implementing the action (Madsen, 2015). Increased participation of women in CSO and decision-making processes are closely linked to the acquisition of new skills and leadership qualities and are sought by existing female role models (women champions) (Latu et al., 2019). Women must be able to participate in the CSO meetings, express their opinions freely, and vote under the same conditions as men (Schuler et al., 2018) in the process of improving or enhancing their status in fisheries community (Torre et al., 2019).

Thus, the government should support women's participation and leadership in CSO initiatives to empower them (Bermio et al., 2019;



Freeman & Svells, 2022), especially in the FAC (Freeman & Svells, 2022; Torre et al., 2019) for national food security because women community members can develop various fish-based food processing products. A systematic assessment of women's leadership and the contribution of CSOs to Malaysian FAC is absent at present (Torre et al., 2019; Chap et al., 2016) simply because this is a male economic sphere (Chap et al., 2016). Efforts should be made to measure the outcome of women involvement in rural CSOs.

Empowering older people through employment and social activities is a solution for liberating them (Ramli et al., 2018; WHO, 2015; Yusof & Zulkifli, 2014; Gonzales, 2013; Doris et al., 2010), but only for those who are both physically and mentally fit. Due to the masculinity of FAES activities, the physical disabilities of older women may limit their direct involvement (Magsamen-Conrad et al., 2019). Thus, many older women in FAC are in feminism poverty (Veeran, 2000; Bradshaw et al., 2017; Chulu, 2006). These older and poor women can be assisted through various social and less masculine economic activities because, according to De La Rue and Coulson (2003), older women in rural areas have special characteristics such as independence, self-confidence, robustness, privacy, dignity, and self-care. Thus, through CSO engagements with no age limit (Rozanova et al., 2012; Cunningham, 2008), they can face the challenge of being older and poor with "empty nest" syndrome, being accepted and empowered (Utomo et al., 2019; Cao & Rammohan, 2016; Shin et al., 2016; Mendes de Leon, 2005), and ultimately lead to self-actualization and the achievement of goals (Aroogh & Shahboulaghi, 2020). Active social participation is important for the health and life well-being of older rural women (Shin et al., 2016; Paggi et al., 2016). Hence, many studies recognize active participation in CSO as the key to successful older women (Utomo et al., 2019; Cao & Rammohan, 2016; Mendes de Leon, 2005). In other words, promoting CSO will also promote and sustain productive ageing among older women (Utomo et al., 2019) as well as good quality of life (Torre et al., 2019; Aroogh & Shahboulaghi, 2020; Cao & Rammohan, 2016; Glass et al., 2006) as they live longer than men (DOSM, 2019; Hamid, 2015).

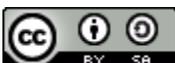
2.3 Gender Barrier for Rural Women Involvement in CSO

Generally, FAES activities are for men due to masculine activities (Satapornvanit, 2018). Therefore, women in FAES often received low pay and are involved in indirect FAES sub-sectors when



women should also have equal rights in getting the benefit from FAES development (Freeman & Svelds, 2022) and be well-accepted in the community. According to Sahas Organization (2013), there is a gender barrier for women to manage community affairs compared to men, although they are highly educated (Teague, 2015; Lafreniere & Longman, 2008). In FAC, women are usually housewives and stay at home nurturing children. Women who want to engage in any social activities must seek permission from their husbands or fathers (Moonzwe et al., 2014; Rocca et al., 2009); however not all husbands/fathers support their wife/daughter in getting involved in social activities. This is part of the gender barriers that rural women have to deal with besides other gender-related barriers such as the traditional gender roles at home (Lowson & Arber, 2014; Hartmann, 1981), gender bias in the community, poor organizational leadership (Sahas Organization), gender-related stress (Klein et al., 2016; Limpangog, 2016; Mayor, 2015), the culture of patriarchal society especially in rural fisheries areas (Chan, 2020; Adisa et al., 2019), and geographical location of the CSO activities which limit women mobility (Sell & Minot, 2018).

