Employment Prospect of Persons with Disability: the Myth and Reality

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ABSTRACT

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) still remain to be among the most vulnerable group in Malaysia. PWDs employment prospect seems to be limited due to their impairment, especially in managerial and professional positions. Investigation into the community’s perception of PWDs employment prospect and barriers is important to help change negative misconceptions towards PWDs and promote social inclusion. The main objective of the paper is to investigate community’s attitudes towards disability and to examine the effects of these attitudes on PWDs’ participation in the country’s workforce. The PWDs in this study are confined to physical, hearing, visual, and those with multiple disabilities. Over 800 respondents were surveyed in the study ranges from the general public, private and government sectors and students. Respondents perceived that employer should accept PWD workers in the mainstream job however, visual and physical impairments were perceived to have less employment opportunities as compared to speech and hearing impairments. Findings from this study also revealed that there is stigma and prejudice against PWDs. Hence more effective efforts and awareness campaigns by relevant ministries and stakeholders are required to reduce this stigma and to empower this vulnerable group.

Keywords: Community; Employment; Perception; Persons with Disability

1. INTRODUCTION

Public attitudes towards disability are influenced by myths and misconceptions. The public always assumes that Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are very independent, blind people have six sense, deaf people can read lip read, wheelchair users have poor mobility, and people with disabilities are very sickly. Lack of knowledge on PWDs leads to the twin problem of negative perception and barriers between non-disabled and disabled people. In 2016 the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank (WB) reported around 15% of the world's population (1 billion people worldwide) are PWDs. With the increase in chronic diseases and war conflicts in some countries over the years, this percentage is expected to be higher. With respect to location, 80% of the PWDs are in developing countries while 20% live in developed countries (World Health Organization, 2011). Over 100 million families in developing countries are facing conflicts related to disability. With increasing numbers of PWDs, issues such as discrimination, prejudice, lack of education opportunity, limited access to public services and facilities and employability became pertinent.
With the aim to ensure and promote freedom for PWDs without discrimination of any kind based on disability, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has come into force internationally on 13 December 2006. The Convention views disability as a “pathology of society” as the result of societies failure to be inclusive and to accommodate individual differences. It is the societies that need to change and the Convention provides a road map for societies to change. Following the CRPD, the Incheon strategy was introduced by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to protect the rights of PWDs (Han, 2012). This new strategy with the slogan “Make the Right Real” started from 2013 - 2022 with 10 goals. The top of the strategy is to reduce poverty and enhance work and employment prospect, enhance access to the physical environment, strengthen social protection and expand early intervention on education of children with disabilities (United Nation, 2012). Malaysia is also one of the countries that signed the CRPD declaration on 8 April 2008. As part of the CRPD member, all actions against the right of the PWDs must be parallel with the rules and regulations set by the convention. The Parliament of Malaysia has endorsed Person with Disability Act (2008) to promote equality among the PWDs in the society (ERT Country Report Series:2, November 2012). Although this Act is supporting the betterment of PWDs life, however, it lacks in punitive provision in providing remedy to breach the rights of PWDs and was non-enforceable in certain conditions and have not fully protect the life of PWDs in Malaysia (Abdullah, Hanafi & Mohd Hamdi, 2017).

The Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (DSWM) under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development of Malaysia categorized PWDs into seven (7) categories, which are based on the PWD act (2008) as described per below:

**Figure 1 Types of disabilities**

 SOURCE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE OF MALAYSIA (2016)

These 7 types of PWDs are being accepted and have been used widely as an official criteria of PWDs in Malaysia. According to DSWM the definition of Visual impairment is referred to individuals who are visually impaired or have low vision in either one eye or both eyes even with visual aids such as spectacles or contact lenses. There are two categories of visual impairment which is blind and low vision. Hearing impairment is individual who are unable to hear clearly without hearing aids or unable to hear even with hearing aids. Physical disability is individual who suffers from the inability of the body to function normally. Physical disability that does not affect functions such as handicapped one finger, have six fingers or more and without or imperfect earpiece is not categorized as physical disability. Learning disability is individual whose intelligence is imbalanced with his or her biological age. People with down syndrome,
inert, intellectual disabilities, autism, specific learning disabilities (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dygraphia) and global development delay fall under this category. Speech impairment is individual able to hear but with speech problem. Mental disability is individual with severe/chronic mental disorder and undergone treatment or was given diagnosis by psychiatrist for at least 2 years. As a result of the illness, they are still unable to function either partially or fully in relation to himself or herself or with the community even after undergoing psychiatric treatment. Multiple disability is an individual who has more than one type of disability. For example, an individual who has 2 types of disabilities such as vision and hearing disabilities (Guidelines: Registration of Person with Disabilities, Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia, 2012). PWDs registration shows an increasing pattern in the number of registration since 2009 until the end of 2014. In 2015 the number dropped to 365,677 because it has been revised accordingly based on PWDs’ death (DSWM, 2016).

The Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development of Malaysia plays an important role for PWDs development in Malaysia. The department is being entrusted by the government to take care of the society developments including for PWDs. This department is the only department that handles registration of PWDs in Malaysia and a yearly report on PWDs will be produced by them to be presented to the public. As a trusted department, the data, numbers, and policies issued were considered as an official from the government (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Official Website, 2016).

The department provide facilities and privileges to PWDs as mentioned in the guidelines. The Disabled Allowance Worker gives an allowance of RM350 per month to PWDs worker whose income is less than RM1200. The Launching Grant program provides financial assistance for PWDs to participate in small business and entrepreneurship with seed money of RM2700. The department also assists PWDs with financial aid to purchase supportive equipment like wheelchair, artificial leg, blind stick and others. Apart from this, aid is also given to PWDs who are unemployed with an allowance of RM200 per month. PWDs with visual impairment are given full sponsor to purchase white cane and braille machine (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Official Website, 2016).

There are programs introduced by the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia with the aimed to promote self-developments and social inclusion between PWDs and community. Such programs are Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP), institution services, sheltered workshop, Disability Equality Training (DET) and job coach information centre@PLPP. Community RP is pioneered and inspired by World Health Organization (WHO) with an objective to improve the misconception of the society towards PWDs. It also urges social interaction between PWDs and society. The program has been organized once in 1984 at Terengganu, with the involvement of 55 PWDs. The program is still continued until today and the candidate will be giving an allowance of RM150 per month for this program (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Official Website, 2016).

Another program under CRP is “one stop center” that has been introduced with an objective to create integration between the community and PWDs in each state. This center will provide
services to PWDs to facilitate them and the community to get information, advisory services, current need and training (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Official Website, 2016).

Institution services program is also important for PWDs. The institution provides care service, rehabilitation and training opportunity to PWDs. Currently, there are 11 institutions which are Taman Sinar Harapan (7), Bengkel Terlindung (2), Pusat Latihan Perindustrian dan Pemulihan Bangi (1) and Pusat Harian Bukit Tungku (1). That institution is under the maintenance of DSWM. Services, as well as training, is including for all types of disabilities (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Official Website, 2016).

A sheltered workshop is specific to PWDs who are unable to get a job in the open market. The aim of this workshop is to create job opportunity among PWDs and to improve quality, capacity, knowledge, and skills of PWDs in getting a job. This application is open only for a learning disability and physical disability (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Official Website, 2016).

DET is a comprehensive method conducted by DSWM to understand the issues related to PWDs. The training is being used worldwide which is based on a social model perspective. The aim is to create the inclusiveness among the community as well as to change the negative perspective and perception of the society to PWDs. At the same time, it is also done to identify the origin of the problem regarding PWDs. The participant can be non-PWDs and PWDs as well (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Official Website, 2016).

The Job Coach information center@PLPP is established in 26 April 2016 to give support on employment to PWDs. Under this, PWDs will be trained on how to write a resume, filling up the application form, support on before and after getting a job and make a follow up to PWDs. (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, official website, 2016)

Disabled Person Policy 2016 - 2022 (DPP)

DSWM has introduced the Disabled Person Policy (DPP) for 6 years, 2016 – 2022. Under this policy there are 4 main objectives:
1. To provide recognition and acceptance of the principle that PWDs have the same rights and opportunities for full participation in society.
2. To ensure that PWDs enjoy the rights, opportunities and equal access under the law of the country.
3. To eliminate discrimination against a person because of his disability; and
4. To educate and raise public awareness about the rights of PWDs.

To ensure the success of these objectives, the policy strategy focuses on 15 areas; advocacy, accessibility, health, rehabilitation, education, employment, personal safety and social protection, support services, social, human resource development, community involvement, research development, housing, children with disability and women with disability (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Policy/Plan of Action: Disabled Persons Policy, 2016).
National Council for PWDs
The national council of PWDs is stated under the section 3(1), Person with Disability act 2008 (Act 685) to discuss the issues regarding PWDs in top management. The function of this council is to inspect suitable policy and national plan towards PWDs in this country. The council is also responsible to develop the program and strategies to educate society in PWDs awareness (Department of Social Welfare Malaysia, Official Website, 2016).

