

## **Job Preferences among Marginalised and Non-Marginalised Youths: A Multi-Ethnic Study in Sabah**

**Balan, R.<sup>1\*</sup>, Samsudin, A. R.<sup>2</sup>, Soon Singh<sup>1</sup> and Juliana, J.<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia*

<sup>2</sup>*Center for Youth Empowerment, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi Selangor, Malaysia*

<sup>3</sup>*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to explore the factors related to job preferences among youths living in marginalised and non-marginalised areas in Sabah. Four dimensions related to job preferences were identified in this study: communality, job comfort, job goals and self-realisation. The study also explored differences in job preferences by gender and ethnicity. A total of 732 youths participated in the study, including individuals from marginalised (N=521) and non-marginalised (N=211) communities. The study found no significant differences in job preferences among marginalised and non-marginalised youths in Sabah. Job comfort was found to be the key factor determining job preferences among youths. In terms of gender, job preferences among young men and women differed only in the dimension of communality in non-marginalised communities and in the dimension of self-realisation in marginalised communities. In terms of ethnicity, there were no significant differences for non-marginalised youth, but significant differences existed in the dimension of self-realisation for marginalised youth. This study's findings can contribute to the development of government policies aiming to help young people find employment.

*Keywords:* Job Preferences, marginalised, multi-ethnic, non-marginalised, youth

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#### *E-mail addresses:*

balanratha1973@gmail.com (Balan, R.),

samsudinukm@gmail.com (Samsudin, A. R.),

soonbs@ums.edu.my (Soon Singh),

ju\_na\_ju@yahoo.com (Juliana, J.)

\* Corresponding author

### **INTRODUCTION**

A job represents a social function and the main channel through which a young man or woman can engage in society after completing formal education (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). Employment is not only important to the role formation of individual youths in

society, it also brings young people into association with each other (Blustein, Phillips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, & Roarke, 1997). Employment provides an extensive network of social relations while helping youths discover opportunities, develop self-awareness and acquire economic resources. However, before they may begin work, youths 15 years old to 30 years old are typically faced with the challenge of choosing a job. Job priorities are likely to be affected by a number of socio-demographic diversity factors such as age, sex and area of residence (Willis, 1990). In addition, parental employment history and academic performance also influence job preferences (Kerka, 2000). In Malaysia, the development of job preferences occurs when a young person has had the opportunity to assess all areas of interest that could play a role in their future work, to take into account parental viewpoints and to select a type of job that is logical and based on academic background.

Because younger generations represent a country's future political, social and economic development, their priorities in job selection often attract attention in Malaysia (Seo, Khairul, Amalina, & Somsubhra, 2014). Both marginalised and non-marginalised youths will face future challenges in finding job opportunities, and these challenges will affect not only the younger generation, but society at large. In the future, issues facing the country will include creating jobs that Malaysian youths want to fill.

The role of the current generation of youths is the same as that of all other generations: to contribute to the economic growth and social development of the country. It is very important that active young individuals find sufficient and satisfactory job opportunities in order to obtain resources and become thriving, productive members of society.

In discussing job preferences among youths, one must distinguish between marginalised and non-marginalised youths, as these two groups often face different challenges in obtaining employment (Seo et al., 2014). Marginalisation occurs when individuals are deterred from any opportunity to develop themselves, when they are isolated from participation in society or when they are deprived of certain rights that are enjoyed by the dominant group. Marginalisation impacts a youth's ability to serve as an active member of society in the economic, cultural and political spheres and affects that individual's future job opportunities. Marginalisation occurs not because of an individual's failure or lack of talent or merit, but rather, because of his or her socio-economic status. Compared to marginalised youths, non-marginalised youths enjoy more opportunities for development, are more actively involved as members of society and do not face as many difficulties in finding job opportunities. Marginalisation refers to youth who are staying in poverty level where their income level is only RM760 per month (Seo et al., 2014).

