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MEDIA RELEASE

RIMA Perception Study Finds Malay/Muslim Youths are Pessimistic About Their Employment Prospects

1. According to a recent perception study conducted by the Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA) among 29 Malay/Muslim youths aged 18 to 35, more than half of the respondents are pessimistic about the Malay youth population's employment prospects. While they acknowledged that there have been a more diverse and larger number of job opportunities for their generation, they felt that this is outweighed by the competition that they face from their peers who are just as competent and skillful. They shared their concerns over a series of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with RIMA held from June 2017 to December 2019.
2. Among other concerns that the youth respondents had was the relevance of their education vis-à-vis the jobs available in the market. They were concerned about finding decent work, stating that when they do secure employment, it often involves poor wages as well as poor working conditions, including heavy workload, long hours, having few or no prospects for advancement, and a lack of benefits.
3. An interesting observation from the study is the differential attitude towards staying in a job between participants with Higher Nitec qualifications or below, and those with at least a diploma qualification. Respondents in the former category said that they will 'bear' with the conditions of underemployment or heavy workload because they believe that their perseverance, experience and enthusiasm will be rewarded in the future. Meanwhile, participants with at least a diploma qualification shared that they prefer to remain unemployed than accept what they consider 'undesirable' jobs, which most defined as 'lousy' pay or heavy workload.

4. The study also found that most respondents had witnessed discriminatory behaviour among hirers, employers, colleagues or clients. Besides the respondent's perception of being discriminated along racial lines at the workplace, it is also interesting to note that most of them also attested to the experience of wealthier and higher-ranking Malay colleagues, clients and customers treating them unfavourably.
5. A majority of the respondents also hoped for more support from Malay/Muslim organisations (MMOs) in the areas of career guidance and counselling, provision of job matching services, and advice on how to counter discriminatory behaviour, among others.
6. Though the sample size for the study is small, the results reveal interesting trends among Malay/Muslim youths. These findings can be used as first steps in addressing some of the issues raised.
7. More detailed findings can be found in the Annex. **The full study titled, 'Voices of Youth: A Conversation on Employment' can be downloaded from bit.ly/RIMAxYPS.**

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About the Centre of Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA)

The Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA) is the research arm of AMP Singapore. RIMA's transformation from a research division of AMP to a full-fledged research centre in February 1998 underscored the growing emphasis on research to support the provision of services, as well as to promote intellectual discourse and discussion on issues and developments affecting the Malay and Muslim communities.

Today, RIMA's mission is to undertake strategic research aimed at providing thought leadership in contemporary Malay and Muslim affairs. Our vision is to be a centre for research excellence for the advancement of the Malay and Muslim communities. To this end, RIMA conducts research programmes in a number of key areas, which include economics, education, religion, social, leadership and civil society.

VOICES OF YOUTH: A CONVERSATION ON EMPLOYMENT
SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

A total of 29 Malay/Muslim youths aged 18 to 35 participated in the qualitative study, which involved focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The youths come from diverse academic backgrounds, are employed in different occupations and presented very different perspectives on the research topic. Their demographic profile can be found in the table below:

Demographic Characteristics	Actual No.
Gender	
Male	17
Female	12

Age	
20 – 24 years old	6
25 – 29 years old	18
30 – 35 years old	5

Employment Status	
Employed	20
Unemployed	9

Demographic Characteristics	Actual No.
Academic Qualifications	
Below Secondary	1
N Levels	1
O Levels	6
A Levels	1
NITEC	3
Diploma	12
Degree & above	5

Employment Concerns

The key findings include the youths' perceptions, attitudes, awareness and predicaments on employment. The study found six themes which resonated among the youths, namely wages and workload; treatment and relations; experience versus qualifications; threats and challenges in sustaining or getting a job; career aspirations and perceptions of Malay/Muslim youths in the workplace; and community's support base.

a) Wages and workload

The youths are broadly concerned about the few opportunities for decent work. They also questioned the value of education they and their peers received: whether it is still relevant to the jobs available; how their knowledge and skills can serve them in the longer term; and the extent to which decision-makers are committed in investing in the potential of young people. Most participants who cited low wage as a concern shared that they have to work overtime or turn to other ways to earn extra income. The older youth participants with a Higher Nitec qualification and below shared that they have more expenses to bear especially if they are married and have housing loans to service, but their lower academic background may mean they have low wages.

An interesting observation from the study is the differential attitudes towards sustaining or getting a job. Diploma and degree holders shared that they prefer to remain unemployed than accept what they consider undesirable jobs, while those with lower educational qualifications tend to bear with the conditions of underemployment or heavy workload.

b) Treatment and relations

Most of the youths asserted that they have witnessed discriminatory behaviour among hirers, employers, colleagues or clients. Apart from perceived discrimination along racial lines at the workplace, it is also interesting to note that most of them also attested to the experience of being treated unfavourably by the wealthier and higher-ranking Malay colleagues, clients and customers.

It is also found that most of the youths did not have any network of contacts or referrals when looking for jobs. For them, their network constitutes mainly Malays of similar occupational, educational and income background. This leaves them with limited resources at their disposal when looking for employment.

c) Experience versus qualifications

The youths generally agree that a higher level of education leads to better job outcomes. However, it is worth noting that some of the diploma and degree holders also felt that they still face challenges in career progression as compared to their peers of other races. Some also experienced difficulties in securing gainful employment or found themselves persistently underemployed.

Those with lower academic backgrounds believed that they are given lesser employment opportunities as compared to the other races because of their education. These group of participants lamented that their years of experience are now rendered ‘useless’. They argue that experience and good performance are deserving of higher salary, and that salary should be pegged to work experience and not solely on their educational qualification. They also perceived the presence of foreigners in Singapore’s job market as being unfavourable to their already difficult access to career opportunities, job security and promotion.

d) Threats and challenges in sustaining or getting a job

The youths expressed concerns about seeking employment in an increasingly competitive environment and the impact of a rapidly changing global economic landscape on Singapore’s labour market. While they acknowledge that there have been a wider spectrum and greater job opportunities for their generation, they felt outweighed by the equally competent and skillful competition from their peers.

None of the youths interviewed have used the services of government-funded job assistance platforms nor explored opportunities through roadshows when they encounter difficulty in looking jobs. Some mentioned that the complexity of the system is a reason why they are confused about the available help and how to utilise them.

e) Career aspirations and perceptions of Malay/Muslim youths in the workplace

Most of the youths felt that more Malay/Muslim youths were seeking employment in informal sectors such as freelance or gig jobs. They felt that Malay youths have less specific career goals or unsure of their goals for the future.

Nevertheless, the youths recognised that the Malay/Muslim community has improved over the years. The younger generation is now being better equipped with qualifications and is in a much comfortable position to thrive in Singapore’s economic landscape.

f) Community’s support base

The youths felt they were not adequately informed of any services Malay/Muslim organisations provide that can help them in looking for jobs. Additionally, there were also concerns raised to help madrasah students develop essential skills for their employment, including providing opportunities to network and interact with non-madrasah students, regardless of religious affiliation.