



Is Child Labor an Issue Today? Factors and Policy-Related

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Abstract

The world has accomplished progress in human right and child education under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the goal that comprises end modern slavery and human trafficking and secures the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms, nevertheless, child labor issues are continuing to spread to many countries in the world. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to address the issue of child labor and factor that help to eliminate child labor issues in Malaysia. Data were collected through an online survey; the participants included twenty-nine (29) Malaysian civil services. The finding of this research indicated that, although the cost for hiring the children is low compare to the adult as highlighted in supply and demand side, few factors preventing community to use the child as a laborer like religion, awareness/knowledge, humanity, ethic, and culture, therefore, there must be a child labor policy that eliminates all forms of child labor in Malaysia. This research is carried values to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in enhancing the policy to end child labor, reduce poverty and hunger, and improves the quality of education; thus, this research carries values to the minister of labor and social affairs in enhancing the policy on human resources development.

Keywords: Child labor; Preventing factors; Sustainable development goals (SDGs).

1. Introduction

Citizens in the developing countries might not be well aware of the issues about child labor, which is synonymous to the third world countries. Malaysia once was an agriculture-based economy with a lack of education coverage especially in the rural area; that might create incidents of child labor at that time. This is due to the high poverty level and lack of awareness among the parents particularly in rural areas and children's work in the farm perceived as a norm. After the implementation of New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970-1990, the poverty level in Malaysia had drastically decreased and the standard of living of its people begin to rise to its desirable stature (Osman-Rani, 2018). During the implementation of NEP, the government managed to persuade and encourage parents to send their children to school rather than being left out in the field of agriculture. This encouragement supported by incentives provided by the government such as providing cash allowances to parents and healthy food to children has tremendously reduced the numbers of children working on the farm. High awareness and knowledgeable policymaker during Malaysia post-independence period regarding the importance of economic stability and education had successfully reduced the poverty level and consequently prevented and curbed pervasiveness of child labor incidents in Malaysia (Thillainathan and Kee-Cheok, 2016).

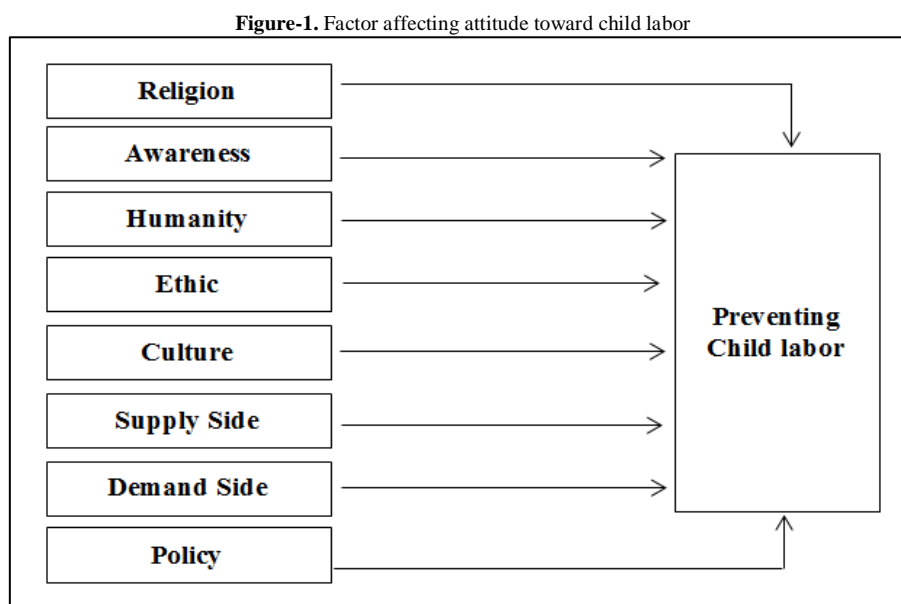
Based on statistics released by the US Department of Labour (2018) in their findings for the Worst Form of Child Labor, until the year 2016, there are 218 million children between 5 and 17 years are in employment worldwide. International Labor Organization (ILO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (2010), has defined the term "child labor" as an act that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, and harms their physical and mental development. The length of their work may be mentally, physically, socially, or morally hazardous for children and deny them the opportunity to attend a school or require them to combine school enrollment with long and hard work. The convention on the rights of the child clearly emphasizes the need to protect children from economic exploitation and from performing any dangerous work, but child labor remains prevalent in many

developing countries. [Admassie \(2003\)](#). Global Estimate of Child Labor report by ILO in 2016, find almost 70.9% of all child laborers worldwide in the age group of 5-17 years in agriculture, amounted to over to 108 million children. Africa and Asia including the Pacific region top the most child labor with figured recorded at 72 million in Africa and 62 million in Asia and the Pacific. 70.9% of child labor is engaging the agriculture sector that concentrated in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific region based on the primary economic activities in the respective regions.