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The youth generation is the age group between 15 and 30 years that tends to be most affected by mainstream development (Seo et al., 2014). Mainstream development presents youths as facing challenges in finding and securing employment as they are forced to compete in the job market with other groups of workers such as migrant workers. Marginalisation also affects the ability of youths, especially marginalised youths, to fulfil their roles in society. Youths who are marginalised from mainstream development tend to have less control over their lives and fewer economic resources compared to non-marginalised youths (Seo et al., 2014). These youths have fewer opportunities to obtain work and they face higher levels of competition; these factors can lead to their feeling decreased levels of self-confidence and self-esteem.

In modern society, employment is seen not only as a source of financial security and the means through which to serve society, but also as a source of identity and self-esteem (Karlsen, 2001). A young person's job is a symbol of the role he or she plays as a member of society. To have a job can also indicate that youths accept their jobs, having selected their jobs based on their own preference. However, the challenges faced by youths in obtaining employment influence the evolution of future job preference. Job preference impact the lives of both current and future generations (Karlsen, 2001).

Karlsen (2001) discussed the ways in which two types of confrontation, direct

confrontation and indirect confrontation, could influence job preference among youths. Direct confrontation refers to the socialisation of labour within a specific working culture or, in other words, it refers to work-orientated job options. On the other hand, indirect confrontation refers to the exposure to the working world that is received through the social environment before one begins work (Bourdieu, 1990). For example, a youth is exposed to the world of work through observation of the work experiences of his or her parents and other adults close to him or her during childhood and adolescence. This observation of the experiences of others influences a young person's future job preference (Berka, 2000). According to Karlsen (2001), indirect confrontation influences one's orientation, selection of jobs and attitude towards work; this means social environment affects their job selection.

Willis (1990) explained that youths tend to depend on the formation of identity in choosing a job; society uses jobs as status symbols, with the ability to act freely and creatively in one's work signifying high status. Youths often find themselves in situations in which they lack control over their work assignments (Willis, 1990). Ziehe (1993) also emphasised that youths face dissonance between their expectations of work and the realities of working life, as in modern society youths are not given a wide choice in employment, nor do they enjoy much freedom to move about or express their creativity within the norms that have been established for a specific industry or

field. Therefore, youths can develop their job preferences based on the desire for a certain outcome, but the factors influencing job preference are likely to be frustrating due to conflict with social expectations (Creed & Scully, 2000; Karlsen, 2001).

Demographic factors such as gender can influence job preference (Willis, 1990). Young women in Malaysia tend to be influenced by their desire to be perceived as committed to the home and household rather than to the working world (Seo et al., 2014). Even in a modern society in which working women have been accepted, negative connotations still exist in relation to job placement for women, especially when it comes to job selection. It is perceived that some jobs should not be pursued by women, such as that of technician or pilot. It is also believed that young men should not be involved in work that is dominated by women, such as jobs in the culinary field or fashion design. Therefore, there is the question of whether job preference among young men and women is influenced by genuine interest in the job or by other factors, such as familial influence.

Ethnicity is another demographic factor that has been found to impact job preference among youths (Bandura et al., 2001). Such an impact is usually found in societies that have a variety of ethnic groups, such as is the case in Sabah. Among certain ethnicities, traditional perspectives often influence job preference. For example, ethnic Malays often choose jobs related to agriculture or public administration, while ethnic Chinese often choose work that involves business

or trade (Seo et al., 2014). Job preference is traditionally influenced by factors such as parental occupation. However, in the context of modern society, factors other than tradition may influence job preference among youths.

Thus, this study was conducted to explore the factors that influence job preference among youths based on four dimensions of job choice: communality, job goals, job comfort and self-realisation (Kalsen, 2001). These factors were determined to encapsulate modern influences on job preference. The study also engaged in comparative analysis based on the demographic factors of gender and ethnic group (Malays, Chinese and other ethnic groups in Sabah).

This study has the following objectives: 1) to study the differences in job preference among marginalised and non-marginalised youth in Sabah; 2) to study the differences in job preference in terms of gender in Sabah; and 3) to study the differences in job preference in terms of ethnicity in Sabah.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Instrument and Participants**

This study used the quantitative method in the form of a survey questionnaire. The sample consisted of 732 youths aged between 15 years old and 30 years old from Sabah. The respondents were divided into two groups: marginalised youths (N=521) and non-marginalised youths (N=211).