Even with the various policies and efforts by the government to promote PWDs development, most PWDs in Malaysia are are facing economic, social or employability challenges and problems. The occurrence of discrimination against PWDs is still prevalent (Khoo, Tiun & Lee, 2013). These challenges rose as a result of the dominant charity-orientated and segregated approaches in providing services to PWDs. The segregation started in primary school when the non-disable pupil and PWDs pupil were separated by special school or class (Jayasooria, 1999). According to Kim (1991, 1995); Ooi (1994a,b,c,1995); Sazli Shaari (1994); Lim (1993); Thanasayan (1995a,b,1996) as cited in Jayasooria (1999), PWDs should not be excluded from the economic development planning and implementation. Discrimination among the PWDs workforce is serious and most crucial impacting PWDs life and their wellbeing. Lack of opportunity for them to be hired in the organization is also a serious problem.

According to the Statistic Department of Malaysia in 2015 unemployment in Malaysia increased from 3.0% to 3.1% with PWDs as the highest number being unemployed. “Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti Network” (PDKNet, 2014) mentioned that only 5.24% of the PWDs population is employed in Malaysia.

Lack of education, skills, government care, devaluation and social ignorance are among reasons PWDs faced challenges in getting employment (Islam, 2015). Having secured employment does not mean that PWDs are without problems. Those hired still experienced a lot of negative behavior by the employer or co-worker. According to Ta, Wah & Leng (2011), PWDs especially teenagers experienced substantially poorer quality of life and are more likely to be unemployed due to institutional discrimination.

Even in the developed countries such as the United States there are cases of discrimination towards PWDs in the labor force. According to Hernandez et al. (2008) they found that the employers tend to be more negative towards PWDs although the employer is supportive of American Disability Act (ADA). Employment for PWDs has fallen since 1990 and the gap between PWDs and non-disabled job prospect has widen in USA. Census data on USA employment in 2011 showed that PWDs employment rate has fallen to 41.1% in 2010 from 50.2% in 1991. Aiden & McCarthy (2014) also said that over 36% of the British people tend to think of PWDs as not as productive as everyone else. The International Labour Organization (ILO) also claimed that unemployment among PWDs is as high as 80% in some countries. In India, from about 70 million of their PWDs, only 10,000 have succeeded in obtaining
employment in the industry while the rest is unemployed (American India Foundation, New Delhi 2014).

With the economic crisis and slow down of economic activities around the world, the issues of employability and career opportunities among PWDs warrant urgent attention and consideration from government and the public. This research is motivated by the employability problems facing the PWDs even with policies to help and empower them. The main objective of the paper is to investigate community’s attitudes towards disability and to examine the effects of these attitudes on PWDs’ participation in the country’s workforce.

This study will contribute towards promoting social inclusion and development in various life domains such as education, employment, and community participation. Another significant contribution of this study is that it will be useful as an input for the government or agencies under the government to improve the policies in employment and social status of PWDs.

2. METHODS
This research was conducted using quantitative approach. Data collection was done through self-administered survey through purposive technique. Respondents were from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Self-administered survey questionnaire was used to get the relevant information which will answer the research objective.

The questionnaire was developed as an instrument to examine employability opportunity and respondents practice towards PWDs by the respondents. The questionnaire covered the demographic characteristic, knowledge and employability of PWDs. Likert scales was used to gauge the respondents’ perception and knowledge of PWDs issue.

1000 questionnaires have been distributed starting from midyear of 2015 until 2016 to various government and private sector, self-employed, retirees and students. At the end of 2016, the researcher finally managed to collect 820 questionnaires or 82% of the response rate. As a result, after going through the cleaning process only 812 questionnaires have been used and analyzed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 812 respondents, 34.7% of the respondents are males and 64.2% are females. A large majority of the survey respondents are Malay (80%), Chinese 10.5%, Indian and other Bumiputera with 3.3% and 3.6% respectively. Non-Malaysian citizens also participate in the survey with 1.5% only. Most of the respondents are Muslims which accounts to 82.4%, 7% of the respondents behold Buddhism as their belief. The remaining number of respondents is Christian, Hindus and others with 5.7%, 2.8% and 0.5% respectively. In terms of marital status, 61.2% of the respondents are single whereas 35.8% of the respondents married. The remaining 1.5% of the respondents either is widowed, divorced or separated. As for educational level of respondents, majority of the respondent have graduated from higher learning institution (74.8%). 51.4% are with undergraduate level and 23.5% of the respondents are with postgraduate level
education. Only 15.8%, 8.6% and 1% respectively are with certificate/diploma, secondary and primary school.