The poverty level has been identified as the main factor that may compel many children to enter the workforce at an early age. Because of the poverty of heads of families, children tend to participate extensively in the agricultural sectors in most rural areas ([Sackey and Johannsen, 2015](#)). Another factor that may influence the roles of their parents as helping parents on farms is a family affair. The role of parents in a school study in Ibadan was highlighted, indicating that 81% of working children indicated that their parents' idea that they should work ([Omokhodion and Omokhodion, 2004](#)). In 2019, The Malaysian Government has agreed to amend The Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 as a punitive action to the offender and provide stiffer penalties to those who exploit child labor in line with the ILO standards. The amendments include increased penalties for offenders including jail terms maximum of five years behind bars and minimum fines of RM50, 000 to maximum RM100,000. Indeed, the above studies open researchers' eyes to look into community opinion; thus, the purpose of this study is to determine factors that hinder the community to use child as labor. The focus on the Malaysian civil service officer, who involve in drafting and formulating policies related. This study would combine factors as religion, awareness/knowledge, humanity, ethic, culture, and policy.

2. Theoretical Framework

The behavioral change paradigm is associated with the assumption that if people are better informed, they will become more aware of environmental problems, and therefore, they will be motivated to act in an environmentally responsible manner. [Hungerford and Volk \(1990\)](#). Another theory is the value-belief-norm (VBN) theory presents a causal chain of five variables that lead to behavior: personal values (especially heterosexual values); this series of five variables, grouped into categories of values, beliefs, and standards. The theory represents three types of inactive environment: this includes environmental citizenship, the behavior of the private sphere, and policy support ([Stern, 2000](#)). Moreover, the Environment Responsible Theory (ERB) argues that having the intention to act is a major factor affecting behavior; The model indicates that the following variables; The intention to act, the place of control, attitudes, a sense of personal responsibility, and knowledge are important factors to know whether or not a person will adopt a behavior. And according to [Elijah \(2017\)](#) None of these theories can fully independently explain the interaction between man and the environment, but a combination of these theories will undoubtedly provide more ideas and possible solutions to the growing environmental problems of the 21st century. Therefore, to prevent child labor researchers need to make use of these theories and introduce factors that control human action; the storyline of this project is on the factors affecting human behavior toward child labor among Malaysians. The study group eight (8) factors to be the reason-preventing child to be used as labor: religion, awareness/knowledge, humanity, ethic, culture, supply side, demand side, and policy. The conceptual framework of the study was summarized in [Figure 1](#), as follow:



3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the issue of child labor and factor that help to eliminate child labor in Malaysia. A survey was conducted to assess Malaysian civil servant opinion and attitude toward child labor issues and factors that were grouped into religiosity, awareness, humanity, ethics, culture, demand and supply side, as well as policy. The questionnaire items measured based on the 5-Likert-scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree". The detail as followed:

i.	Strongly Disagree	:	Respondent strongly disagree with the statement
ii.	Moderately Disagree	:	Respondent moderately disagree with the statement
iii.	Slightly Disagree	:	Respondent slightly disagree with the statement
iv.	Moderately Agree	:	Respondent moderately agree with the statement
v.	Strongly agree	:	Respondent strongly agree with the statement

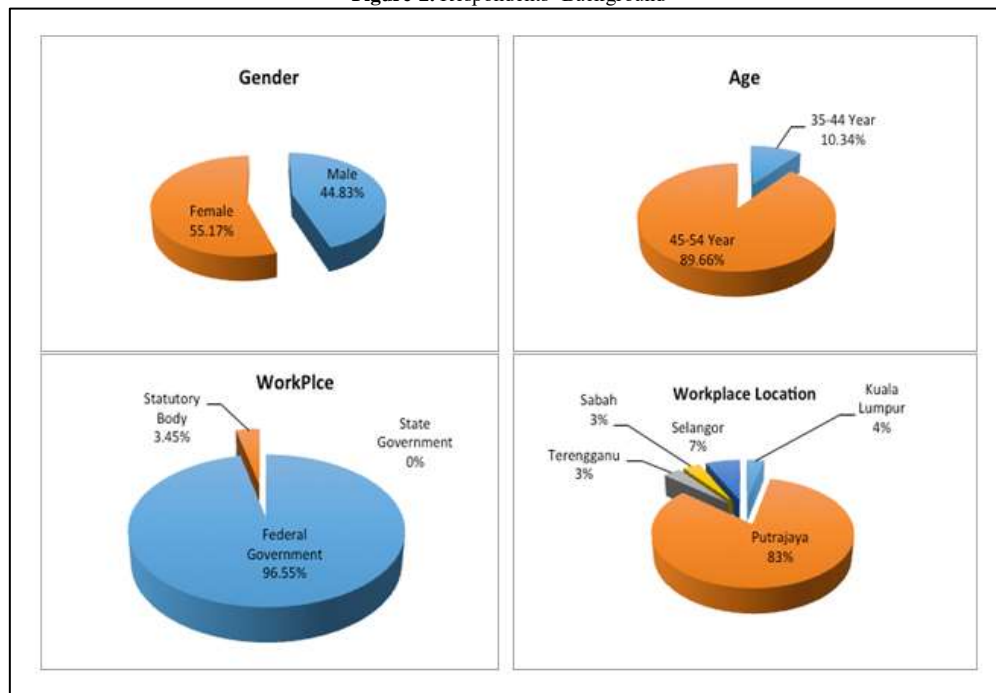
The target respondents are Malaysian civil servants, the sample of respondents has to be selective and only circulated among 29-selected official. The sample is too small; the main reason for the small number of respondents is because the survey is mostly targeted to the respondent from the agriculture sector and the Ministry of Human Resource. Approximately, 30% of the respondent had been selected from the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Primary Industry as these 2 ministries involve specifically in the agriculture sector. Apart from that, there is a possibility the impact of Movement Control Order (MCO) during Coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic may the other reason limited the participation of the respondent.

