

Job Opportunities for Special Needs Population in Malaysia

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ABSTRAK

Kajian kualitatif ini dijalankan untuk mendapat maklumat terkini tentang peluang-peluang pekerjaan yang dijawat oleh populasi berkeperluan khas di Malaysia dan kaedah bancian telah digunakan. Responden kajian adalah individu berkeperluan khas yang mempunyai pekerjaan di institusi, swasta atau yang bekerja sendiri. Data dianalisis secara kualitatif and kuantitatif dan kiraan frekuensi dan peratus digunakan. Seramai 746 individu berkeperluan khas dengan pekerjaan telah dikenal pasti dan pekerjaan yang dijawat mereka boleh diklasifikasikan dalam empat kategori: profesional, separa profesional, bukan profesional berkemahiran dan bukan profesional tanpa kemahiran. Untuk memastikan lebih ramai individu berkeperluan khas mendapat pekerjaan, lebih banyak majikan perlu kehadapan untuk menawarkan pekerjaan; dan, lebih banyak pusat latihan vokasional perlu dibuka. Individu berkeperluan khas adalah sumber modal negara yang belum diterokai dan kebanyakan daripada mereka mempunyai banyak potensi tersembunyi. Jika diberi latihan yang sesuai, motivasi dan dorongan, kumpulan ini mungkin akan menjadi pekerja yang lebih baik dan setia kepada negara.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was carried out to find the current job opportunities for special needs population in Malaysia and a survey method was employed. The respondents for the study are the special needs individuals who are currently employed in institutions, companies or who are self-employed. The data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative procedures and frequency counts and percentages were employed. 746 special needs individuals with jobs were identified and the job types undertaken by them can be classified into four categories: professionals, semi-professionals, skilled non professional and unskilled non professional. To ensure more special needs individuals are employed, more employers should come forward to employ them; and, more vocational training centers should be opened. These special needs individuals are our untapped resources and many of whom have many hidden potentials. Given the right training, motivation and encouragement, this group may prove to be better and loyal workers for the country.

INTRODUCTION

One percent of Malaysia's 21 million population are estimated special needs population in Malaysia. Unfortunately, only 69,753 are registered with the country's Social Welfare Departments (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, 1997). This is because some of these special needs people were discovered late; or their parents/guardians seek help when the special needs person is too old for formal schooling or vocational training; or their parents/guardians come forward with their special needs children when they are too old to take care of their special needs children; or following their parents'/guardians' death; or the onset of a disability occur late in the normal person's life. Furthermore, registering a disable person in the handicap register is not a compulsory issue in Malaysia. Taking into consideration all of the above reasons, it is understandable why only a small portion of the special needs population is in the job market today.

However, there are many successful special needs individuals in Malaysia. To highlight a few examples of the special needs population, the country has: university lecturers, tutors, research assistants, chief executive officers, managing directors, masseurs, sales managers, executive directors, executive secretaries, teachers, personal assistants, school principals, ballet/dance school owner, auditors, cane weavers, musicians, music or radio deejays, translators, artists, draftsmen, batik designers, salesmen, tailors, lawyers, waiters or waitresses, librarians, businessmen and telephone operators.

Nevertheless, there were sad stories too. In the mid 1980s, many special needs STPM holders' comments were: ... "why must we waste our time at the university when there are no jobs available after graduation. These comments were endorsed by special needs university graduates".... there were very few jobs available then, and we had to compete with our normal peers. We hid our degrees and showed our potential employers our STPM certificates instead in order to secure our telephone operator jobs". In another situation, a blind law graduate was weaving cane (rotan) baskets in a sheltered workshop for nearly six years before a suitable job opportunity came her way. Other educated special needs individuals became street musicians and even as bilingual speaking beggars.

Throughout the world, disabled people are among the least privileged and most vulnerable. Their right to training, employment and job development is often overlooked. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been concerned with the development and the well being of all including those with disabilities. Many countries are recognizing the special needs population's potentials as workers and contributors to society as well as their rights to equal treatment and opportunity. Consequently one finds more and more disabled people who are educated and competent, who have the tenacity and will to achieve social and economic independence (ILO 1994).

In the Malaysian context, Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir announced that more aggressive efforts should be implemented to ensure that the one percent allocation for employment of the handicapped in the public sector was achieved and that the private sector should emulate this (*News Straits Times* 13 January 1990).

