

## ANALYZING WORK AND SALARY EXPECTATIONS OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS

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### ABSTRACT

*Youths are a misunderstood generation. Their unique personalities and values have attracted much media interests and research. Unfortunately, much of these coverages tend to aggravate the negative rather than the positive. One of the popular discourses on youths is on their work expectations. Youths, who belong to the millennial generation, have often been stereotyped as demanding, materialistic, narcissistic and unwilling to work hard. These characteristics have been blamed as the root cause for their lack of success in the job market. Employer-based surveys perceived millennial youths in general are too, yet did not have much to offer. These negative portrayals are harmful to their prospects as human capital. The article is written to investigate if there was an alternative view on the subject. Much of the existing knowledge on the topic, at least in the context of Malaysia, has been informed mostly by employers' perspectives commissioned by professional consultants and recruitment bodies. Also, past research on the topic has covered the general population of the millennials, rather than a specific group of unemployed youths. While this knowledge has been helpful in shedding light regarding our job applicants, however they are less useful in revealing the other side of the story. Therefore, this article attempts to combine two important aspects - unemployed youths and their stereotypical work expectations as millennials - to determine if their profiles and expectations may explain their unemployment. Findings reported in the article are based on a survey involving 844 unemployed youths located throughout Malaysia. Two specific objectives are pursued in the article: to determine desired work attributes expected by unemployed youths; and to identify their expected salary against selected demographic profiles. The findings suggest that our youths may have been subjected to unfair accusations and stereotypical misconceptions. The results are discussed in relation to relevant theory and practice. Recommendations and areas for future research are provided.*

**Keywords:** youth unemployment, millennials, work attributes, work values, financial expectations.

### ABSTRAK

*Golongan belia merupakan generasi yang sering disalah anggap. Personaliti dan nilai mereka sering mendapat perhatian media dan dijadikan topik penyelidikan. Malangnya, kebanyakan liputan ini cenderung kepada aspek negatif dari yang positif. Salah satu isu popular mengenai belia adalah mengenai jangkaan kerja mereka. Belia, yang merupakan generasi milenium, sering distereotaip sebagai berkemahuan tinggi materialistik, narsistik dan tidak sanggup bekerja keras.*

*Sikap tersebut sering dilihat sebagai punca utama kegagalan mereka mendapat pekerjaan. Dalam satu kajian, majikan berpandangan golongan belia selalu meminta lebih dari nilai yang mereka tawarkan. Persepsi negatif ini memudaratkan prospek mereka sebagai modal insan. Tujuan artikel ini adalah untuk menyiasat pandangan alternatif mengenai isu tersebut. Kebanyakan pengetahuan mengenai isu ini terutama di Malaysia adalah berdasarkan perspektif majikan. Kajian ini juga kebanyakannya dilaksanakan oleh perunding profesional dan agensi rekrutmen. Selain itu, kajian lepas membincangkan populasi umum millennials, dan bukannya belia yang menganggur. Walaupun pengetahuan ini bermanfaat, namun ia masih kurang jelas dalam mendalami isu tersebut. Oleh itu, artikel ini cuba menggabungkan dua aspek yang penting - belia yang menganggur dan jangkaan kerja mereka sebagai golongan milenium. Tujuannya adalah untuk menentukan sama ada latar belakang dan harapan mereka dapat menjelaskan punca pengangguran mereka. Dapatan yang dilaporkan di dalam artikel ini adalah berdasarkan kaji selidik yang melibatkan 844 belia yang menganggur di seluruh Malaysia. Artikel ini mempunyai dua tujuan: i) mengenalpasti atribut kerja belia menganggur; dan ii) mengenalpasti jangkaan gaji mereka berdasarkan profil demografi terpilih. Penemuan kajian mendapati golongan belia mungkin menjadi mangsa terhadap tuduhan yang tidak adil dan stereotaip negatif. Hasil kajian ini dibincang dan dikaitkan dengan teori dan praktis. Cadangan penyelidikan lanjut turut dinyatakan.*