4. Result

4.1. Participants' Background

Based on the respondents' demographic information, the descriptive analysis was conducted (Figure 2) and the results indicated that 55.17% of respondents were female and 44.83% were male gender, their age was between 35-44 (10.34%) and 45-54 (89.66%), 96.55% of them working in the federal government and 3.45% of them working in a statutory body, their office located at Putrajaya (82.76%), Kuala Lumpur (3.45%), Terengganu (3.45%), Sabah (3.45%), and Selangor (6.90%). The results as follow:

Figure-2. Respondents' Background



4.2. Construct Reliability of the Research

Table 1 indicated the reliability test for the entire construct; and the results indicated that all variables have a high alpha value of 0.9 and above.

Table-1. Reliability Test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Item
Attitude	.921	9
Religion	.924	5
Knowledge	.941	6
Humanity	.939	4
Ethic	.911	4
Culture	.912	3
SupplySide	.973	7
DemandSide	.974	7
Policy	.939	5

4.3. Descriptive Statistics for the Scales

In this part, overall means and standard deviations evaluated from sub-scales and items in the three scales are presented; [Sekaran and Bougie \(2009\)](#) defines the mean as the average that provides a general picture of the data without exhausting the researcher with each of the notes in the data set. Standard deviation was used to evaluate the dispersion of data; the dispersion describes how data are collected around the mean, while the standard deviation assesses the dispersion and the extent to which the figures deviate from the mean ([Parasuraman, 2006](#)). The results provide descriptive understandings of all factors related to participants' attitude toward child labor and the results are indicated as follow:

5. Participant's Opinion toward Child Labor Issue

The results of this section of the survey are to seek participants' views and opinions of a civil servant toward child labor issues. The result indicated that majority of respondents with a mean score of (4.931) are against the exploitation of a child as labor, indeed, the highest mean score of (5) was given to children right in education, and all results are highlighted in [table 2](#) as follow:

Table-2. Participants' View and Opinion

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am against the exploitation of a child as a labor	29	4	5	4.931	0.25788
I support that every child has an education right	29	5	5	5	0
The exploitation of a child as labor is a crime	29	2	5	4.7586	0.68947
I am boycotting the goods that I know produced by child labor	29	2	5	4.4483	0.82748
I will buy the goods produced by child labor to support their income	29	1	5	2.8276	1.4897
Government is fully responsible to curb and prevent child labor issue	29	1	5	4.069	1.09971
Responsibility to curb and prevent child labor issue is at every stage of society	29	4	5	4.8276	0.38443
I cannot accept the fact that the child has to help the parent to supplement the household income	29	1	5	3.9655	1.17967
I can accept a working child to support household income with certain strict condition	29	1	5	3.1724	1.22675
Valid N	29				

6. Factors Preventing Participants to Use Child as a Labor

6.1. Religion Factor

The result of this section indicated that the belief on the importance of knowledge for children as an obligatory in religion is the main factor that influence participant attitude toward child labor issue, as highlighted in [table 3](#) as follow:

Table-3. Religion

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My obligation against the exploitation of a child as a labor	29	3	5	4.6552	0.55265
My belief on child access to education as an obligation of every parent influence my taught	29	4	5	4.8966	0.30993
Religion prohibited any kind of exploitation of a child.	29	3	5	4.7241	0.52757
Providing education opportunities for children is part of religion.	29	4	5	4.8621	0.35093
Religion principle regarding child labor is above the cultural practices.	29	4	5	4.6897	0.47082
Valid N	29				

6.2. Awareness Factor

The result on awareness indicated that awareness on child education as the long-term measure for the poor family to exit from poverty line carry the highest mean of (4.8276), and its an import item that influence participant attitude toward child labor issue, as highlighted in [table 4](#) as follow:

Table-4. Awareness

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am aware that poverty is the main reason for a child to work to support the family income.	29	1	5	4.4138	0.86674
I am aware that child education is the long-term measure for the poor family to exit from the poverty line.	29	3	5	4.8276	0.4682
I am aware that child labor issues will larger the gap of income disparity between the poor and rich in the long run.	29	3	5	4.4483	0.63168
I am aware that child labor issues can be curbed and prevented effectively through law and enforcement.	29	3	5	4.5172	0.68768
I am aware that child labor issues can be curbed and prevented effectively through knowledge and education.	29	2	5	4.6897	0.66027
I am aware that children's involvement in agriculture activity is necessary to pass on skills and knowledge.	29	1	5	3.7586	1.15434
Valid N	29				

