

Precarious Work Behaviour among Millennial Generation in Malaysia: A Preliminary Investigation

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ABSTRACT

The concept of precarious form of employment has received attention over the years. Precarious work that involves with uncertainty, instability and insecurity is indeed very popular among the Millennial generation. Thus, the study aims to describe the extent of the Millennials perceptions on various dimensions of precarious work behavior. Data collected from 163 Millennials revealed that precarious work have limited workers' rights. However the Millennials agreed that the wages they received for the work is satisfactorily. This study is significant to the organization and the department of human resource to understand the characteristics of the Millennials in Malaysia especially in the context of precarious work behavior.

***Keywords:** Millennial generation, Malaysia, preliminary investigation*

Introduction

Globalization and vibrant technological change are unavoidable forces characterizing the 21st century. This has indirectly influence the work employment pattern that lead to the emergence of 'precarious employment'. Substantial growth gained by precarious employment is mainly due to the changing nature of employment conditions specifically the increase of flexible employment relations globally and in line with the effort of making employment more flexible (Benach et al., 2014).

Precarious work is characterized as work that is insecure, unstable, and uncertain which departs from the norm of standard work such as job security, working full- time, work under employer's supervision and other statutory benefits and entitlements (Kalleberg, 2009; 2014). Precarious work has also been referred to as employment on a fixed-term contract and unregulated, part time work, self- employed, casual, temporary, on- call, done at home and outsourced (Hewison & Kalleberg, 2013). In addition, the term precarious employment is also known as contingent work as it critically labeled as insecurity or flexibility. Compared to other forms of employment contracts, precarious form of employment are more vulnerable and the workers often face difficulties and inequality in exercising their rights. However, there is still no universally agreed definition of precarious employment, given its multidimensional nature that differs across countries and the economic and social structure of the labour market (Moscone et al., 2016).

In the context of South and Southeast Asia, Hewison and Kalleberg (2013) highlighted that their experience on precarious employment are different from other regions in the world. Going from agricultural to industrial and service sector, flexible employment is required and has been translated through the widespread use of precarious forms of employment. In other words, employment practices that are uncertain, unstable and insecure are considered as 'standard' in this part of the world. In order to compete globally, these practices are in place to reduce cost and to take full advantage of flexibility. Among the most common precarious work described are short-term contracts, part time works and self-employed. Thus, Hewison and Kalleberg (2013) suggested that the term 'precarious work' is potentially a more useful conceptualization to be used in these countries. Thus, we proposed the term 'precarious work behaviour' to be used throughout this paper. Precarious work behaviour in this study

is defined as any work behavior that is related to non-regular and non-standard work such as part time work, short term contracts and self-employed.

The emergence of studies on precarious work demonstrates its importance to the field of human resource management. However, little studies have been conducted in the context of Malaysia, especially in understanding the perceptions Millennials that involved in precarious work. As such, the study has an aim of describing millennial generation perceptions on various dimensions of precarious work behavior. The study is hoped to fill a gap in understanding the Millennials work patterns and to get the best out of them.

Literature Review

Precarious Work

The concept of precarious form of employment has received attention globally for years. In fact, it has been recognizing as a pervasive feature of labor markets in developed countries prior to World War II (Quinlan, 2012). According to Kalleberg (2009), the precarious employment has emerged in the United States in the mid- to- late 1970s. The neoliberal globalization and technology advances has challenged the economy of the United States which in turn led companies to outsource work to lower-wage countries in order to become more competitive globally. The growth of precarious work in the US and other more developed countries has consequently influenced the changes of work arrangements in Asia region (Hewison & Kalleberg, 2013). The growth of precarious employment in Japan begin since the mid 1980s and in China, it is seen as rare until the 1980s. In the context of Malaysia, there is very limited data on non- standard employment. At the very least, nearly one in four employed persons in Malaysia in 2011 were non-standard informal workers(Serrano, 2014) and female workers was found to predominate in non-standard employment.

Due to its characteristics, precarious work has made the availability as well as the quality of jobs more risky, uncertain (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017) and deteriorating (Kalleberg, 2009). Kalleberg and Vallas (2017) further elaborate that the outcomes of precarious work are not restricted to work and the workplace but also involve many non-work areas, including individual health and well-being such as mental stress and poor physical health.

