

The Perception of Social Work Students on Human Trafficking in Malaysia

M. Zulaikha¹, Z.M Lukman², C. Azlini³, R. Normala⁴, M.Y. Kamal⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}*Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu, Malaysia*

Abstract: The issue of human trafficking in Malaysia has been debated for decades. It is a transnational crime that is rapidly growing across the world compared to drugs and weapons smuggling. Human trafficking could affect the country's safety and sovereignty. This transnational and domestic issue targets women, children and foreign workers as exploitable victims. Various proactive approaches have been taken by the government to provide safety and protection mechanism for victims of human trafficking and establish Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (ATIPSOM) Act 2007 in order to punish the offenders and to tighten the state border control that involves cooperation from different parties. Even though Malaysia's position constantly changes in the annual human trafficking report by the U.S. ambassador in Malaysia, Malaysia continues to work hard in order to place in the top tier in overcoming human trafficking crime. This descriptive study is done by using the questionnaire in the research to explore social work students' knowledge of human trafficking in Malaysia. The findings of this study show that students do understand and have the general and specific knowledge about human trafficking and that they are serious about human rights that are supposed to be received by the victims. However, there are a number of social work students who are less interested in helping trafficking victims in the future. Research and special education need to be given to the students so that it could make the students want to help the victims and obtain the additional knowledge about human trafficking not only in Malaysia but also in the whole world.

Keywords – Human trafficking, Exploitation, Malaysia, Social work, Questionnaire

I. INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is a crime that involves violations of human rights and is a form of modern-day slavery, where this phenomenon is not a new case and it could disrupt Malaysia's safety and sovereignty [1]. Human trafficking issue has gotten global attention as a serious transnational crime along with drugs and weapons smuggling [2]. Malaysia is perceived as a destination, source and transit country for human trafficking [3]. Human trafficking is also an act of exploiting humans in order to gain profit through sex activities or labor work [4].

Human trafficking means all actions that include acquiring and retaining labor or one's service by force which includes recruiting, taking, transferring activities using threat or by forcing through other forms of deception [5]. Besides that, it also involves deceiving, kidnapping, and abuse of power, providing or accepting people with payment or interest

transactions for exploitation purposes [6]. Exploitation includes all forms of sexual exploitation, labor work or forced service, slavery or activities inclined towards slavery, servitude and other activities that are against the law or organ transplant [7].

It is estimated that the profit gained from human trafficking crime is as much as USD 38 billion a year [14]. The profit of sex exploitation in Malaysia is as much as US\$99 billion [15]. Based on the profit gained a huge number of crime victims especially women and children having their dignity, freedom and human rights subjugated from them [8]. The United Nations (UN) had approximated about 700,000 to four million children every year fall victim to human trafficking [9]. Meanwhile, ILO estimated around 12.3 million people in the world are labor workers [10]. NGO *Free the Slaves* estimated that there are 27 million slaves in the whole world so far. Generally, this organized crime placed the third largest in the world that gives profit after the crimes of drugs and firearms [11].

Today we can see a lot of measures taken by the Malaysian government in order to overcome this problem. Malaysian government established an act in order to contain a human trafficking issue which is Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIP) Act in 2007, in which it aims to overcome transnational crime [12]. ATIP is then renewed and became Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants 2007 (ATIPSOM) [13]. This act is strengthened with the establishment of the National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons 2010–2015 [8]. The government continues to be committed in combating the issue with the implementation of National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2016-2020) where the plan focuses on cooperation between national strategic partners including the United States of America in order to improve the aspects of prevention, accusation, and protection of human trafficking victims [14].

Therefore, this writing is done to study the perceptions held by social works students towards human trafficking issue in Malaysia and to know the extent of their readiness in facing and helping human trafficking victims in Malaysia in the future. The result of this study will give the latest information about the students' extent of general and specific knowledge and their readiness to be involved in combating human trafficking issues. This study will also improve their awareness to be involved in overcoming the issue.

II. GLOBAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING SITUATIONS

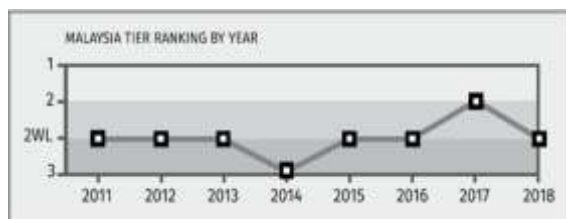
United Nations (UN) has taken the initiative by introducing the main document to prevent this international crime, and the document is known as *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children*, also known as the *UN Tip Protocol* [15]. This document acts as the main reference especially for the UN members in understanding human trafficking crime, also as the main guideline for few countries such as Malaysia and Australia in forming laws for trafficking crime in their countries [16]. The UN protocol has outlined three main elements to prove human trafficking offense [17]. Some of the elements are:

1. The accusation has to prove that the criminal has done something that is inclined towards the crime.
2. The criminal has used any force, the victim's weakness or other methods as stated in the protocol for the criminal activity.
3. The criminal has to have at least one motive or intention where their action is done to exploit the victim.

Trafficking crime is the third largest organized crime in the world [18]. AUSTRAC estimated the profit gained from human trafficking activity is as much as *US\$10 billion* until *US\$31.6 billion* a year and as much as *US\$13,000* for each victim based on ILO [19]. Approximately around 27 million world citizens became victims for human trafficking [20]. UNICEF's report stated that about 400 women and children become trafficking victims every month, where most of them are aged between 12 to 16 years old and are forced to work in the commercial sex industry [7]. In ASEAN regions, the main cause of human migration is due to higher economic opportunities compared to their native country [21].

III. HUMAN TRAFFICKING SITUATIONS IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a popular destination among foreigners and locals alike because of the economic factor, and these groups of people are vulnerable to become victims of trafficking for sexual purposes and labor work [22]. Malaysia has placed in level 2, 7 times in a row in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report released by the U.S. State Department and in the latest Trafficking in Persons Report 2018, Malaysia remains in level 2 [23]. Placing in level 2 in compliance with minimum standards shows that the country is not fully applying the TVPA assigned by the U.S. State Department [24].



Looking at the accusation aspects, Malaysia has recorded an obvious increase where 35 individuals were sentenced compared to only seven in 2015 [9]. In the human trafficking report, the government has strengthened the law by banning the victim's passport from being segregated, where it has convicted 17 employers for segregating passports without permission compared to zero in the previous year [25]. ATIPSOM has formed a process in order to help the victims in the protection center so that they can move freely and work, where from 1,558 victims that were identified, the government only carried out 106 risk assessment and gave working visa to six victims along with special emigration passes for freedom of movement to 12 victims, whereas 28 other victims were given freedom of movement [10].

Malaysia became a transit country and to some extent became a source and destination country for children, women, and men, who are exposed to being in forced labor, sex activities and slavery [26]. Based on *Global Slavery Index* 2014 report, Malaysia placed on the 56th for the level of modern slavery circulation, the 34th as the country with the total number of people involved in modern slavery and placed 87th as the country that takes a strict initiative in combating human trafficking [16].

Various factors lead to the rise of human trafficking crime rate in Malaysia, some of them are migration aspect, victim scamming syndicate, job opportunities, weak country border control, cunning, poverty, economic advancement and variety mechanisms of trafficking victims traded [27]. Trafficking victims claimed that they were physically abused while in the imprisonment, for failure to pay ransom asked by the syndicate [15]. The flood of immigrants coming inside the country is due to human trafficking, failed to be contained because of the demand in foreign workers in various sectors and they came from Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific [9].



IV. MALAYSIA'S EFFORT IN COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING CRIME

Malaysia emphasised the formulation of acts and execution of punishment to the offenders according to the systems implemented in the country by formulating ATIPSOM 2007 twice, once in 2010 and the second in 2015 that aim to include offenses related to smuggling of migrants, increasing penalty rate for human trafficking offences, protecting victims and to

combat global syndicate that makes Malaysia as a transit country for human trafficking and smuggling in order to bring victims to the third country especially Australia [4]. The offenses under ATIPSOM 2007 has been outlined to few sections, some of them are Section 12, 13, 14, 15, 15A, 26A, 26B, 26C and 26D, where each section of the offenses have their own conviction and differs between the sections [27].

Malaysia has also formed a special institution to face human trafficking issue which is named Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants. MAPO functions and is responsible as stated under Section 7 Act 678 [25]. The policies under MAPO has granted working permission to human trafficking victims, especially men and women victims that don't need protection and further care [28]. MAPO has been given the mandate to plan and oversee the implementation of ATIPSOM 2007 that covers the aspects of preventional, implementational, and prosecution including organizing awareness campaigns in order to open the citizens' eyes about the effects of human trafficking to the country [29].