The questionnaire was adapted from the survey on work preference used by Karlsen (2001). Karlsen's original

instrument contained 13 items influencing job preference, and it grouped these items into four dimensions. Each dimension described job characteristics that influence preference: altruism, job orientation, safety and comfort and self-realisation. In this study, the researchers kept Karlsen’s 13 items and added four items to suit the objectives of the study in Sabah. Thus, the instrument used in this study included 17 items. Four dimensions were derived using factor analysis: communality, job goals, job comfort and the capacity for self-realisation through the job. The survey respondents ranked the importance of each item in influencing their job preference using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from ‘not important’ to ‘very important’. The questionnaire also contained demographic questions on age, gender and ethnicity.

**Data Analysis**

The researchers used t-tests in data analysis to test for differences between marginalised

and non-marginalised youths. In addition, researchers also used ANOVA to test for differences of ethnicity within the groups of marginalised and non-marginalised youths.

**RESULTS**

**Differences in Job Preferences between Marginalised and Non-Marginalised Youths**

As can be seen in Table 1, job comfort was the main dimension influencing overall job preferences among both marginal and non-marginal youth populations. Job comfort includes factors such as freedom, satisfaction, independent work time, high income, lack of limitations, competition, ability to make decisions and take risks. The non-marginalised youth displayed a slightly higher mean value for job comfort (4.261) than did the marginalised youth (4.179). The second factor influencing job preference was the capacity for self-realisation, which included the inclusion of

Table 1  
*Group differences (marginalised and non-marginalised) by the four dimensions of job preference*

Dimensions of Job Preference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Communality Non-Marginalised (Mean=3.53, SD=0.82) Marginalised (Mean=3.56, SD=0.77)	-0.491	730	0.624
Job Goals Non-Marginalised (Mean=3.83, SD=0.81) Marginalised (Mean=3.86, SD=0.73)	-0.391	730	0.696
Job Comfort Non-Marginalised (Mean=4.26, SD=0.68) Marginalised (Mean=4.18, SD=0.77)	1.343	730	0.180
Self-Realisation Non-Marginalised (Mean=4.21, SD=3.44) Marginalised (Mean=3.90, SD=0.88)	1.923	730	0.055

considerations such as artistic and religious values and virtue in choosing a job. It was found that non-marginalised youths valued self-realisation slightly higher (4.208) than marginalised youths (3.896). The third factor was job goals, which included goals for higher wages, the nature of the job and accumulation of power. It was found that the marginalised youths showed a higher mean value (3.856) compared to the non-marginalised youths (3.832) in this dimension. Communality was the fourth dimension, and it included factors such as work location, familiarity with

colleagues, work satisfaction, job creation and work atmosphere. The marginalised youths placed slightly more importance on communality (3.559) compared to the non-marginalised youths (3.527). The analysis showed no significant differences between the marginalised and non-marginalised youths in terms of job preference.

**Job Preference by Gender**

**Non-marginalised.** Table 2 shows the comparison between male and female respondents within the marginalised and

Table 2  
Group differences (marginalised and non-marginalised) by the four dimensions of job preference

Dimensions of Job Preference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>MARGINALISED</b>			
Communality	2.066	209	0.040
Male (Mean=3.66, SD=0.76)			
Female (Mean=3.42, SD=0.86)			
Job Goals	0.777	209	0.438
Male (Mean=3.88, SD=0.79)			
Female (Mean=3.79, SD=0.83)			
Job Comforts	-1.735	209	0.084
Male (Mean=4.17, SD=0.66)			
Female (Mean=4.33, SD=0.68)			
Self-Realisation	-1.363	209	0.174
Male (Mean=0.85, SD=1.00)			
Female (Mean=4.50, SD=4.54)			
<b>NON-MARGINALISED</b>			
Communality	-0.273	519	0.785
Male (Mean=3.55, SD=0.79)			
Female (Mean=3.57, SD=0.75)			
Job Goals	-0.025	519	0.980
Male (Mean=3.86, SD=0.77)			
Female (Mean=3.86, SD=0.70)			
Job comfort	-0.947	519	0.344
Male (Mean=4.14, SD=0.82)			
Female (Mean = 4.21, SD = 0.71)			
Self-Realisation	-2.487	519	0.013
Male (Mean=3.80, SD=0.87)			
Female (Mean=3.99, SD=0.88)			