Besides empowerment (Torre et al., 2019; Kleiber et al., 2017), women's involvement in CSO promotes the sustainable development of FAC, gender equality (Freeman & Svelds, 2022; Mutimukuru-Maravanyika et al., 2017), top decision-making position in the community for women (Torre et al., 2019), and change of roles of women in the rural community (Ashford et al., 2009). Women will have more opportunities to participate and more influence in decision-making processes (Munene & Thakhathi, 2017) similar to the men in society because they will acquire new skills (Frangoudes et al., 2019), get financial support (Munene & Thakhathi, 2017), opportunities to establish and manage a cooperative (Torre et al., 2019) for themselves, and represent their voice at the national level (Kleiber et al., 2017). The decision-making capabilities (Ashford et al., 2009), communication, and negotiation skills (Mutimukuru-Maravanyika et al., 2017) help women overcome social, cultural as well as financial barriers to get involved in communal activities (Menhas et al., 2013; Naz & Ahmad, 2012; Norris & Inglehart, 2001). The empowered women and strong capabilities of CSO leadership make it easier for rural women to get permission from their husbands with regard to social activity involvement. According to Torre et al. (2019), women are resourceful, creative, and independent to meet the costs when they engage in



CSOs, which reflects that engagement in CSO will increase the well-being of women. Nevertheless, according to Harper et al. (2017), the role of women in fisheries in terms of management, governance, and decision-making is very limited, when women's involvement is crucial for community development (Torre et al., 2019; Zimmerman, 2000). Thus, firstly promoting their involvement in CSO is a good start to train them before they could get involved directly in the management, governance, and decision-making of FAES.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Study Location

Data in this paper were collected in four fisheries communities that represent two water system fisheries sectors in Peninsular Malaysia. One location represents one zone and one water system fisheries sector in Peninsular Malaysia as follows: -

- i) Hulu Terengganu, Terengganu for freshwater system community
- ii) Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan for freshwater system community
- iii) Manjung, Perak for brackishwater system community
- iv) Mersing, Johor for brackishwater system community

3.2 Study Design, Sampled, and Data Collection Process

This study used an exploratory and correlational research design and was only based on a cross-sectional survey collected among rural women CSO leaders in the fisheries community in the year 2020-2022. In this study, Peninsular Malaysia was divided into 4-zones – Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Middle. One state was randomly sampled from each zone – Terengganu from Eastern Zone, Perak from Northern Zone, Negeri Sembilan from Middle Zone, and Johor from Southern Zone. With the advice from the Department of Fisheries Malaysia (DOF), Terengganu and Negeri Sembilan were sampled for freshwater fisheries community, and Perak as well as Johor were sampled for brackishwater fisheries community. Then, four districts were advised randomly by DOF from a list of districts with respective water systems – Hulu Terengganu District in Terengganu and Jelebu District in Negeri Sembilan were sampled for freshwater fisheries community, and Mersing District in Johor and Manjung District in Perak were sampled for brackishwater system fisheries community.



A meeting with all Penghulu (sub-district leaders) for all the sampled districts was organized by the District Office. A briefing on the research was delivered during the meeting. The Penghulu then advised on their sub-district fisheries villages. Next, another meeting with all the Heads of Villages was then organized for research briefing, sampling, and cooperation. One data collection meeting with women CSO leaders in respective sub-districts was scheduled through these meetings. In total, 320 respondents were randomly sampled (Table 1).