6.3. Humanity Factor

The result on Humanity indicated that Socioeconomic disparities and lack of access to education are among others contributing to the child labor carry the highest mean score of (4.586), and its an import item that influence participant view toward child labor issue, as highlighted in table 5 as follow:

Table-5. Humanity

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Socioeconomic disparities and lack of access to education are among others contributing to child labor.	29	3	5	4.5862	0.56803
Child labor prevents the physical, intellectual, and emotional development of children.	29	2	5	4.1724	0.75918
A working child is mostly manipulated by the parents	29	1	5	3.6552	1.0098
Child labor has long-term physical, psychological, behavioral, and societal consequences	29	1	5	4.3103	0.84951
Valid N	29				

6.4. Ethical Factor

The result on ethical factor indicated that children fall easy victims to unfair job conditions because they do not have the power to stand-up against mistreatments carries the highest mean score of (4.8276), and its an import item that influence participant view toward child labor issue, as highlighted in table 6 as follow:

Table-6. Ethics

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Child labor is morally and ethically unacceptable.	29	3	5	4.3793	0.67685
Child labor is unethical because it is against the autonomy of the children.	29	3	5	4.4828	0.68768
A child is considered individuals with an autonomy that should be protected and safeguarded.	29	4	5	4.6897	0.47082
Children fall easy victims to unfair job conditions because they do not have the power to stand-up against mistreatments.	29	4	5	4.8276	0.38443
Valid N	29				

6.5. Cultural Factor

The result on cultural factor indicated that socio-cultural aspects such as the caste system, discrimination, and cultural biases against girls may exist and lead them to be child labor carries the highest mean score of (4.8276), and its an import item that influence participant view toward child labor issue, as highlighted in table 7 as follow:

Table-7. Culture

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a tradition, where children follow the parents' footsteps and learn the job from an early age.	29	3	5	4.069	0.59348
Cultural beliefs may contribute to the gender bias concept that influencing parents to discourage girls from attending school and the opportunity to have an education.	29	2	5	4.1034	0.90019
Sociocultural aspects such as the caste system, discrimination, and cultural biases against girls may exist and lead them to be child labor.	29	2	5	4.3448	0.76885
Valid N	29				

6.6. Causal Factors Associated with Child Labor

ILO-FAO report has outlined 2 major factors contribute significantly to the pervasive incident of child labor namely supply and demand. The supply factor that most respondents agreed with is to supplement household income to meet basic needs; with a mean score of (4.3448). The majority of respondents agreed that child labor incidents happen when the family is struggling to fulfill the basic need due to several factors such as escalating the cost of living.

Table-8. Supply Side

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Need to supplement household income to meet basic needs.	29	3	5	4.3448	0.61388
Limited schools in rural areas and commute to the school are considered dangerous for girls.	29	1	5	3.7241	1.13063
Perceived irrelevance of education.	29	1	5	3.6207	1.08278
Limited access to financial services and children's labor used to repay debts.	29	2	5	3.8966	0.97632
The need to cope with shocks such as a failed harvest, death of livestock, or the illness or loss of breadwinners.	29	1	5	4	0.88641
Children's participation in agriculture is considered a way of life and necessary to pass on skills and knowledge; low awareness of the hazards of agricultural work.	29	1	5	3.8966	0.817
Substitution of adults in domestic chores and labor when parents are working.	29	1	5	3.5172	1.12188
Valid N	29				

On-demand side, the factor that most been agreed by the respondents were the cost for hiring the children is low and underpaid compare to the adult; the total mean score is (4.379) as in the following table:

Table-9. Demand Side

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cheap labors, as children are often unpaid or their wages are lower than adults'.	29	1	5	4.3793	0.94165
Insufficient labor supply at peak times, particularly in agriculture. (e.g. for weeding, harvesting)	29	1	5	3.7586	1.2721
Quotas or piecework based on family work units that put pressure on parents/guardians to involve children.	29	1	5	3.7241	1.16179
Low productivity of small farms and rural enterprises operating at very small margins.	29	1	5	3.8966	1.01224
Requirement on some plantations that children work for them to live with their families.	29	1	5	3.1034	1.44778
The perception of those children's fingers is productive and ideal for some agricultural tasks. (Flowers and horticulture)	29	1	5	2.8276	1.46553
Children, particularly girls, are considered to be more obedient workers.	29	1	5	3.2759	1.4116
Valid N	29				

6.7. Policy Factor

Generally, the survey on the policy of child labor in Malaysia showed an overall result that majority of respondent agreed with all the facts that been listed particularly on the need of specific child labor policy to be developed to support existing children and young persons; the Employment Act 1966 that has been amended in 2019 recorded the same result in providing child labor policy.