**Kata Kunci:** Pengangguran belia, milenium, atribut kerja, nilai kerja, jangkaan kewangan.

## INTRODUCTION

Being youths today is not easy. They are living at the time of economic crisis that makes finding employment a challenge. Furthermore, technological advancement has transformed work practices requiring higher digital literacy that make first entry to the job market even harder. In 2016, 40 percent of youths in the world were unemployed (<http://data.worldbank.org/>). It was estimated that 71 millions of youths between 15 to 24 years old were unemployed throughout 2016 and 2017. This crisis has been felt across the world, although at varying degree (International Labour Organization, 2016). The ILO also reported that a steady rise of youth unemployment has been expected to grow in the South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific regions, from 13.0 percent in 2016 to 13.6 percent in 2017 (International Labor Organization 2016). More than 500,000 youths in the region was expected to be out of jobs. Compared to other regions, these two regions also recorded the highest unemployment disparity between youth and adult age groups. In 2016, the likelihood for youths to end up jobless was five times more than adults. This figure is way higher than the world's average of 2.9 percent. In some regions including the Asia Pacific, youth unemployment rate increases consistently with the level of education attained. The ILO found that those with tertiary education

were two to three times more likely to be unemployed than those with lower education level. To reflect this grave concern, the United Nations (UN) pledged to promote inclusive, sustainable and decent employment as a top priority under the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The UN estimated that 470 million jobs need to be created to accommodate new labor market entrants throughout 2016 to 2030 (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals).

Putting inadequate job opportunities aside, youth unemployment is argued to be aggravated by their own unrealistic expectations towards the job market. Youths belong to the millennial generation whose characteristics significantly differ from their predecessors. Multi-generational theory argues that people's characters are influenced by key economic, socio, political and technological events during the year they were born (Howe and Strauss 2007). By 2030 millennials are estimated to form 75 percent of the global workforce (Ng, Lyons and Schweitzer 2012), forcing multiple generations to work side by side. The differences of work values and styles of various generations, if not properly managed, may escalate into generational collision than a form of diversity strength. The former is already witnessed in the context of youth employment market. Employers often complain that millennials are choosy, have unrealistic job expectations, and do not have the skills needed for the job market.

These concerns are relatable to Malaysia. For instance almost 20% (i.e. 57,000) of Malaysian graduates were reportedly unemployed in 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2018). The Statistics Department of Malaysia (DOSM) further revealed that in 2015, the 20 to 24 year-olds constituted the largest unemployed groups in Malaysia (i.e. 42.1 percent) (<http://www.dosm.gov.my>). Another report showed 30.7% of 132,900 graduates of the various public and private institutions remained unemployed six months after graduation ([www.ikim.gov.my](http://www.ikim.gov.my)). Among others, the failure to gain employment was blamed on the applicants themselves. A recent JobStreet.com survey involving 427 employers highlighted five main reasons why employers were reluctant to hire fresh graduates (Jobstreet. Malaysia, 2015). They asked for unrealistic salaries and benefits (68%); had poor command of English (64%); were too choosy about the job or company (60%); had poor communication skills (60%); and had poor the wrong character, attitude or personality (59%). Other findings with similar nuances have consistently swarmed the local media for some time, and most of them were derived from the perspectives of employers. These negative reputations have added further damage to the image of youth applicants.

Against this backdrop, a study was conducted to gain perspectives of unemployed youths towards their work and salary expectations. The

respondents are in the age range that qualifies them to be considered as generation millennials. Given the widespread interests on the supposedly unrealistic salary expectations, the respondents' salary expectations will be analyzed against selected demographic profiles.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Generation Theory*