Providing the disabled with job opportunities is the right thing to do. Facilities for the disabled became the main consideration when HARRIS Advanced Technology (M) in 1987 added a third factory to its manufacturing plant in Hulu Klang. More need to be done to help the disabled adjust to their careers. It is important to assign the disabled the right job for the right person so that they would not feel incompatible and give up easily. Once they have gone through the initial stage they will prove to be as dedicated as the others (*The Star* 4 December 1994).

Seven years have now passed and only little success has been achieved in getting many disabled workers working in either government or private sectors. At the end of 1996, only a few thousand disabled were placed in the private sector (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat 1997).

This study was carried out to identify a list of possible new job opportunities that can be accomplished by the disabled people in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed the survey method. The structured interview was conducted to obtain data and information on job opportunities for the disabled. The respondents for the study are the special needs individuals who are currently employed in institutions, companies or who are self-employed.

The data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative procedures. The qualitative analysis was used to describe the various suggestions and requirements of the companies/institutions employing special needs workers. Frequency counts and percentages were also employed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are 746 special needs respondents (72.1% males and 27.9% females). There are 222 blind, 298 physically handicapped, 163 deaf, 53 mentally retarded and 10 speech disabled. They work in 140 institutions or companies as professionals, semi professionals and skilled non-professional and unskilled non-professional workers as demonstrated in Table 1. The majority of them (67.96%) work as non-professional skilled workers.

Majority of the special needs workers are the skilled non-professional physically handicapped workers (Table 2). They constitute 28% of the overall workforce. The second largest is the non-professional skilled blind workers (18.6%)

TABLE 1. Percentages of respondents according to types of jobs

Types of Jobs	Percentage
Professional	8.85%
Semi Professional	5.50%
Non-Professional (skilled)	67.96%
Non-Professional (non-skilled)	17.69%

TABLE 2. Percentages of workers according to types of disabilities and job categories

Job Category	Types of Disability	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage by Job Category
Professional	Blind	44	5.9	66.67
	Physical	17	2.3	25.76
	Deaf	5	0.7	7.58
Semi-Professional	Blind	9	1.2	21.95
	Physical	20	2.7	48.78
	Deaf	11	1.5	26.83
Non-Professional Skilled	Speech	1	0.1	2.43
	Blind	139	18.6	27.42
	Physical	209	28.0	41.22
	Deaf	118	15.8	23.27
	Mentally Retarded	34	4.6	6.71
Non-Professional Non-Skilled	Speech	7	0.9	1.38
	Blind	30	4.0	22.73
	Physical	52	7.0	39.39
	Deaf	29	3.9	21.97
	Mentally Retarded	19	2.5	14.39
	Speech	2	0.3	1.52

followed by deaf workers in the same job category. When classified according to job categories among the special needs individuals who work as professionals, 66.67% of them are blind, 17% are physically disabled and 7.58% are deaf. For the semi-professional workers, there are 21.95% blind, 48.78% physically disabled and 26.83% deaf.

As for the non-professional skilled jobs (Table 2), the majority of the special needs workers are physically handicapped (41.22%) followed by the blind (27.97%) and the deaf (23.29%). Similar findings are also true for the job classified as non-professional.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BLIND

From the total respondent of 746 special needs workers studied, 29.76% are blind as tabulated in Table 3. Majority of them (62.62%) work as non-professional (skilled) workers, e.g. telephonists, factory workers, handicraft workers, stenographers and street musicians (Table 4). About 20% of the blind hold professional jobs, e.g. lecturers, managing directors, administration officers, counselors, auditors and training officers. They also constitute a majority of the special needs professionals.

TABLE 3. Percentage of blind workers by job category

Job Category	Frequency	Percentage
Professional	44	19.82
Semi-Professional	9	4.05
Non-Professional Skilled	139	62.62
Non-Professional Non-Skilled	30	13.51
Total	222	100.00

TABLE 4. Job opportunities for the blind

No.	Occupation
1.	Executive Director
2.	Manager
3.	Lecturer
4.	Teacher
5.	Legal Officer
6.	Auditor
7.	Administration Officer
8.	Human Resource Officer
9.	Counselor
10.	Tutor
11.	Translator
12.	Businessman
13.	Stenographer
14.	Masseur
15.	Salesman
16.	Musician
17.	Telephone Operator
18.	Factory Worker
19.	Guard
20.	Handicraft Worker

JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED

Almost 40% (39.95 %) of special needs workers studied are physically disabled. As demonstrated in Table 5, majority of them (70.13%) work as skilled non-professional workers. They work as factory workers, businessmen and general workers. About 17% (17.45) of them work as non-professional unskilled worker. Only 5.7% of the physically disabled hold professional jobs, such as lawyers, auditors and officers (Table 6).