Table-10. Policy

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Malaysia successfully curbs the issue of child labor started from the implementation of New Economic Policy (NEP) through the reduction of the poverty level.	29	2	5	4.2759	0.79716
Education and awareness are the best instruments for Malaysia to curb and prevent child labor in Malaysia.	29	3	5	4.5517	0.63168
Implementation of stringent law and enforcement can effectively curb and prevent child labor in Malaysia.	29	3	5	4.6552	0.55265
In 2019, Malaysia had amended the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 to strengthen this Act. This measure is sufficient to curb and prevent the child labor issue.	29	1	5	4.1724	0.88918
Malaysia needs to introduce the policy specifically on the child labor issue to support the existing Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 that had been amended and strengthened in 2019.	29	4	5	4.5517	0.50612
Valid N	29				

7. Multiple Regression Analysis

This part was to measure to see the significant relationship between the entire variables. The finding is indicated in the following tables:

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude	29	4.2222	0.72436
Religiosity	29	4.7655	0.39666
Awareness	29	4.4425	0.68179
Humanity	29	4.181	0.74671
Ethic	29	4.5948	0.50627
Culture	29	4.1724	0.70497
SupplySide	29	3.8571	0.89296
DemandSide	29	3.5665	1.17213
Policy	29	4.4414	0.61963
Valid N (listwise)	29		

Correlations										
	Attitude	Religiosity	Knowledge	Humanity	Ethic	Culture	SupplySide	DemandSide	Policy	
Pearson Correlation	Attitude	1	0.947	0.974	0.95	0.979	0.951	0.963	0.974	0.978
	Religiosity	0.947	1	0.948	0.866	0.933	0.865	0.916	0.908	0.913
	Awareness	0.974	0.948	1	0.957	0.943	0.942	0.957	0.943	0.967
	Humanity	0.95	0.866	0.957	1	0.915	0.962	0.951	0.937	0.979
	Ethic	0.979	0.933	0.943	0.915	1	0.928	0.928	0.959	0.955
	Culture	0.951	0.865	0.942	0.962	0.928	1	0.97	0.956	0.953
	SupplySide	0.963	0.916	0.957	0.951	0.928	0.97	1	0.975	0.946
	DemandSide	0.974	0.908	0.943	0.937	0.959	0.956	0.975	1	0.953
	Policy	0.978	0.913	0.967	0.979	0.955	0.953	0.946	0.953	1

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. An error of the Estimate
1	.995a	0.989	0.985	0.08789

a Predictors: (Constant), Policy, Religiosity, Culture, Ethic, DemandSide, Knowledge, Humanity, SupplySide

b Dependent Variable: Attitude

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.537	8	1.817	235.216	.000b
	Residual	0.155	20	0.008		
	Total	14.691	28			

a Dependent Variable: Attitude

b Predictors: (Constant), Policy, Religiosity, Culture, Ethic, DemandSide, Knowledge, Humanity, SupplySide

Based on the above table of Multiple Regression Analysis Results, all the independent variables (religiosity, awareness, humanity, ethic, culture, supply side, demand side, and policy) significantly correlate with Attitude toward child labor (0.947, 0.974, 0.95, 0.979, 0.951, 0.963, 0.974, and 0.978 respectively). And the correlations between each of the independent variables are also too high. Indeed, the correlation is more than 0.7; therefore all variables will be retained.

8. Discussion

The results from the survey showed some interesting points about child labor issues; some respondents showed indirect support to children's labor production of goods, intending to help and support them financially. This means there are different opinions on this factor, and we believe the reason most people sympathize with children coming from poor families and not realizing they are victims of child labor. Respondent also agreed that an issue of child labor is the responsibility of the whole society and should not be left alone on the shoulder of the government. The respondent also recognized that child is labor just to help their parents and support the household income, although the majority are against the exploitation of children. In fact, from a religious point of view, every child is a gift from God to the parents and it is the parent's responsibility to guide and protect them and provide them with the opportunity to excel in the future. The religion cared for the child, by ensuring the parents preserve the child's rights from a childhood age till they grown and became a young person. According to Riyad as-Salihin, Ibn Umar (May Allah be pleased with them) reported: Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, "All of you are guardians and are responsible for your subjects. The ruler is the guardian and responsible for his subjects; the man is a guardian of his family and responsible for his wards; the woman is the guardian of her husband's house and responsible for her wards; a servant is the guardian of his master's property and responsible for his wards. So all of you are guardians and are responsible for your subjects". What is more, Islam focused on protecting children from wars and disasters, and another thing that will affect child life. The result of the survey indicates the religious awareness of Islamic societies and the commitment to preserving children's rights. Now a day, especially in poor Islamic societies there has been widespread exploitation of a child as a labor for the following reasons: poverty and lack of family income, wars, lack of interest in educating the children, ignorance of the family and lack of knowledge about children's rights, and finally, the culture of some families not to teach children but to use the child as labor to provide money to the family.