The topic of generational differences has been subject to much research interests. Multi-generational theory argues that individuals who were born within different time periods possess different sets of attitudes, personalities, values and expectations (Howe and Strauss 2007). People can be categorized into four generations, i.e. Traditionalists / Silents (pre-1946); Baby Boomers (1946 – 1960), Gen X (1961 – 1979), and Gen Y (1980 – onwards). There are different opinions regarding when each generation starts and ends. The wider consensus is that Gen Y was born in 1980 to 2000. Gen Y has also been called as Gen Z which refers to those who were born after 2000 although this group is often lumped together as Gen Y (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2015). Gen Y has also been called as 'millennials', 'echo boomers', 'GenMe', and gen digital/tech. Regardless of the debates, it can be concluded that the newer generation possesses different values, personalities and desires, that may be very difficult for older generation to understand. It is estimated that by 2030 Gen Y will constitute 75 percent of the global workforce (Ng, Lyons and Schweitzer 2012). In Malaysia, Gen Y forms the biggest group of the total population at 38 percent, compared to Boomers (13 percent), and Gen X (20 percent) (Statistics Department of Malaysia 2007). The diversity in the values and attitudes towards work between these generations can bring both opportunities and challenges at the workplace. Gen Y enjoys the reputation as being technology-savvy, risk-takers and smart that can push organizational performance further. However, they also have been negatively painted and called spoiled and entitled. Gen Y have been said and found to possess values, supposedly significantly different from the older generations. For the purpose of this paper, the term millennials will be used to consist of individuals who were born in 1980s onwards, and they comprise of groupings also known as Gen Y, GenMe, or other similar terms.

### *Work Attributes*

A person's decision to choose a particular job may be influenced by several factors. Job choice refers to the process that job applicants go through in choosing a job that involves various job decision stages (from recruitment phase, receiving job offer, and after making job choice decision) (Barber *et al.* 1994). What applicants looked for in jobs is often influenced by their

work values which can be simply defined as the outcomes that people desire through work (Brief 1998). One's work values will influence the individual's job preference, workplace attitudes and behaviour (Dose 1997; Judge and Bretz 1992). Job applicants will consider several factors when deciding whether or not to apply, attend an interview and finally accept a job offer.

Table 1 shows selected frameworks on work attributes / values. Boswell *et al.* (2003) suggested 14 job characteristics that are applicable when job applicants make their job decision. Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons (2010), whose study focused on millennials generation, listed 16 desired work attributes while Twenge *et al.* (2010) suggested that one's work values may be seen through one's preference towards five reward dimensions, i.e. leisure rewards, extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, altruistic rewards, and social rewards. Protestant Work Ethics (PWE) Scale, proposed by Blau and Ryan (1997) however enlisted four major groups of work values: attitudes towards hard work, towards leisure, towards asceticism, and towards independence. Regardless of the numbers, the underlying properties of these frameworks relatively cover the same essentials of the standard priorities that people have towards their jobs.

**Table 1: Selected Frameworks of Work Attributes and Values**

Authors	What people look for in jobs?
Boswell <i>et al.</i> , 2003	Job choice decision factors for university graduates: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Company culture</li> <li>2. Advancement opportunities</li> <li>3. Nature of work (e.g., challenging)</li> <li>4. Training provided</li> <li>5. Work/non-work balance</li> <li>6. Monetary compensation</li> <li>7. Benefits</li> <li>8. Location</li> <li>9. Vacation time</li> <li>10. Level of job security</li> <li>11. Size of company</li> <li>12. International assignments</li> <li>13. Reputation of the company</li> <li>14. Industry</li> </ol>

Eddy <i>et al.</i> , 2010	<p>Work related attributes for millennials:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Opportunities for advancement in position</li> <li>2. Good people to work with</li> <li>3. Good people to report to</li> <li>4. Good training opportunities/developing new skills</li> <li>5. Work-Life balance</li> <li>6. Good health and benefits plan</li> <li>7. Good variety of work</li> <li>8. Job security</li> <li>9. Good initial salary level</li> <li>10. Challenging work</li> <li>11. Opportunities to have a personal impact</li> <li>12. Commitment to social responsibility</li> <li>13. Opportunities to have a social impact</li> <li>14. Organization is a leader in its field</li> <li>15. Strong commitment to employee diversity</li> <li>16. Opportunity to travel</li> </ol>
Twenge <i>et al.</i> , 2010	<p>Generational work values:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Leisure rewards</li> <li>2. Extrinsic rewards</li> <li>3. Intrinsic rewards</li> <li>4. Altruistic rewards</li> <li>5. Social rewards.</li> </ol>
Blau and Ryan, 1997 in Cugin, 2012	<p>Protestant Work Ethics (PWE) Scale: (Despite the name, the scale has been recognized as a free from any specific religious value and has been used in many cross cultural research).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attitudes towards hard work</li> <li>2. Attitudes towards leisure</li> <li>3. Asceticism</li> <li>4. Independence</li> </ol>

Studies on what each generation want in a job revealed some interesting findings. A study by Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons (2010) on millennials found that the top 10 desired work attributes for the generation were: opportunity for advancement, good people to work with, good people to report to, good training and development of new skills, work life balance, good health and benefits plan, good variety of work, job security, good initial salary level and challenging work. The study concluded that the priority given on opportunity for career advancement did not only show that millennials were an ambitious lot, but the insignificant relationship between this finding with the respondents' level of academic performance

strengthened the stereotype suffered by millenials as being a generation 'entitled'.