Table 1 : Sampling (n=320)

Water System	District	n
Freshwater	Hulu Terengganu	80
	Jebebu	80
Brackishwater	Manjung	80
	Mersing	80
	TOTAL	320

3.3 Instrument

A specially developed questionnaire consisting of the background of respondents, CSO background, CSO activities, a scale of leadership (adapted from Twenty Reproducible Assessment Instrument for New York Work Culture) by Harris (1995), Malaysian Personal Household Well-being scale by Jariah (2007), WHO-5 General Well-being by Bech et al. (2003), Empowerment Scale (Nikkah & Redzuan, 2010; Labonté & Laverack, 2008; Kabeer, 2005; Malhotra, Rohini & Grown, 2003) was used to collect the data. This paper reports only the respondents' backgrounds and empowerment data. The study was approved by Ethic Committee for Research Involving Human Subject Universiti Putra Malaysia (JKEUPM-2020-281).

3.4 Null Hypothesis

Due to Binary Logistic Regression (BLR) Models used in this paper, thus, null hypotheses are essential for BLR Model. The two null hypotheses tested in this paper are as follows: -

Ho₁ – no socioeconomic determinants predict highly empowered older respondents

Ho₂ – no socioeconomic determinants predict highly empowered younger respondents



3.5 Statistical Analysis

The descriptive statistic through frequency and percentage were used to profile the socioeconomic backgrounds of rural women CSO leaders by age category (RO1), and one BLR Mode was used to test the null hypothesis respectively. In addition, the multicollinearity test was used to eliminate the independent variables (socioeconomic backgrounds) that have a strong correlation with each other, as well as the Pearson Correlation test between each IV and the DV (only IVs with significant ($p < 0.00$) correlation will be considered in BLR model). The two BLR Models are as follows:-

$$\text{BLR Model 1 - Ln } Y_{\text{Older Rural Women CSO Leaders}} = a + b_1_{\text{maritalstatus}} + b_2_{\text{academicbackground}} + b_3_{\text{watersystem}} + b_4_{\text{workingstatus}}$$

Notes: -

- i) DV (older respondents high empowered=1, low empowered=0)
- ii) Model significant ($p < 0.05$)
- iii) IVs (Marital Status, Academic Background, Water System, and Working Status)

$$\text{BLR Model 2 - Ln } Y_{\text{Younger Rural Women CSO Leaders}} = a + b_1_{\text{maritalstatus}} + b_2_{\text{academicbackground}} + b_3_{\text{watersystem}} + b_4_{\text{workingstatus}}$$

Notes: -

- i) DV (younger respondents high empowered=1, low empowered=0)
- ii) Model significant ($p < 0.05$)
- iii) IVs (Marital Status, Academic Background, Water System, and Working Status)

4.0 Findings

4.1 Background of the Rural Women Leaders

This sub-topic presents the findings on RO1 (to profile the backgrounds of the respondents by age category). There were $n=299$ respondents reported in this paper, and divided into two age categories - younger (less than 60 years old) and older (60 years old and above) (United Nations, 2019; Neumark, 2009). The 299 respondents represent older ($n=74$) and younger ($n=225$) rural women CSO leaders in the fisheries community. Table 2 shows the distributions of respondents by six socioeconomic backgrounds, namely location, academic background, age, marital status, working status, and household income status. The respondents are mainly from Manjung



(34.78%), and followed by Hulu Terengganu (28.76%), Jelebu (24.75%), and Mersing (11.71%) (Table 2). Initially, an equal number of respondents was sampled in each district; nevertheless, some districts delivered overwhelmed responses and some moderate responses. Thus, an unequal number of respondents was received from all districts. Generally, the respondents in this paper consisted of three-quarters younger and a quarter of older respondents.

The academic background was divided into three categories - primary and no schooling, secondary, and tertiary education. The majority (64.60%) of respondents are at the secondary level of education, and they are mainly younger respondents. 17.18 percent of respondents only have primary or no schooling of academic background, and are mainly older respondents (56%). These statistics may conclude that older rural CSO women leaders have low academic backgrounds than younger rural women CSO leaders. This has been confirmed by many studies showing that most rural women are school dropouts or possess lower academic backgrounds (Smock & Schwartz, 2020; Agnafors et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2013; Zainalaludin, 2012; Ellwood & Jencks, 2004). Poor academic background could be a major barrier to their lack of confidence, interest, and influence on other people (Zhao et al., 2013), which also reflect their poor empowerment level. Women in the fisheries community, especially middle-aged or older women with little education, come from poor households (Kadfak, 2020), which may be due to poor education services (Arba et al., 2010), lack of various resources in rural areas (World Bank, 2010), and fisheries communities which are always located not just in rural but remote geographic areas (Nagaraj et al., 2017).