On the awareness/knowledge perspective, most of the respondent has a high degree of understanding the roots cause of child labor is related to household income disparity and child education is the way out to exit the poverty line. They also agreed that effective policies on law and enforcement will help to curb and prevented child labor problems. This result may influence the level of awareness between respondent and action by the authority to increase awareness of child labor. Population census in 1980 shows data numbers of children age 10 to 14 years old working in Malaysia is on the decreasing trend from 43,000 to 39,746 in the survey done in 1991. Malaysia ratified the UNCHR, Convention on the rights of the children 1989, in 1995 to recognize the right of the children to be protected from economic exploitation and performing hazardous work. By ratifying the UNCHR charter Malaysia government are fully committed to take certain measure to protect children from exploitation. The result may help Malaysia civil servants to take the issues of child labor seriously, and introduce proper policies that help to prove the issue. The majority of respondents agreed that child labor is morally, ethically unacceptable and children need to be protected at all costs. This ethical awareness may influence the establishment of strict laws in Malaysia dealing with child labor in employment. Children and Young Person (Employment) Act 1966, section 2 (2) only allow certain condition for 4 reasons of work for children such as; light work in the relation of family-run or family-oriented businesses, work in the field of public entertainment, work that is sponsored by the government within a school or institution, and contracted apprenticeships that are approved by authorities. Besides, section 1A (1) further define "light work" means any work performed by a worker; while sitting, with moderate movement of the arm, leg, and trunk or while standing, with mostly moderate movement of the arm.

The elaboration on light work would allow children to carry out a certain task such as a cashier at the grocery store. Recently, on the 1st October 2019, ILO and Ministry of Human Resources launched the development process of the National Action Plan on Child Labor as ILO encourage Malaysia to lead the regional and global levels as a pathfinder country in the fight against child labor. Another interesting point is child labor in the agriculture sector is well accepted as an effort to pass the necessary skill and knowledge. It is not surprising to see there are strict laws against child labor in Malaysia, however, the law also makes allowances for children to work locally, in which many might presume child labor may not as illegal as what we may think. Farmer parents believe work in a family business is beneficial to children's development (Neufeld, 2002). 12% Malaysia Growth Domestic Production (GDP) is from agriculture with 16% of Malaysian populations are involved in the sector. Global data had shown that the agriculture sector had the most child labor in the industry, therefore authority has to find a way to cooperate with corporations and firms engage in the agriculture sector. As poor parents and children have to find a way to make a

living to support themselves, corporations and firms in agriculture would exploit the society that lacking a social safety net and having economic disparities.

There are the parents mostly manipulate a mixed feeling on the factor-working child, where only 59% of respondents agreed and the rest slightly disagreed. This may be due to the influence of culture and belief in Malaysia, as not to disobedient to parents and parents know what best for their children. A study was conducted at Sabah 2007-2008, finds that among the reason why children are brought to is a belief by parents that job experience gained by children would later assist them in their future career. Most of the cases happen to poor families and children not performing well in school. That study also finds factors that lure children in the workforce at an early age are; culture of a society; family belief; and social-economic condition. Child labor study conducted in Nigeria 2009 (Omokhodion), finds the reason for children to work is to supplement the family income, gain experience, pay for schooling, and helping their families in the business. Parental factors associated with child labor are the children's age, parent educational status, size of family, religion, and parent occupational status. The survey shows that parents with lower educational status and working as unskilled workers tend to encourage their children into child labor.

From the global perspective, according to Article 8 of ILO Convention No. 169 states those collective rights to culture and custom should not infringe upon core human rights. Consequently, "culture" or "tradition", whether used by governments or communities, does not legitimize child labor, gender discrimination, unequal access to education services, or any other violations of individual human rights (ILO). Indeed, 85% of the respondent agrees with the fact that where children follow the parents' footsteps and learn the job from an early age as a family tradition. Globally, cultural belief contributes significantly to the high incidence of child labor. In developing countries, there is a tradition in the family where the children that underperform in school will be tagged along to the workplace especially in a rural area where the agriculture activity is the main income to the family. The parents believe in increasing working skill and knowledge to children is more beneficial instead of sending them to the school. This argument makes sense taking into account of every child has their capability and talent. The other argument is the misconception of child labor definition, particularly among the indigenous community. Indigenous community definition on child age might be different from the standard definition used by the government or international organization. Apart from that, 79% respondent agreed that some cultural beliefs might contribute to the misguided concept that a girl's education is not as important as a boy's education, and therefore, girls are pushed into child labor. This so-called gender discrimination is most happen in indigenous cultural practices, girls in the rural or specifically in a remote area are less likely to go to school and migrate to urban areas to work as domestic servants. This makes them less "visible" and more vulnerable to exploitation, sexual abuses, and violence. Some indigenous children combine school with work but the majority of child labor has spent full time as labor (ILO).

