

Malaysians' Reluctance to Work in Local 3D Sectors: A Preliminary Review

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to provide a general overview of the issues underlying Malaysians' reluctance to work in the 3D sectors. It accomplishes this by highlighting key factors that contribute to this issue thereby finding the possible and practical solutions. In realising these objectives, the authors rely on qualitative library research which involves analysis of primary and secondary resources. As the result, this article suggests practical solutions that focus on the enhancement of human rights compliance by employers to attract more Malaysian workers. A better working condition may contribute towards the reduction of high dependency on foreign workers in the future.

Keywords: 3D sectors; Working conditions; Foreign workers; Human rights at workplace.



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1. Introduction

The lack of interest among Malaysians to take up 'dirty, dangerous and difficult' (3D's) jobs are reflected in the high number of foreign workers being hired by many employers in Malaysia. The number of foreign workers has been increasing steadily year by year and are spread over various industries in Malaysia particularly construction, plantation, manufacturing, and agriculture. Despite the current Malaysia's healthy economic situation which provides many job opportunities to the people, most Malaysians chose not to work in 3D sectors leaving a huge employment gap in demand.

The steady yearly increase in the number of foreign workers in Malaysia which, as at 30 June 2017, has amounted to around 2 million workers, is a clear indication that employers prefer to employ foreigners rather than locals [Ministry of Home Affairs \(2017\)](#). Notwithstanding the rising trend of foreign workers recorded every year especially in 3D sectors, one simple question that we need to ponder on is; how long will our country depend on these foreign workers while many of our own youngsters are stuck in a jobless rut? This question requires a thorough analysis on the current practise in local 3D sectors. It is therefore the aim of this article to describe the issues underlying the Malaysians' limited presence in the 3D sectors. This will help us propose sustainable solutions to the issue.

The realisation of the aim of the article will be achieved, firstly by providing the overview and background of 3D sectors in Malaysia which also identifies the definitions of 3D sectors. This is followed by a brief analysis on the real factors contributing to the Malaysians' reluctance to work in local 3D sectors. Finally, this article contemplates on the enhancement of human rights compliance in 3D sectors as the way forward. This may attract more Malaysian workers and thus contribute towards the reduction of high dependency on foreign workers over time and in the future.

2. Overview of 3D Sectors in Malaysia

The 3D sector is the acronym for the infamous 'dirty, dangerous and difficult' jobs and employments which mainly covers various sectors such as construction, manufacturing, agriculture, plantation, cleaning services, and automotive maintenance. Due to negative perception that most Malaysians have on these jobs, very limited number of locals prefer to work in these sectors. Statements made by the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) indicate that Malaysians typically avoid working in sectors like agriculture or any industry that involves manual labour not because of the low wages but because society does not view them as highly-respected career choices. The 3D jobs are looked down socially and people doubt the 3D jobs are given any recognition ([Kumar, 2016](#)). There is a stigma on the jobs such as in construction or cleaning services as being less glamorous or low class. This perception is

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encouraged by society's attitude towards people who perform those jobs. Their employers pay them low wages and do not provide them with humane working environments. These poor and unencouraging working condition have caused the society to look down on them (Scott, 2016). Furthermore, the nature of work in the 3D sectors are rough and needs more physical strength which most Malaysians are not interested in as compared to working in air-conditioned office and comfortable working environment.

The fact that many Malaysian are not willing to perform 3D jobs has contributed to the country's dependency on the foreign workforce. Having left their home countries to find employment with better pay in Malaysia, most foreign or migrant workers are commonly ignored of their basic rights by their employers. They are 'forced' to accept this situation to ensure their employment's 'survival' in Malaysia. Many employers have taken advantage of foreign workers' vulnerable nature by exploiting them and to a certain extent, violating their basic rights as employees.

Although the laws of Malaysia do not discriminate against migrant workers, in practice, the rights of migrant workers are not fully protected. The employment laws are not sufficient in ensuring the compliance of employees' basic human rights by the employers. The employers in construction and plantation industries, for example, do not provide a safe and healthy working environment to their employees. If any casualties occurred, they are not covered by insurance scheme. This is clearly a violation of their rights and employees. Migrant workers are also reported to be underpaid and overworked.

3. The Factors Contributing to Malaysians' Reluctance to Work in Local 3D Sectors

The high dependence on foreign workers in 3D sectors has led many to believe that the main reason for the scenario is due to the reluctance by Malaysians themselves to fill in the demand in these sectors (Bernama, 2015). On the contrary, some have suggested that this perception is erroneous taking example that as there are many Malaysian working abroad in 3D sectors, this reflects that it is not the case that Malaysians are reluctant to work in the sector (Loshana, 2016).

An overview of existing literature points towards several factors that contribute to lack of number of Malaysian working in local 3D sectors. First, naturally, for the locals, the availability of job options, mobility factor and matter of convenience allow them to avoid the difficult, dangerous and dirty jobs (Marhani *et al.*, 2012). A study by World Bank (2013) on the Malaysian policy on Immigrant Labour suggests that a sufficient number of Malaysian workers are highly mobile across industries mainly to opt for better salary (Ibrahim, 2018) economic opportunities, and work condition including the use of modern technology and facilities. The fact that many Malaysians working in overseas such as in Singapore and Australia (Loshana, 2016) in 3D jobs is due to the options that they have, mobility and higher wages (Aris, 2018a). This scenario opens for labour shortages in 3D job sectors locally which created demand for foreign workers especially unskilled workers.