Twenge *et al.* (2010), in their study to compare work values of Boomers, Gen X and Millennials, debunked the halo reputation of the millennials. They found that, contrary to the popular beliefs, millenials did not prefer jobs with altruistic values (eg. contribution to society) more than the previous generations. Furthermore, millennials were found to put lesser emphasis on job social values (eg. good colleagues) and job intrinsic values (eg. challenging work) compared to their predecessors. In another cross-country, multi-generational study, Cugin (2013) found a significant generational difference with regard to attitudes towards leisure, asceticism and hard work dimensions. Cugin concluded that values toward hard work were clearly declining with younger generation. She further highlighted that while hard work was the most important work value for Traditionalists and Boomers, Gen X emphasized most on asceticism, Gen Y on the other hand prioritized mostly on leisure.

The widespread understanding regarding millennials attitudes is mostly based on the North American context. Since attitudes and values are culturally-bound, these findings may not reflect how millennials feel elsewhere. There have been few studies on the subject in Malaysia. One frequently quoted surveys is by Pricewaterhousecoopers in which they provided a glimpse of what Malaysian Gen Y wanted in their careers: they looked for career mobility, were loyal to their employer; concerned about moral standing of organizations; could not live without gadgets; emphasize work life balance; wanted mentors and coaches; and valued cash over other benefits ("Malaysia's Gen-Y Unplugged" 2009). Elsewhere, Islam *et al.* (2011) found that coaching, communication with employers, career enhancement, financial compensation; and technology are most important to Gen Y. They also highlighted that unlike Gen Y in the US, our Gen Y did not emphasize the aspects of work life balance, autonomy, and company policy. A study by Queiri, Fadzilah Wan Yusoff and Dwaikat (2015) also shows that our Gen Y have slightly different attitudes towards work compared to the prevailing universal assumptions. Not only that pay and benefits is the most influential factor when Gen Y decides whether to stay or quit, they also found that work-value fit was irrelevant in the decision. Another important Gen Y study in Malaysia involving 1,358 samples by the Hay Group concludes that aside from salary, the top five reasons for Gen Y to decide in joining a particular company are its company reputation, clear career progression, benefits and perquisites, training and development, and passion for the job ("Stepping Into Their Shoes: Engaging The Next Generation In Malaysia" 2017). The study found that work life balance was a very significant factor, followed by team oriented work culture and flexible hours. And the top three reasons to

quit their job are: better opportunities in other organizations; undesired/unexpected job responsibilities; and no increment after confirmation. In a nutshell, one characteristic consistent in these studies and perhaps differentiates Malaysian Gen Y compared to those elsewhere is that they do emphasize a lot on financial compensation and is mostly motivated by money.

### ***Salary expectations***

Salary is often one of the most important factors in influencing one's job decision. For organizations, salaries determine the quantity and quality of talents they attract to jobs. Pay level is a product of several factors such as qualifications, skills, experience, job level, industry, and location. It is also country-dependent, influenced by relevant regulations such as the minimum wage. ILO has argued the minimum wage policy in a country has a direct link in addressing income inequalities and promoting inclusive growth (Samans *et al.*, 2015). Malaysia's history with regard to minimum wage is relatively new. The country has been very careful with its labor policies, compensation matters included, given its export-oriented economy and high dependency on foreign direct investments. Any move that can increase labor costs will attract plenty of resistance and debates from both employers and the government.