International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has outlined several factors that contribute to child labor. The main factors are divided into two major factors namely the supply side and demand side as a determinant of child labor. Generally, the supply side economically and positively means the willingness and ability of producers to create goods and services to the market. Nevertheless, in the child labor case, the willingness and ability terms have to be interpreted comprehensively from a different perspective. From the supply side, 93% of respondents agree on the fact that one of the major factors in the child labor supply side is to supplement household income to meet basic needs. Food and beverages are the fundamental need for human life and inevitably the trend in food prices is increasing every year. In Malaysia, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is the method to measure changes in the prices paid by consumers for a basket of goods and services including food and beverages. CPI trend in Malaysia by time series can be analyzed based on data from the Department of Statistic Malaysia (DOSM). Based on the CPI data trend, children's involvement in workplace activity happens to supplement the household income to meet basic needs that might be justified. CPI trend increased significantly from 2003 to 2016, may give an impact on the household particularly for a low-income household in a rural area. This impact might be pressure for the family to work harder and eventually involved the child to support their efforts to survive in the escalating cost of living. Nevertheless, the Malaysian government provides a huge subsidy and price control mechanism on the essential goods particularly food to ensure the goods are affordable.

Most of the respondents also agree with children's participation in the workplace is considered a way of life and necessary to pass on skills and knowledge. Around the world including Malaysia, the situation can be considered most happen in the agriculture sector when the household is fully dependent on agriculture activity. On the positive side of this factor, agriculture can be considered as a family business and major contributor to the rural household income in Malaysia for example in the palm oil industry and paddy planting. Therefore, skill and knowledge transfer are very important to the children for them to be competent when they inherit the business from their parents. However, provided that the agriculture skill and knowledge transfer is managed based on the current existing law and regulation, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), and practice to avoid any hazard of agricultural work. Skills and knowledge are very valuable assets that important to be transferred to the children that have the interest to make agriculture a career. Malaysia also experienced natural disasters such as the major flood in east peninsular of Malaysia in 2014 and the El-Nino phenomenon in 2016. These disasters gave a huge impact on the rural household income that depend solely on agriculture activity as the main income. This is related to the 78% of the respondent that agree there is the need to cope with shocks such as a failed harvest, death of livestock that push the children to involved in the workplace. Besides, respondents agree the illness and loss of sole breadwinners in the family also become a factor for children to work to help their family.

Indeed, 75% of respondents also agreed on ILO-FAO reports that limited access to financial services and children's labor used to repay debts also among the reason contribute to child labor issues. This factor is a global issue that might be seriously happening in third world countries where access to a financial assistant is limited. In

Malaysia's situation, government-provided assistance in kind of subsidy, incentive, grant, and soft loan especially for a small-medium industry that is involved in agriculture activity and the other industry as well. For example, the total subsidy and incentives provided to the paddy planting industry approximately amounting to RM1.5 billion in 2019 (Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry- MOA). There are 2 factors outlined by the ILO-FAO that obtain more than 30% of disagreement by the respondent and both are related to the education. About 37% of respondents do not agree with the perception that most children involved in labor are not interested or feel irrelevance to education. While 31% of respondents disagree with the facts that are limited school and risk for girls to commute to the school. This factor might be justified in the country that experienced political unrest and civil war thus create a barrier to get the education not only for the girl but for the boy as well. Also, poor education systems and facilities contribute significantly to the child labor issue. The education sector has been given as the main priority by the Malaysian government starting from New Economic Policy in 1970 until the current Malaysia Eleventh Plan.

From the demand side, the majority or 93% of respondents agree that cheap labor is the main factor that contributes to the child labor issue. This situation related to the level of the industry player and mainly takes place in the rural area that is categorized under the cottage industry that operates with small margins. Small wages or unpaid children as labor are an advantage for this category of industry player to maintain or to increase the profit margin. Moreover, 72% of respondents also agree with the manipulation of children as labor happens in a peak period when the industry is lacking workers and children have been manipulated to cover the shortage. This situation mainly occurred in the agriculture sector for example in the plantation sector when it comes to the wedding and harvesting season. However, there is a tradition for the children tagged along to the farm to ease the burden of parents during the peak season in plantation or paddy farming, particularly during the school break. But some parties have wrongly interpreted this situation as a child manipulation. Two factors had been identified that opposed by almost half of the respondents which is that children have to work for them to live with their families as requirements on some plantations and perception that children's fingers are productive and ideal for some agricultural tasks, particularly in flowers and horticulture sector. Plantation companies must provide education access to the worker's children as their human right and not manipulating them as labor. Furthermore, children's physical and mental is not an advantage for them to be manipulated as child labor even though the fact that their fingers are productive and considered to be more obedient workers.

Awareness and knowledge of policymakers regarding supply and demand factors that contribute to child labor as outlined by the ILO-FAO are very crucial to curb or develop prevention measures for child labor issues. For every country, the supply and demand factors might be different depending on the socio-economy and culture of the respective countries. Generally, the presence of demand will inevitably create the supply. Thus, the basic measure is the demand side should be tackle seriously to control or eliminate the supply factor. In Malaysia's scenario, most of the labor that involves 3D (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) jobs cross over various sectors are foreign workers. Uncertain economic situation and the escalating cost of living might be a factor for the foreign labor to involve their children as well in the workplace especially in the plantation sector as a supplement for the household income. The number of foreign labor in the country is increasing in line with the growing industry that demand for manpower that mostly involving 3D jobs. Until 2019, the number of foreign labor in Malaysia recorded amounting to 2.28 million people.