The government has implemented the National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2010–2015) and (2016–2020) as a pioneer for the approaches taken by MAPO [30]. This action plan acts as a guide in the attempt to overcome human trafficking issue and completing the existing Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2007, it also has its own objectives, principles, vision, and mission [31]. This plan focuses on the cooperation with the national strategic partners including the United States of America to improve the aspects of prevention, prosecution, and protection of human trafficking victims [18].

The government continues to be committed by establishing a National Human Rights Institutions also known as SUHAKAM, where The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999 (Act 597) was formed [19]. The establishment of this is to build and protect human rights in Malaysia including human trafficking victims' rights [32]. SUHAKAM has functions of its own, especially to advise and help the government in formulating laws, code of conduct and recommending approaches that the government should take [20].

Malaysia continues to reinforce the efforts in combating human trafficking issues through negotiation sessions with foreign countries such as Australia, that aims to find a way in order to reduce the rising of human trafficking crime rate [33]. The Bali Process is also one of the country's attempt in solving trafficking issues in the Asia-Pacific regions, where it discusses and brings forth various initiatives, to increase public's awareness about this transnational issue [9]. Malaysia has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Kingdom, to cooperate in the field of safety for both countries especially in the transnational aspects, where it covers aspect of violence, organised crime, human trafficking, migrants smuggling, drugs smuggling, document fabrication, cybercrime and counterfeit money [34].

V. FORMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

1. *Exploitation*

Most frequently happening is human trafficking. Victims of sexual exploitation are often promised work that pays well and are then either taken legally or smuggled illegally into the country and they are strictly controlled and are often involved in drug abuse [31].

2. *Bonded Labour*

Smuggled illegally and are forced to do work that is beyond their ability and if the victims refuse they are threatened to be handed over to the authorities. Victims are completely manipulated and are under the syndicate's constant surveillance. Often the victims are abused and not paid [33].

3. *Forced Domestic Servitude*

Victims of forced domestic servitude are domestic workers that are forced to work in an informal workplace and are forbidden from mingling with other workers. Victims of foreign domestic servitude often consist of women and children, they were recruited from other underdeveloped countries such as South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Women victims are ordered to work as house helpers and nannies, whereas children victims are made labor workers or beggars. Victims of domestic servitude are placed in developed countries such as Europe, the United States of America, Taiwan and Malaysia [8].

4. *Organ Trafficking*

Organs are mostly obtained from the poor and underdeveloped countries. Organ trafficking is done by means of exploiting the victims in the country or smuggled illegally. Organ trading gives a high profit in international level [30]. Based on the research conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO), approximately 10 percent of 70,000 kidneys are transplanted every year where they come from the black market [9].

5. *Baby Trafficking*

Baby victims that are sold in the black market give off a handsome sum of money in return because of the high demand. For example in Malaysia, babies are sold from RM10, 000 until RM20, 000 each [25]. Baby victims trafficked are often kidnapped, smuggled and bought by individuals or certain groups that are involved in the syndicate [35]. Babies get a high demand in the black market [36]. The Ministry of Human Resources collaborated with ILO and held a *symposium* to create awareness and their target was the employers that provide job opportunities to foreign workers [37]. In 2008, an inspection was conducted on 50,518 employers and 15,376 employers and foreign workers were involved [38]. Actions have been taken by the involved enforcement in order to further strengthen the process and procedures of foreign workers recruitment and to reduce the demand of the foreign workers [39].

VI. DATA AND METHOD

The research done is a quantitative study in the form of descriptive in order to identify and empirically study the extent of the students' general and specific knowledge about human trafficking issues and discover how far the social works students are willing to involve themselves in helping human trafficking victims in Malaysia. The study uses 22 items of a questionnaire to get the study findings, where the questions focus on human trafficking in Malaysia and specifically for the social works students in Malaysia. The study obtains direct statistics pertaining to human trafficking issues from agencies involved along with the annual reports released such as Ministry of Home Affairs, MAPO, SUHAKAM, *Trafficking in Person Report*, Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) and Immigration Department of Malaysia and also supported by previous studies.