non-marginalised groups that was carried out using t-tests. For non-marginalised youths, the only dimension with a significant difference between male and female respondents was communality, with the young women displaying higher mean scores for this dimension. In other words, the non-marginalised young women in Sabah preferred jobs that were located close to where they lived, that allowed them to become familiar with their work colleagues and that provided them with opportunities to assist others. No significant differences were found between male and female respondents for the dimensions of job goals, job comfort and the capacity for self-realisation. This indicates that both male and female youths in Sabah may be similarly influenced by job goals, job comfort and the desire for self-realisation. Job preference among both male and female non-marginalised youths is driven by factors such as the perceived freedom and ability to exercise artistic talent and creativity in different types of work, to achieve income security and to possess potential for promotion.

**Marginalised.** Among marginalised youths, self-realisation was the only dimension that demonstrated significant differences between males and females. Young women who lived in marginalised areas displayed higher mean scores for self-realisation compared with their male counterparts. In other words, young women in marginalised areas placed more importance on working in abstract or artistic fields or in social welfare when choosing a career.

Meanwhile, no differences were found between marginalised men and women in the dimensions of communality, job goals and job comfort.

**Job Preference by Ethnicity**

This research also included ethnicity as an identifying factor for respondents in both non-marginalised and marginalised areas. Three major ethnicities were identified: Malay, Chinese and ‘other’. The respondents who identified themselves as natives of Sabah, Sarawak or other locations in Malaysia were pooled into the ‘other’ category. This categorisation took into account the fact that a small population of ethnic groups from Sarawak and other areas were living in Sabah during the course of the study.

Table 3 shows that all three ethnicities were represented in the groups of marginalised and non-marginalised youths. A one-way ANOVA analysis was then undertaken to identify differences between the ethnicities in terms of the four dimensions influencing job preference.

Table 3  
*Number of respondents of each ethnicity*

Group	Race	Frequency	Percent
Non-marginalised	Malay	46	21.8
	Chinese	50	23.7
	Others	115	54.5
	Total	211	100.0
Marginalised	Malay	110	21.1
	Chinese	123	23.6
	Others	288	55.3
	Total	521	100.0

**Non-marginalised.** Table 4 shows that the ANOVA analyses found no differences between the three main ethnic groups in non-marginalised areas in the context of the four dimensions of job preference. All ethnicities in the non-marginalised population developed job preference based on work location, salary, potential for

promotion or quality of life. This gives the impression that for mainstream youths, job preference was not made based on ethnic factors or considerations. These findings suggest that the factors leading to the selection of work are similar for all youths in non-marginalised areas of Sabah.

Table 4  
*Comparison of dimensions influencing job preference between ethnicities within the population of non-marginalised youths*

Dimension	Ethnicity	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	ANOVA Result
Communality	Malay	46	3.36	0.81	[ $F(2, 208)=1.81, p=0.17$ ].
	Chinese	50	3.67	0.90	
	Others	115	3.53	0.79	
	Total	211	3.53	0.82	
Job Goals	Malay	46	3.70	0.90	[ $F(2, 208)=1.24, p=0.29$ ].
	Chinese	50	3.77	0.89	
	Others	115	3.91	0.74	
	Total	211	3.83	0.81	
Job Comfort	Malay	46	4.28	0.54	[ $F(2, 208)=0.24, p=0.79$ ].
	Chinese	50	4.31	0.79	
	Others	115	4.23	0.67	
	Total	211	4.26	0.68	
Self-Realisation	Malay	46	4.14	0.80	[ $F(2, 208)=1.76, p=0.17$ ].
	Chinese	50	3.47	1.09	
	Others	115	4.56	4.54	
	Total	211	4.20	3.44	

**Marginalised.** Table 5 shows the dimensions of job preference among the tribes that live in marginalised areas. The ANOVA results showed that among marginalised youths, the importance placed on self-realisation differed by ethnic group ( $p=0.00$ ). The marginalised young Malays participating in the study displayed a higher tendency to choose work that is abstract and welfare-

orientated compared with the Chinese and other ethnicities. These findings suggest that young Malays living in marginalised areas prioritise work that is of a more artistic and welfare-orientated nature. In the other dimensions tested, one-way ANOVA analyses found no significant differences between ethnic groups in marginalised areas.