Precarious Work and Millennial Generation

Generation Y or the Millennials were born in or after the 1980s and who entered the labour market in the 2000s. Millennials are more educated than earlier generations, knowledgeable users of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and avid users of social media (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010). Shih and Allen (2007) characterized the Millenials as a generation that has high levels of self-confidence, self-reliance, independent, individualistic, socially active and prefer to work in a team. Additionally, they are also said to give emphasis to work-life balance and make career decisions that favor lifestyle and leisure. Findings by Lyons et al., (2015) also indicate that Millennials had almost twice as many job and organizational moves in a year as the generation Xers, which is almost three times as many as the Boomers, and 4.5 times as many as the Matures.

Compared to other generations, Millennials are more exposed to the changing labour markets by accepting more precarious work arrangements such as temporary, part-time work and multiple jobs (Lyons et al., 2015). This is due to the fact that organizations nowadays became flatter and more competitive to sustain their flexibility, thus less opportunity for the Millennials to engage in a long term employment. A few researchers (e.g., Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Ng et al., 2010) described the Millennials as highly mobile and they expect more job variation.

In Canada, young people aged 15 to 24 are more likely to work on a temporary employment contract. As stated, the percentage of temporary employment among youth in Canada rose from 25percent in 1997 to 30 percent in 2001 (DePratto & Barlett, 2015). Almost half of women and 39 percent of men aged 20- 24 years old in the European Union (EU) involve in precarious job (EIGE, 2017) and young people especially school leavers has been identified involves in precarious employment. The number of young people involves in precarious employment is very limited in Malaysia. However, those that considered outside labor force are regarded as the ones who are engaged in such precarious employment. In Malaysia, 33.8 percent of young people aged between 15 to 19 years old and 11.3 percent of those between 20 to 24 years old are considered outside labor force in year 2000 (Rajeswari, 2004).

Millennials have high expectations from their organization. Özçelik (2015) highlighted that the Millennials value “freedom and flexibility to get the job done in their own way and their own pace”. In other words, Millennials prefer to be given flexibility in completing their tasks and responsibilities.

This preference is increasing as technological advancements, especially high speed internet are becoming standard in the home and thus, employees believe that they need not be physically at work throughout scheduled work hours. Thus, it is suggested that organizations that hire the Millennials need to to organize work schedules that permit them to work flexi-time, telecommute and/or work from home (Özçelik, 2015).

Methodology

The study utilized a quantitative approach. Data were collected using online survey. Respondents of the study were Millennial who do part time work. Part time work is an indicator of a precarious work (Lim, 2018) as it differs from the regular, full time work and is involves uncertainty, insecurity, and have limited social and legal protection (Kalleberg et al. 2000).

Precarious work behavior was measured using Employment Precariousness Scale (EPRES) adapted by Vives et al. (2010). The instrument includes a few dimensions such as wages, worker rights, and individualized contracts (individual level bargaining over employment conditions). In addition, respondents were also asked on their perceptions on flexible wrok arrangement. 5 Likert scale was utilized for all variables in the study.

Results and Discussion

Data were collected from 163 respondents using online using snowball sampling technique. Majority of the respondents were females (70 percent) and Malay ethnicity (80 percent). 67 percent of the respondents are married and 60 percent of the respondents are age between 26 to 35 years old. 61 percent of the respondents hold a bachelor degree and 19 percent of the respondents hold a masters degree.

Based on Table 1, respondents were asked on their rights as an employee while doing precarious work. It was found that the weekly holiday has highest mean of 3.07 (26.2 percent of agreement). This is followed by requesting a day off for family affairs (Mean = 2.95, 8.5 percent of agreement) and taking a long leave (Mean = 2.79, 10.3 percent of agreement). Taking sick leave was found to have the lowest mean of 2.32 (5.4 percent of agreement).

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Precarious Work (Worker rights)

No	Item	% of agreement	Mean	SD
1	Indicate how often you can exercise without obstacles:Weekly annual leave	26.2	3.07	1.15
2	Take sick leave	5.4	2.32	.86
3	Go to the doctor	9.8	2.50	.90
4	Take long leave	10.3	2.79	.79
5	Request a day off for personal reasons when needed	8.5	2.68	.73
6	Request a day off for family affairs when needed	8.5	2.95	.86

Table 2 describes the respondent's opinion on wages that they received in doing precarious work. A total of 57.2 respondents (Mean = 3.6) agreed that their current salary allow them to cover their basic needs. However only 34.5 percent (Mean = 3.0) of the respondents agreed that the salary that they received allows them to cover unexpected expenses.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Precarious Work (Wages)