The idea is then expanded from literature review and related studies on human trafficking issues written by Conahan & Kyere (2010), where there are 28 question items in the questionnaire, then elements of literature review were used to form questions in the questionnaire so that it is suitable with the human trafficking context that happens in Malaysia, by adding specific questions about human trafficking, related acts, and suitable demographics. The questionnaire that is modified is given to 5 ex-students of social works in public universities in order to test its clarity and suitability.

i. Data Collection

The questionnaire was begun circulated to social works students in University Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), then to social works students in other public universities such as University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), University Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UniMAS) and University Utara Malaysia (UUM), aged between 18-41 year olds and have active enrollment status. The approximated number of respondents that answered the questionnaire are 300 people and consists of men and women. The data were collected for a month from July 7th, 2018 until August 12th, 2018, where all respondents could answer within the given time and all research findings were reported in statistical format. When the questionnaire was closed on August 12th, 2018, the collected data are then exported to an Excel spreadsheet for data cleaning and analysis.

VII. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

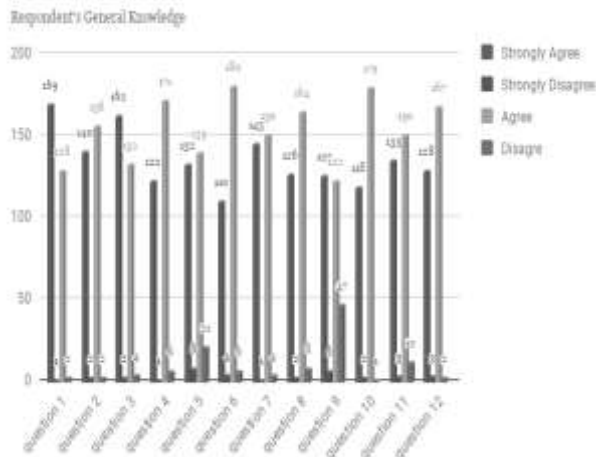
The researcher cleaned the data by taking out all questions from the spreadsheet obtained until all that remains are the digit values. The question texts and answers from questions in Section A, B, and C in the questionnaire are extracted, and the frequencies and pie charts are used to represent the findings based on the research questions.

1. Social Works Students' General Knowledge On Human Trafficking In Malaysia

This Section contains 12 questions where the answer with the highest percentage and frequency from the respondents will be explained. Based on Figure 3, Q1-respondent obtained knowledge about human trafficking issues from media such as television, radio, printed media, and social media, where the result showed as much as 99% ($n=295$) respondents agreed. For Q2-human trafficking is also referred to as human exploitation, of which 98.66% ($n=296$) respondent totally agree with human trafficking also referred to as human exploitation. MAPO stated that it is called exploitation because there are elements of force, fraud, and devotion [7]. Q3-trafficking victims consist of women, children, and men. The result showed 98% ($n=294$) respondent agreed with the given statement. Grubb and Bannett said the victims consisted of women, children, and men were to be prostitutes, slaves, and organ trafficking [40]. Q4-poverty is one of the factors the easily affected to become human trafficking victims, indicating as much as 97.66% ($n=293$) respondents strongly agree. Fraser said the victims wanted to change the poverty of life by seeking better economic opportunities in other countries [21]. Q5-the human trafficking victims involved citizen from other countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, Philippines, Nepal, Burma, Vietnam, and not a Malaysian citizen, show that 90.3% ($n=271$) respondent agree with the stated statement. Andika said the victims were from the political escape of a country. Q6-human trafficking victims mostly become illegal immigrants [41]. The result showed that 96.66% ($n=290$) respondent agree. ATIPSOM stated that they are called illegal immigrants because they are non-citizens and are not permanently residing in Malaysia [42]. Q7-human trafficking victims come to Malaysia to find better economic opportunities. Result show as much 98.33% ($n=295$) respondents strongly agreed. Fraser said the victims come to Malaysia due to greater economic opportunities than in their own country [21]. Q8-women trafficking is often for sexual purposes and men for labor work. Indicating as much as 96.66% ($n=290$) respondents strongly agree with the given statement. Rashila state that male and female victims are vulnerable to forced labor and sex or bondage [26]. Q9-more human trafficking victims are a man than women, indicates that 82.27% ($n=247$) respondents agreed. United Nation said that male prevalence is more due to the high demand for foreign workers [10]. Q10-human trafficking victims are sometimes abused physically, that show 98.88% ($n=297$) respondents strongly agree. Noor said victims were physically abused during the detention period [16]. Q11-studies social work courses provide enough information about human trafficking, indicating that 94.98% ($n=285$) of the respondents agree that the social work courses they are studying provide enough information. Finally, Q12-human trafficking victims need to be given access to the appropriate human rights indicating that 98.33% ($n=295$) respondents agree, in which UDHR states no one can be enslaved or disallowed and prohibited in all forms of treatment [10].