8.1. Understanding the Current Situation of Child Labor in Malaysia

The important goals and plans of the New Economic Policy are to promote national unity through a two-pronged method involves two steps development as to eliminate poverty by raising the level of income and increasing job opportunities for all Malaysians regardless of race. Speeding up the process of restructuring the Malaysian community for improvement economic imbalance, to reduce and eventually abolishing racial identity according to economic function (Mohamad *et al.*, 2014). Poverty and child labor have a strong relationship as agreed by the majority of respondents in this study. Respondent also agrees DEB is successful in eradicating poverty among Malaysian hence the incident of child labor is successfully curbed and prevented with the enforcement of Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966. The different situations might currently happen in Malaysia when the majority of the labor involved in 3D work is foreign labor lead to the issue of foreign child labor. Children's foreign labor is at risk to become child labor particularly when it comes to supporting household income to meet basic needs during a hard time such as escalating cost of living.

Based on the survey, respondents agree that both education and law as an important instrument to prevent and curb child labor. In Malaysia, The Education Act 1996 through Section 29A (2) requires parents to send their children to primary education for six years in the event of parental failure to be fined not more than RM5,000 or imprisonment not exceeding six months or second. Creating awareness among parents and children on the importance of education is crucial as an exit from the poverty line. In 2019, the Malaysian Government has amended Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 to strengthen this act and make it to be in line with ILO standards and Malaysia's ratification of the Minimum Age Convention 1973 and the Worst Form of Child Labor Convention 1999. Generally, the new law includes: exposing children to hazardous chemicals, dusty conditions, extreme temperatures, noise, and vibration. And a young person may be engaged in hazardous work with personal supervision if he or she is under apprenticeship or undergoing vocational training.

Besides, 85% of respondents agree with the amendment of this act is sufficient to curb and prevent child labor, however, the remaining 15% disagrees. The disagreement may be based on the view that the amendment of the act must be followed by systematic and integrated enforcement otherwise an effort to strengthen this act will be ineffective and futile. Interestingly, 100% of the respondent agrees that the amendment of Children and Young

Persons (Employment) Act 1966 need to be supported by the development of the specific policy on child labor. The possible argument is that enforcing the law alone is not sufficient without the support of a child labor-specific policy. The result shows that all the respondents have good knowledge and awareness regarding the child labor issue. This knowledge and awareness are very important to civil servants involved in developing policies related to economic development so as not to overlook child labor issues. Awareness of the current issues based on coronavirus 19 (COVID-19) pandemic also crucial for a civil servant. During Covid-19 pandemic situation, the vulnerable group such as foreign labor, underprivileged and homeless, orphanage both in the rural and urban area need to be protected from involved into child labor incident., the impact of the movement control order (MCO) and post Covid-19 pandemic may drive many children to take up employment to assist their parents to support the family income that severely affected. Some employers due to the extraordinary circumstances of MCO may also exploit them. Hence, the amendments to the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 in 2019 by the government is timely as an effort to prevent child labor incident from occurred from the impact of MCO and post Covid-19 pandemic. The amendment needs to be followed by the implementation of active and stringent enforcement to ensure the effectiveness of the act.

9. Conclusion

Based on data analysis, Malaysian civil servant has a high degree of understanding the root cause and issues related to working children in Malaysia. This may influence the level of education attained by their parent previously and the indirect awareness experienced by the civil servant as a person during childhood. Overall, this research investigates the level of awareness among Malaysian civil servants (official) and focuses on the understanding that they have on issues about child labor. The research achieves its objective to assess the level of awareness in Malaysia civil servant by using the quantitative method, however qualitative method by interviewing the respondent unable to be conducted due to the COVID-19 Movement Control Order imposed by the authority during the period of research. The result of the survey is critical to reflect knowledge and awareness among civil servants, who are responsible for formulating and drafting the public policies dealing with labor issues in Malaysia. Child labor incident rates in Malaysia can be considered low and under controlled compared to other developing countries like other ASEAN countries. Recently, several initiatives have been taken by the government to regulate child labor incidents such as amendment of the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 to strengthen this act. The agriculture sector or specifically palm oil frequently associated with child labor issues. Hence, the government has introduced the Malaysia Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO) as a mandatory certification for the palm oil industry that covers the protection and welfare aspect of the labor. Nevertheless, all levels of Malaysian and specifically the policymakers should not feel complacent with the current situation. Government servants or policymakers should be aware and up to date on the current cost of living, rates of foreign labor, and the latest Covid-19 post-pandemic situation that can contribute to the child labor incident. Besides, the effort to curb and prevent child labor issues should not just within the country but can be expanded as cooperation among the ASEAN countries to ensure the welfare and right of the children.

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