Second, the greater opportunity and mobility that the locals enjoy is mainly due to their higher education level compared to the foreign workers already in the industry (Marhani *et al.* (2012). A study found that the presence of foreign unskilled workers allows Malaysians to invest in their own education and enables them to work in high-skilled occupations (World Bank, 2013). Contrary to the perception that foreigners replace local workers leading to job losses among the locals, immigration has in fact generate jobs for the locals by reducing the costs of production which lead the local firms to be more competitive in the global market, allowing them to expand and hence increasing demand also for Malaysian workers (World Bank, 2013). This is especially true for local workers with middle and high levels of education who are not impacted by the presence of immigrants (World Bank, 2013).

However, it is admitted that the immigration did have negative effect on the locals of the lowest educated groups whose opportunities are filled in by the immigrants (World Bank, 2013). Furthermore, jobs in the local 3D sectors, mainly the low skilled, offer lower salary compared to the risks that they carry (Kumar, 2016). Pertubuhan Rapat Malaysia, a non-governmental organization focusing on labour issues, suggested that the salary is important variable for choice of work and good salary pay would not hinder Malaysians from working in the sector (Loshana, 2016). Apart from this, the working environment is another important variable in the choice of job especially for locals who have greater option. Poor working condition, long and odd hours as well various safety and health issues which are prevalent in these sectors are the other push factors for the locals Trakic (2010). A considerable number of injuries and accidents at workplace hinder the locals to opt for the sectors (Amnesty International, 2010). Besides, the status of job is another important variable suggested by some (Zuher, 2016). The 3D jobs are looked down socially and people doubt the 3D jobs are given any recognition.

4. Enhancing Human Rights Compliance in 3D Sectors as the Way Forward

Based on the factors contributing to Malaysians' reluctance to work in local 3D sectors discussed above which include among other the poor human rights compliance by the employers towards their employees, there is a need to relook at the existing laws and policies to effectively address the issue at hand. Advancing human rights in the workplace is essentially used to promote the rights of workers against injustices. There is a widespread impression that understanding and respecting right and interest of the workers will have a good impact on their performance and towards the industries sustainability. If the employers have the ability to improve and protect the 3D workers' rights and privileges from recruitment until the end of their contract, the local workers will be encouraged to take the job. In other words, the employers need to take all the necessary steps to ensure that the workplaces are healthy and with a sustainable environment.

As strongly emphasized by the MEF's executive director, Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan, that in order to encourage more locals into 3D sectors, these industries must be modernised and mechanised, and must provide better job incentives (Kumar, 2016). The purpose of modernising the facilities in a dangerous and difficult job (e.g. building construction) is to avoid a major and minor accident. Despite the severity of a major accident, the minor accident also causes damage to the employee's (worker) health and has been occurring much more frequently in all industries (Calixto, 2015). Employers have the role to guarantee that workers are receiving, at least, the maximum basic wage by considering the nature of their job as dangerous, difficult and dirty. Low wages do not offer an opportunity for local workers' family to sustain a good livelihood unless housing and other facilities are supplied to them. With good salary (Aris, 2018b), a worker knows that he can live on for the work that breaks his back every day (Scott, 2016).

Workers who are seeking for an equitable access to reasonable facilities like clean water and air and healthcare are part of basic human rights that should be provided or improved by the employers. These are issues which are important for better productivity (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), 2002). Other best courses of actions for employers to encourage local workers are by giving them an opportunity to benefit from the Employee Provident Fund scheme. In addition, workers' social security can also be covered by insurance industry. The UDHR clearly provides that everyone has the right to means of social support apart from the right to just and favourable remuneration which also includes the benefits of insurance. Indeed, enhancing human rights at the workplace are important to the well-being of the workers, whether local or foreigners. Employers must be aware of the workers' rights, especially their basic needs as a human being to enable them to enjoy a better life.

5. Conclusion

This article examines the real and underlying issues behind the dwindling numbers of Malaysians, especially among the youth, who work in local 3D sectors. The reluctance of most Malaysians to work in these infamous sectors has opened vast opportunities to foreign workers who flocked into the country to fill the vacant employment positions. Taking into consideration the insufficient nature of the existing human rights compliance by employers in 3D sectors in Malaysia which needs to be addressed, this article affirmed that there is always hope in attracting more Malaysians to work in these sectors. All the relevant parties such as the government and the employers must 'rebrand' 3D sectors as a more respectable career that guarantees a better living and sustainable career path for the employees.

As such, this study sees the need for the Malaysian authority to develop proper and consistent policies in workers' recruitment in the 3D sectors. The existing laws must be enforced and if there are loopholes, new laws need to be enacted (Shah and Yusof, 2018). Also, human rights compliance at the workplace by the employers must be enhanced and improved in order to upgrade the 3D sectors from its low-class perspective to become a respectable career. A complete revamp needs to be done on the whole structure of 3D sectors. Only by doing this, more Malaysians will have their confidence in the employment in these sectors and gradually our high dependency on foreign workers will be diminished (Kaur, 2018). The government and other relevant organizations such as the employer organizations must meet them halfway by establishing humane working conditions and ensuring that the wages they earn provide them with a decent living. With these elements in place it is foreseeable that in the near future the country will no longer depend heavily on foreign workers to work in the 3D sectors.

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