Although traditionally Malaysia have already had some provisions on minimum wage, the ruling was extremely limited to certain nature of jobs in which they must be employed under a contract of service and not contract for service. For example, those who are self-employed, casual or employed as domestic servant are excluded from the scope of minimum wages requirement. (see Employment Act 1955, Labour Ordinance Sabah and Labour Ordinance Sarawak. Its commitment to implement a nationwide provision on minimum wage was only relatively recently triggered after a report in 2009 (see <http://minimumwages.mohr.gov.my/index.php/employees/2016-06-27-04-40-15> for details). The report shockingly revealed that 33 percent of private sector employees had earned less than RM700 per month, an amount below the country's poverty income level of RM800 ("Mengenai Dasar Gaji Minimum Malaysia" 2013). After much debates and deliberation, the Minimum Wage Policy was finally introduced in 2012 whereby effective January 2013 employers in the private sector were instructed to pay at least RM900 (Peninsular Malaysia) and RM800 (East Malaysia) per month to their workers. The amounts were then increased to RM1,000 and RM920 per month starting 1st July 2016 and recently to RM1,100 nationwide effective 1.1.2019 (Minimum Wages Order 2018). Despite these provisions, some parties argued that the amount was not still disproportionate with productivity increase nor it was comparable to other benchmarked countries (Soon 2015).



Beyond the minimum wage line, salaries are decided by employers based on various factors and essentially left to market forces. To illustrate, the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) who conducts annual salary survey showed that the employers valued a degree-level job applicant at an average of RM2,566, whilst Masters degree at RM3,197 (Kana 2016). MEF further reported that these amounts were incongruent with what applicants expected, whereby degree and Masters-qualified fresh graduates requested an average of RM2,725 and RM3,447 per month respectively. JobStreet.com also highlighted similar scenarios. Their survey reported that employers perceived job applicants as having unrealistic salary expectations. JobStreet highlighted that according to employers, 60% of fresh graduates requested RM3,500 monthly for their first job while another 30% expected as much to RM6,500 per month (JobStreet.com).

As mentioned before, the existing knowledge on the subject is limited in some ways. Firstly, there has been a dearth of studies conducted to examine work values of generation youths that involve wider samples in Malaysia. Secondly, studies to understand millennials desired work values from the perspective of unemployed youths are almost unheard of. There is a question whether their lack of success in securing employment is caused by unrealistic work expectations. Answer to this question is needed in order to properly understand and address the youth unemployment problem.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A survey questionnaire method was administered on unemployed youths in Malaysia. For the context of the research they are defined as those in the age of 15-30 years old and who are not engaged in any paid work nor enrolled in any formal training and education programs during the referenced week, i.e. the time the survey was conducted. The actual size of youths in the age group was not available. To indicate the population, the study relied on the database that had been provided by IYRES. In 2015, 370,100 of them were reportedly out of job nor have they undertaken any formal education or training. A total of 1,008 samples were conveniently selected to represent this population. As much as possible, the study tried to include a balanced representation of respondents from each of the six zones in Malaysia, to be in line with the focus of IYRES. Therefore, the selection of samples was loosely done with this motive in mind. The data was mostly collected from respondents who attended several job fairs and a youth program, each conducted in different zones (Table 2). These venues were chosen as they thought they could conveniently capture the target population, i.e. unemployed youths. The programs took place between 15th July to 28th November, 2016 and were organized by government

or private bodies. Due to the unavailability of such program during the study period, data from Sabah and Sarawak was randomly collected at various public places. All questionnaires were distributed by enumerators who received proper briefing and training about the project intention.

**Table 2: Sampling and Data Collection**

Zones	Platforms	Distributed	Returns
Central	Urban Launchpad		
	Bandar Tun Razak, Kuala Lumpur	190	190
South	Program Fit Malaysia, Rembau	5	5
	Karnival Kerjaya Agensi Pekerjaan Swasta (APS), JobsMalaysia, Melaka	60	60
	Program Temu Duga Kerjaya SLIM Peringkat Zon Selatan, Johor Bahru	100	100
East	UTC Kuantan	50	50
North	Penang Career and Postgraduate Expo 2016	200	200
Sabah	Random distribution	203	203
Sarawak	Random distribution	200	162
		<b>1,008</b>	<b>970</b> <b>(96.2%)</b>