In short, social works students do have the general knowledge about human trafficking in Malaysia with the average of 287.5, this shows that the social works students take the issue seriously, especially regarding human trafficking that involves the country they're living in.

Fig 3: Respondents' General Knowledge about Human Trafficking



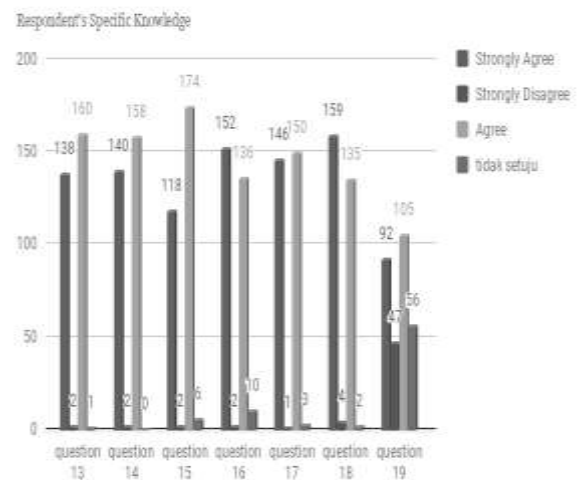
2. Social Works Student's Specific Knowledge About Human Trafficking In Malaysia

This section contains 7 questions and a large number of respondents agree and truly agree about the statements given, the total percentage of the answer with the highest frequency will be discussed. Based on Figure 4, for Q13-human trafficking in Malaysia can disrupt the country's safety and sovereignty. Showed 99% (n=298) respondents strongly agree. Alvarez & Alessi noted that trafficking phenomena are no new because it is capable of sustaining the security and sovereignty of Malaysia [1]. Q14-in Malaysia there are laws to protect human trafficking victims. Indicates that 99.33% (n=298) respondents agreed. Rahim said the Malaysia government has to established an act to curb the trafficking problem of ATIP [43]. Q15-Malaysia is said to be a destination, source or transit country for human trafficking, as much as 97.32% (n=292) respondents agree. Rashila says Malaysia is a transit country and is a source country and destination country for children, women, and men [26]. Q16-an NGO that helps the human trafficking victims in Malaysia, indicates 95.98% (n=288) respondents strongly agree. SUHAKAM [6] said government agency and NGOs were involved in combating human trafficking within five years. Q17-human trafficking is the transnational crime that is rapidly growing in Malaysia, showed 98.66% (n=296) respondents agree. Brennan noted that human trafficking has received global attention as a serious cross-border crime in line with smuggling of weapons and drugs [2]. Q18-human trafficking issues in Malaysia are put under Anti-Trafficking In Person and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act 2007, indicating that 97.99% (n=294) respondents agreed. Cooper & Hieda stated that Malaysia has legislation ready to contain this problem that ATIPSOM which was enforced on February 28,

2008 [19], and Q19-social work student is interested in helping human trafficking victims in Malaysia in the future, showed 65.89% (n=197) respondents agreed. However, 34.11% (n=103) of the respondents did not agree to help the victims in the future.

All in all, the majority of the social works students have the general knowledge about human trafficking issues in Malaysia with the average number of 287.7, this shows that the social works students are concerned about the current issues that happen in the country. However, even though they are in the social field, it can be seen that only half of the social works students are interested in helping the human trafficking victims in the future.

Fig 4: Respondents' General Knowledge about Human Trafficking



VIII. CONCLUSION

The research findings represent a large number of social works students having the general and specific knowledge in understanding human trafficking issues. A large number among the 300 respondents are taking the human trafficking issues in Malaysia seriously and are concerned about the victims' welfare. The students realize the importance of human rights for everyone regardless of citizenship even though the human trafficking victims are not Malaysian citizens. It is hoped that the students in the social works field could look deeper into this issue and frame a solution that could potentially help the human trafficking victims in the later years. Researches about this study are the first step in identifying the persecuted human trafficking victims and also as a guideline for other researchers in unearthing human trafficking issues in Malaysia. The government has also taken appropriate measures in combating the issue. This conducted research could help in increasing the public and public universities students' knowledge and awareness in combating human trafficking crime and to help the victims involved.

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