TABLE 5. Percentages of physically handicapped workers by job category

Job Category	Frequency	Percentage
Professional	17	5.70
Semi-Professional	20	6.71
Non-Professional Skilled	209	70.13
Non-Professional Non-Skilled	52	17.45
Total	298	100.00

TABLE 6. Job opportunities for the physically disabled

No.	Occupation
1.	Manager
2.	Lecturer
3.	Teacher
4.	Surveyor
5.	Administrator
6.	Draftsman
7.	Clerk
8.	Businessman
9.	Technician
10.	Mechanic
11.	Welder
12.	Tailor
13.	Masseur
14.	Carpenter
15.	Factory Worker
16.	Production Worker
17.	General Worker
18.	Maid
19.	Guard

JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEAF

Only 21.85% of the special needs individuals studied are deaf. Most of them (72.39%) work as skilled non-professional workers in factories (Table 7). Some of them work as production operators, general workers, mechanic and cleaners. A few of them (3.07%) work as professionals, e.g. managers, teachers and supervisors (Table 8).

TABLE 7. Percentage of deaf workers by job category

Job Category	Frequency	Percentage
Professional	5	3.07
Semi-Professional	11	6.75
Non-Professional Skilled	118	72.39
Non-Professional Non-Skilled	29	17.79
Total	163	100.00

TABLE 8. Job opportunities for the deaf

No.	Occupation
1.	Manager
2.	Teacher
3.	Supervisor
4.	Graphic Artist
5.	Nurse
6.	Cashier
7.	Chef
8.	Clerk
9.	Businessman
10.	Machine Operator
11.	Production Operator
12.	Tailor
13.	Waiter / Waitress
14.	Factory Worker
15.	General Worker
16.	Labourer
17.	Shop Assistant

JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED

Mentally retarded workers constitute 7.10% of special needs workers under-studied. The figures in Table 9 below show that none of them work as professional or semi professional workers. Majority of them work as skilled non-professional workers, e.g. production operators, carpenters and factory workers. About 36% of them work as unskilled non-professional workers, e.g. sweepers, cleaners, shop assistants and other general workers (Table 10).

TABLE 9. Percentage of mentally retarded workers by job category

Job Category	Frequency	Percentage
Professional	0	0
Semi-Professional	0	0
Non-Professional Skilled	34	64.15
Non-Professional Non-Skilled	19	35.85
Total	222	100.00

TABLE 10. Job opportunities for the mentally retarded

No.	Occupation
1.	Cashier
2.	Businessman
3.	Salesman
4.	Production Operator
5.	Factory Worker
6.	General Worker
7.	Handicraft
8.	Tailor
9.	Shop Assistant
10.	Carpenter
11.	Cleaner
12.	Gardener
13.	Seamstress
14.	Sweeper

This research findings showed that the special needs population's shortcomings or their handicapping factors were not the stumbling blocks of their career development and education has played a major role towards their success.

Seven hundred forty six special needs individuals (blind, low vision, deaf, mentally retarded, cerebral palsy, down syndrome, epileptic, stutter, physically disabled, spastic, and with speech problems) with jobs were identified and some of the jobs undertaken by the special needs population are classified as: professional, semi professional; skilled non-professional and unskilled non-professional.

Hundred forty government agencies and private companies were located. These employers or potential employers' suggestions for their clients or potential clients' training to be more specific and suitable for the job market; in line with the country's needs; business bias; inclination towards industrialization: electronic, information technology; food and tailoring.

CONCLUSION

The special worker can undertake jobs at various levels. Government agencies, companies and individual employers should prepare job opportunities for them. Training centers should work 'hand in hand' with the employers in providing on-the-job training for special individuals. Training centers should be sensitive to curriculum innovations to meet societal needs.

Even though there were many examples of the special needs population with secured jobs, our society cannot be complacent with the successful few. We have to work harder to ensure that more job opportunities be made available for the special needs population. They were born with or have acquired a very small disability. Do not let our negative attitudes become handicapping factors for the special needs population or to their disabilities.

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