Table 5

*Comparison of dimensions influencing job preferences between ethnicities within the population of marginalised youths*

Dimension	Race	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	ANOVA Result
Communality	Malay	110	3.60	0.85	[ $F(2, 518)=1.66, p=0.19$ ].
	Chinese	123	3.65	0.83	
	Others	288	3.51	0.71	
	Total	521	3.56	0.77	
Job Goals	Malay	110	3.90	0.78	[ $F(2, 518)=1.23, p=0.29$ ].
	Chinese	123	3.77	0.73	
	Others	288	3.88	0.71	
	Total	521	3.86	0.73	
Job Comfort	Malay	110	4.19	0.70	[ $F(2, 518)=0.35, p=0.70$ ].
	Chinese	123	4.22	0.82	
	Others	288	4.16	0.78	
	Total	521	4.18	0.77	
Self-Realisation	Malay	110	4.08	0.68	[ $F(2, 518)=8.72, p=0.00$ ].
	Chinese	123	3.63	1.02	
	Others	288	3.94	0.87	
	Total	521	3.89	0.88	

## DISCUSSION

The results clearly illustrate that there is a significant difference in how communality and job goals influenced job preference among the sampled marginalised and non-marginalised youths. In terms of communality, the non-marginalised youths showed higher preference for jobs that allowed them to work close to home, become familiar with colleagues and help other people. They also preferred to have jobs that made them happy, and they wanted jobs that were valued by mainstream society.

In terms of self-realisation, the non-marginalised youths placed emphasis on finding work that aided in the development of artistic, religious and welfare-orientated

outcomes. This means that non-marginalised youths chose jobs that emphasised a positive social relationship with the workplace environment. This dimension also emphasised social relationships that fostered interdependence and helped individuals navigate the workplace environment. In addition, this dimension emphasises artistic and creative goals in choosing a job. Typically, non-marginalised youths who have artistic and creative abilities choose jobs that provide opportunities to display such talent. This is because job choices tend to coincide with individual interests and personalities among non-marginalised youths. Moreover, the ability to display one's personality in one's work

will contribute to the worker's sense of personal satisfaction and joy.

No significant differences were found between the marginalised and non-marginalised youths in the dimensions of job goals and communality. This finding needs to be given greater attention in future research, as the youths in this study did not show a preference for the type of work they chose for a regular income. The non-marginalised youths placed more emphasis on work that allowed freedom and work related to art and religion. This finding is new in the literature, and it suggests that future generations will no longer focus on the type of work that is prevalent now or on work that yields a stable income.

In terms of job goals, wages were no longer a motivating factor for non-marginalised youths in choosing a particular field of work. In addition, obtaining the status that accompanied permanent employment did not necessarily provide non-marginalised youths with satisfaction, because they may have felt that such status no longer reflected their true identity. Both marginalised and non-marginalised youths increasingly sought work that they felt was satisfying.

The marginalised and non-marginalised youths surveyed in this study did not choose communality as a main factor influencing their job choices. The youths were more concerned with self-reliance and did not pay as much attention to the particulars of location of the job or social relationships they could foster in the workplace. The youths seemed to have an open mind and

an inherent desire to learn something new. This attitude provides an opportunity for youths to learn new skills, such as computer skills and soft skills. This attitude will also help youths become more independent and competitive in the workplaces of the future.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Based on these findings, the researchers were able to identify the main factors influencing job preference among marginalised and non-marginalised youths. The factors that were identified can contribute to the implementation of government policies designed to increase youths' future job earnings and to reduce the rate of youth unemployment. This includes invention to make more youths involved in entrepreneurship.

This study aimed to determine the different factors influencing job preference among marginalised and non-marginalised youths. The study found that the dimensions of communality and job goals have different impacts on job preference between groups of marginalised and non-marginalised youths. In addition, the study considered differences in job preference by gender and ethnicity. The study found that there was a significant difference between the three ethnic groups in all factors influencing job preference.

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