3.1. Community Perception toward PWDs and PWDs’ Employability

Respondents were asked to response to the following statements: 1. It is society that creates barriers to PWDs and 2. PWDs are treated fairly in the Malaysian society. This study found that most of the respondents agree that there is a gap between disabled people and non-disabled (34.2%). However, 38% of the respondents also moderately agree that disabled people are treated fairly in the society. This result confirms the fact there is still gap and barriers between PWDs non-PWDs. Gaps and barriers formed roadblocks in achieving equality in employment of PWDs in Malaysia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is society that creates barriers to disabled people</td>
<td>45 (5.9)</td>
<td>183 (24)</td>
<td>273 (35.9)</td>
<td>168 (22.1)</td>
<td>92 (12.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with disabilities are treated fairly in Malaysian society</td>
<td>36 (4.7)</td>
<td>253 (32.8)</td>
<td>293 (38)</td>
<td>126 (16.3)</td>
<td>63 (8.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When probed further on their views on PWDs, study revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that PWDs are more accident prone than other people (26.2%). In terms of facilities and services, a large majority of the respondents strongly support the development of facilities and services for disabled people (64.0%). Most of the respondents agreed that PWDs are suitable to ride on the public transport (46.8%) and may not cause dangers or adverse effects to other passengers (53.6%). PWDs have the right to participate in the full range of human experiences (success and failures) therefore society and employers should have the same expectations and requirements for all employees.

On the possibility of having employment opportunities for People with Disabilities, a large majority of the respondents answered that disabled people receives fewer opportunities in employment because of their disabilities. On average, the respondents stated that people with visual (59.6%), physical (57.3%), learning (50.9%) and mental (52.3%) impairment has fewer opportunities in employment. However, the group is likely to receive more opportunities in employment albeit having a small number is speech, learning and hearing impairment with 7.6%, 6.2% and 6.0% respectively. Physical impairment is notably the highest group with 29.4% of the respondents assuming to receive much fewer opportunities in employment. With regards to hearing disability it was recorded that 2.5% of the respondent assume people with this disability will render much more opportunities in employment.
4. CONCLUSION

This study has provide empirical evidence that in reality there are still negative perceptions and attitudes resulting from lack of understanding about PWDs and interactions with PWDs. Ironically these negative perception and attitudes became factors that formed barriers for PWDs inclusive participation in the workforce. This is supported by the majority of the respondents’ belief that PWDs are more accident-prone, they cannot use the public transportation effectively and have fewer employments opportunities as compared to non-PWDs. People should be hired for any jobs that they have the skills and talents to perform. No PWDs should be prejudged regarding employment opportunities. They should be given equal chance based on their ability and skills. Discrimination against PWDs must be stopped as it contributes to labor wastage in the workforce. Indirectly the society is paying for the cost of this wastage. This social exclusion can be traced back to the level of awareness and attitude of the general public toward person with disability. This study also found that almost half of the respondent does not know how to respond to PWDs if they require help or assistance. Consequently, this stigma results in the discrimination of PWDs first in institutions of education, in the work force and in the community. Discriminations and ignorance of employers and the leaders of the industry have a negative impact on their quality of life and general well-being of PWDs. PWDs employment prospect seems to be limited due to their impairment, especially in managerial and professional positions if this behaviour continues. Hence more effective efforts and awareness campaigns by relevant ministries and stakeholders are required to reduce this stigma and to empower this vulnerable group. According to Islam (2015), due to lack of attention and inefficiency of government policies in providing jobs to PWDs job seekers may cause this issue to rise too. This can also be as a result
of the failure of 1% PWDs in public sector program. This is also supported by the statement from Siti Huraizah Ruslan (PWD representative), in the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) General Meeting in 2014. She said that after 26 years of the implementation of 1% policy, this policy still did not have much impact in creating job opportunity among PWDs job seekers (Utusan, 2014). Therefore, this research recommends that there must be a strengthening of linkages between university, industries and societies. Universities, industries/employers and societies need to work together to ensure the prospects of PWDs employability be improved. As a suggestion, the policy on the circulation 1% of the PWDs required in public sector should be changed to 5%. Government financial support, aid, law enforcement and effective policy are important in ensuring the rights and life of PWDs are supported and protected. Revision and improvement in law is needed to ensure effectiveness of the enforcement. PWDs must be treated with respect and dignity.

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6. REFERENCES