Table 2 : Background of Rural Women CSO Leaders (n=299)

Socioeconomic Variables		Younger		Older		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Location (n=299)	Hulu Terengganu	64	74.4	22	25.6	86	28.76
	Jelebu	56	75.7	18	24.3	74	24.75
	Manjung	81	77.9	23	22.1	104	34.78
	Mersing	24	68.6	11	31.4	35	11.71
	Water system (n=299)	Freshwater	120	75.0	40	25.0	160
	Brackishwater	105	75.5	34	24.5	139	46.49
Marital Status (n=299)	Single	52	66.7	26	33.3	78	26.09
	Married	173	78.3	48	21.7	221	73.91



Socioeconomic Variables		Younger		Older		Total	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Academic Background (<i>n</i> =291)	Primary and not schooling	22	44	28	56	50	17.18
	Secondary	149	79.3	39	20.7	188	64.60
	Tertiary	48	90.6	5	9.4	53	18.21
Working Status (<i>n</i> =289)	Not working	112	69.6	49	30.4	161	55.71
	Working	108	84.4	20	15.6	128	44.29
Poverty Status (<i>n</i> =220)	Non-poor	40	78.4	11	21.6	51	23.18
	Poor	130	76.9	39	23.1	169	76.82

This study addresses two water systems in the fisheries community, namely the freshwater and brackishwater fisheries systems. In this paper, the majority (53.51%) of respondents are from freshwater communities, and 46.49 percent are from brackishwater communities (Table 2). According to Saidi et al. (2021), women in brackishwater communities are generally poorer than in freshwater communities because women in brackishwater area are usually full-time housewives and are completely dependent on their husbands for a living (Wahab et al., 2018; Aisyah et al., 2012). Therefore, they spend many hours every day helping the husband to fish to generate income as compared to women in the freshwater communities. This could explain why women in brackishwater community participate less in CSO activities (Utomo et al., 2019).

Table 2 also shows similar distribution patterns between younger and older respondents in freshwater and brackishwater communities. The engagement of respondents in freshwater and brackishwater communities is dominated by younger women as compared to older women. Curvers et al. (2018) found that older people are less likely to participate in social engagement, even though participation in social engagement can improve health and well-being in older age. In western studies, older women are more likely to participate in dance events to socialize because they enjoy it; but time, weather, and physical health are the indicators of low participation (Gothe & Kendal, 2016). Besides, older rural women are predominantly caregivers (Utomo et al., 2019), and geographic remoteness, where fewer facilities are accessible, limits the mobility of older people (Nagaraj et al., 2017) to socialize.

This paper reports the majority (73.91%) of respondents were married, and 26.09 percent were single (Table 2). Many were married than being single in both age categories. Marital status is one of the



'not poor' indicators among rural women (Kramer et al., 206), which may also explain their involvement in CSO as a social activity (Utomo et al., 2019). Usually, single mothers have to focus on generating income activities and nurturing children (Utomo et al., 2016); thus, they have less time to involve in CSO activities.

The respondents in this paper are in the majority (55.71%) may be retired or housewives (Table 2). At the mean age of 55.37 years old (SD=7.311 years old) in the year 2022, on average, the respondents in this paper are young. Though women in the fisheries community are usually full-time housewives and utterly dependent on their husbands for a living (Bahtiar et al., 2021; Wahab et al., 2018), their involvement in CSO can be an indicator of empowerment, especially among the CSO leaders (Golla et al., 2011).