No	Item	% of agreement	Mean	SD
1	My current salary allows me to cover my basic needs	57.2	3.6	.87
2	My current salary allows me to cover unexpected expenses	34.5	3.0	1.1

Table 3 displays respondents' perception on their chance to bargain under their precarious employment condition. More than half of the respondents (63.2 percent, Mean = 3.69) agreed that they are not afraid to demand for a better working condition. This is followed by 'able to demand better working conditions without being exposed to punishments' with a mean of 3.47 (49.2 percent of agreement). Statement 'do not feel defenseless towards unfair treatment by my superiors' was the third highest as perceived by the respondents with a mean of 3.31 (40.8 percent of agreement). The lowest mean of 3.12 (32.9 percent) indicate the probability respondents would be fired for not doing what they were asked to do

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Precarious Work (Bargaining Under Employment Condition)

No	Item	% of agreement	Mean	SD
1	I do not feel afraid to demand better working conditions	63.2	3.69	.88
2	I am able to demand better working conditions without being exposed to punishments.	49.2	3.47	.88
3	I do not feel defenseless towards unfair treatment by my superiors	40.8	3.31	.83
4	I am not afraid of being fired for not doing what I am asked to do.	39.6	3.08	1.06
5	I would be fired for not doing all what I am asked to do.	32.9	3.12	.97

Table 4 describes the Millennials's perception on flexible work arrangement. The highest mean of 4.39 (85.3 percentage of agreement) was found to relate flexible working arrangement and its importance in order to attend to family responsibilities. This is followed by its importance in order to manage with various work and responsibilities with 87.8 percentage of agreement (Mean =4.28). Statements that highlighted the benefits of flexible working engagement was also found to have high mean values, specifically on 'enable to focus on the job' with a mean of 4.28 (84.7 percentage of agreement) and 'balances work commitments' (84.2 percentage of agreement). The lowest mean was found on other people's reaction on flexible working arrangement such as 'supervisors' (Mean = 2.2) and 'other people' in general' (Mean = 2.64).

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis of Flexible Work Arrangement

No	Item	% of agreement	Mean	SD
1	Supervisors react negatively	22.5	2.62	1.19
2	Essential to attend to family responsibilities.	85.3	4.39	.74
3	Enable to focus more on the job	84.7	4.28	.78
4	Negatively impact career progress.**	17.1	2.20	1.17
5	Cannot afford the loss of pay **	38.5	3.29	1.10
6	Balance life commitments	84.2	4.28	.82
7	Other people react negatively	20.7	2.64	1.03

8	Essential to be able to deal with other interests and responsibilities outside work.	81.1	4.13	.88
9	Essential for me in order to be able to manage variations in workload and responsibilities.	87.8	4.28	.72

Based on the results, it can be concluded that Millennials have positive perceptions on precarious work behavior. Even though precarious work behavior comes with many disadvantages such as instability, insecurity, and insecurity, the Millennials are aware with it and they are do not feel afraid to demand a better working condition. This is maybe due to, firstly, Millennials are the generation that is exposed to precarious work arrangement (Lyons et al., 2015). Thus, in this turbulent business environment, temporary, part-time work and multiple jobs work arrangements are increasingly become a norm for this generation. Secondly, the fact that the Millennials' characteristics such as multi-tasking, highly mobile, independent, and their preference to do work with freedom and flexibility match with the attributes offered by precarious working arrangements. Finally, some researchers such as Özçelik (2015) in fact proposed that organizations that intend to hire Millennials, should incorporate the 'flexibility' element to ensure good retention rate of the employees. Perhaps precarious work arrangement does fulfill the needs of the Millennials in terms of work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study serves as a platform in providing initial findings on precarious work behaviour among Millennials in Malaysia. The results would be useful for the top management and HR practitioners to understand the work pattern among Millennials. Additionally, this study provides information in designing jobs and working environment that would fully utilize the potential of the Millennials.

However, a few suggestions are highlighted to further improve the study. Future research should utilized a better sampling technique, to further improve the generalization of the study. Additionally, future research should also look at the effect of precarious work behaviour on various variables such as job satisfaction, well-being and happiness of the employees. Moderating or/ and mediating variable should also be identified to fully understand how the relationships between the variables work.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge research support under Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) (600-rmi/rags 5/3 (75/2015)), administered by Universiti Teknologi MARA and funded by the Malaysian Government.

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