4.2 Socioeconomic Determinants of Highly Empowered Leaders among Rural Women by Age Category in Malaysian Fisheries Community

This sub-topic presents findings on RO2 (to identify the socioeconomic indicators that predict highly empowered respondents by age category). Thus, two null hypotheses were tested - Ho1 (no socioeconomic determinants predict highly empowered older respondents) and Ho2 (no socioeconomic determinants predict highly empowered younger respondents). The BLR Model 1 was used to test the Ho1, and BLR Model 2 was used to test the Ho2. The DVs in both models were high empowered=1 and low empowered=0, which is a dichotomous DV, respectively.

The BLR Model 1 fits and is significant ($p < 0.05$) to predict highly empowered older respondents. Thus, Ho1 is rejected. In 30.6 percent variance in the DV can be explained by the IVs in BLR Model 1 (Table 3). Only one indicator had significantly ($p < 0.05$) predicted highly empowered older respondents, which is marital status (Table 3). Single marital status predicts 90.5 percent less likely that older rural women CSO leaders are in the highly empowered category. In other words, the married status is inclined to be in the highly empowered group among older women CSO leaders in the fisheries community.



Table 3 : Wald Chi-Square Predict High Empowered among Older Rural Women CSO Leaders ($n=59$)

	B	SE.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Marital Status (Single=1)	-2.35	0.925	6.455	1	0.011	0.095
Academic Background (Low=1)	0.152	0.961	0.025	1	0.874	1.164
Working Status (Not Working=1)	-0.949	1.267	0.561	1	0.454	0.387
Water System (Freshwater =1)	-0.972	0.959	1.028	1	0.311	0.378
Constant	4.026	1.452	7.692	1	0.006	56.041

Instead of 'not poor' (Kramer et al., 2016), married status may also predict highly empowered rural women because many studies confirm that women in married relationships are highly empowered (Thandar, Moe, & Naing, 2020; Batana & Ali, 2015; Sharma and Shekar, 2015; Rammohan & Johar, 2009). This paper obtains that among older women leaders, married status is inclined to the highly empowered category. Since marriage is stable among older couples, thus, the social support given by the husbands for the wives to get involved in CSO helps them be empowered (Moyo and Francis, 2010) because the CSO is a good platform for a woman to be trained and empowered socially and economically (Golla et al., 2011).

Married women with supportive husband and family members have a voice, mobility, and decision-making authority in the home (Sharma & Shekar, 2015) as well as in the community (Thandar et al., 2020). Therefore, many married women are empowered and participate in decision-making at the community level (Pambè, Gnoumou & Kaboré, 2014; Boateng, Kuire, Ung, Amoyaw, Armah & Luginaah, 2014), especially those who come from long-stable marriage at their older age. The husbands also provide a social class for the wives to be accepted in the community. Therefore, the older the married women, the stronger their role and power in the community. Especially among the non-poor and married older women, they always volunteer to protect the interests of their class.

The fishermen's wives were mainly active in housewives' organizations for health and social welfare (Bermio et al., 2019), and they usually represented their husbands in meetings of fisher folk organizations or become members themselves (Bermio et al., 2019). According to Población and Siar (2018), women are highly empowered when they have equal access to membership and decision-making in



the fisheries organization. One indicator of a healthy marital relationship is that men acknowledge their wife's contributions, have successful communication (Warner, 2007), respect their wife's decisions and voices as well as give them the freedom to get involved in the community (Bermio et al., 2019).

For BLR Model 2 test Ho2 (no socioeconomic determinants predict highly empowered younger respondents), the BLR Model 2 fits and is significant ($p < 0.05$) to predict highly empowered younger respondents. Thus, Ho2 is rejected. In 47.0 percent variance in the DV can be explained by the IVs (Table 4) in BLR Model 2. Only one indicator had significantly ($p < 0.05$) predicted highly empowered younger respondents, which is the water system (freshwater=1, brackishwater=0) (Table 4). The Freshwater system community predicts 52.8 percent less likelihood that the younger respondents are in the highly empowered category. In other words, the younger respondents from the brackishwater community are inclined to be in the highly empowered group.

Table 4 : Wald Chi-Square Predict High Empowered among Younger Rural Women CSO Leaders ($n=189$)

	B	SE.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Marital Status (Single=1)	-0.358	0.415	0.747	1	0.387	0.699
Academic Background (Low=1)	0.62	0.795	0.607	1	0.436	1.859
Water system (Freshwater=1)	-0.751	0.364	4.256	1	0.039	0.472
Working Status (Not Working=1)	0.009	0.37	0.001	1	0.98	1.009
Constant	1.648	0.356	21.493	1	0	5.198

Typically, younger women in the fisheries community are the daughters of fishermen, so they work together to supplement the family income and are sometimes involved in the small family business (Siason et al., 2002). As they work together, they develop the capacity to become economically empowered through the impact of the family business (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2010). Besides that, members of the brackishwater communities are usually involved in ecotourism activities (Gohar & Kondolf, 2020), which provide many employment opportunities for younger women, for example, through homestay, food business, and boat rental services. These sub-sectors of the economy are more inclined to younger than older groups in the community.

In addition to working and getting paid, they also encounter many international tourists or outsiders (Mojjo et al., 2010). This



exposes them to English language, a different culture, and a different way of thinking, which empower them academically and socially (Sabina, & Nicolae, 2013). Therefore, it is much easier for younger women to accept and adapt to these types of cultural changes than older community members. Once empowered, the younger women can seek opportunities to lead and become actively engaged in the community (Moyo & Francis, 2010), besides evaluating, developing, and articulating their desires and interests without being dictated to or imposed by others (Oxaal & Baden, 1997).

In the brackishwater FAES, younger women who have active leadership skills are needed to improve livelihoods, maximize social, environmental, and economic returns (Panda, 2007). According to Torre et al. (2019), young women who have high levels of empowerment are usually inspired by the knowledge of a former leader in the fisheries community. They received coaching in leadership (Sipahutar et al., 2020) to strengthen their skills and knowledge (Torre et al., 2019). According to Freeman and Svets (2022), in Croatia, many women are registered as owners of vessels and fisheries enterprises. They are not out for fishing traditionally, but half of the fisheries areas are owned and operated by women due to 'asset ownership'. These are masculine roles but within the capacity of younger women than older women. The younger women in the CSO leadership who engage in community involvement to enhance their leadership power (Bookman & Morgen, 1988) and have 'asset ownership' on the vessels have been easily accepted by male fishers.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The rural women CSO leaders in this paper are mainly from Manjung (brackishwater). Generally, they have secondary school as academic background, come from freshwater communities, are married, unemployed, and have an average age of 55.37 years. Marital status and water system significantly predict older respondents and younger respondents, respectively. While, single older respondents and younger respondents from the freshwater community are less likely to be in the highly empowered category. In conclusion, among the rural women, CSO leaders in the fisheries community, older and married, as well as younger and from the brackishwater fisheries community, are more inclined to be in the highly empowered group.

This paper adds two important conclusions focusing on the fisheries community. First, married status among older CSO leaders is



a determinant of highly empowered older women. Second, the younger women group in the brackishwater fisheries community is a determinant of the highly empowered younger women. Thus, four main recommendations are highlighted in this paper. First, further studies should focus on single and older groups of women as well as younger groups from the freshwater fisheries community to explore the factors associated with the less likelihood of them being in a highly empowered category. Second, the empowerment programs among rural women CSO leaders in FAC should focus on single and older women as well as younger women from freshwater FAC. Third, further studies on the issues and problems of single and older women's involvement in CSO leadership in FAC should be conducted because low empowerment levels—may contribute to low well-being economically (feminism poverty) and socially (empty nest syndrome among older women). Lastly, the factors that affect the high empowerment level of younger women in brackishwater FAC can be studied to confirm their roles in empowering younger women.

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