Items used in this article were derived from a 7-page long questionnaire used to identify the profiles and measure employability competencies of unemployed youths. Out of the 6 sections, one section addressed the respondents' 'desired work attributes' that contained 15 items. A respondent screening section was also included in the questionnaire to ensure the unemployed status of the respondents as stipulated under the definition by the Department of Statistics Malaysia. The 'desired work attributes' items were adapted from the New General Self-Efficacy questionnaire by Chen, Gully and Eden (2001). The respondents were basically asked 'to what extent that the following factors are important for you when you choose a job?' Options followed five point Likert scale ranging from 5 – very important, 4, important, 3 – moderately important, 2 – slightly important, and 1 – not important. A pilot study on 30 respondents showed that the 15 items under the 'desired work attributes' produced a reliability score of .861. The data was analyzed statistically using the SPSS software. Mean scores were categorized into three levels: low (<2.33), Medium (2.34-3.65), and High (>3.66). In terms of salary expectation, the question asked was worded as 'how much salary per month you think appropriate for your levels of education and skills?' The answers were categorized into

5 expected salary ranges: RM0 - RM1000, RM1000 - RM2000, RM2000 - RM2500, RM2500 - RM3000, RM 3000 and above.

## FINDINGS

Altogether, 970 respondents returned their questionnaires (i.e. 96.2%). Only, 844 were deemed complete and the respondents rightfully considered as unemployed youths. Cronbach's alpha on the survey shows that items under the 'desired work attributes' variable are internally consistent with a reliability score of .892.

Majority of the respondents hailed from the Northern region (25.1%). This is followed by respondents from the South (22.3%), East (8.6%), Central (16.7%), Sabah (14.0%) and Sarawak (13.3%). In terms of age groups, the respondents are 20-24 years olds (58.4%), 25-30 years (34.8%), and 15-19 years old (6.9%). In general the respondents have a good education background whereby majority (46.8%) possessed degrees; 44.8% had upper secondary / pre-university / certificate / diploma qualifications; 3.8% had postgraduate qualifications; and 4.6% had either lower secondary / primary education or no schooling at all. Most of the respondents are Malays (75.1%), followed by Bumiputera Sabah (10.7%), Chinese (5.9%), Bumiputera Sarawak (4.4%) and Indians (3.9%). In terms of length of unemployment, in general almost half (48.8%) of the respondents were still unable to find a job after 6 months of job hunting. To be specific, the majority of them had been unemployed between six months to one year (38.5%), while 30.7% had been unemployed for less than three months. There was also a small number of respondents (3.1%) who had been unemployed for more than three years.

### Desired Work Attributes

Table 3 shows that that all work attributes were perceived as very important by majority of the respondents. However, if we observe the percentage of very important work attributes in detail, there are four work attributes that received highest mean scores, i.e. 'compensation and benefits', 'work life balance', 'work location', and 'basic salary'. Although 'opportunity to contribute to social impact', 'good variety of work', and 'challenging tasks' were perceived as very important by the respondents, these work attributes, however, record relatively low percentage scores compared to other attributes.

**Table 3: Desired Work Attributes**

Work Attributes	Mean
Other Compensation and Benefits	4.29
Work Life Balance	4.22

Work location	4.21
Basic Salary	4.20
Job Security	4.15
Training Opportunities	4.11
Immediate Superiors	4.08
Co-workers	4.03
Company Commitment Towards Social Cause	3.99
Opportunities for Promotion	3.97
Company's Reputation Within the Industry	3.97
Opportunities to Travel	3.91
Challenging Tasks	3.87
Opportunities to Contribute to Social Impact	3.88
Good Variety of Work	3.85

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### EXPECTED SALARY

#### Expected Salary by Education Level

Several observations can be made regarding the respondents' salary expectation based on their education backgrounds (Table 4). Majority of those with upper secondary / pre-U/certificate/diploma levels requested between RM1000–RM2000 per month. This amount commensurates with the general market rate. Interestingly, expected salary range of RM1000–RM2000 is also what has been requested by the majority of respondents with the highest education up to secondary levels. Data from the respondents with degree portrays a noteworthy pattern. There seems to be a disagreement on how much they believed was their worth. The amounts range from RM1000 to RM3000

Table 4: Crosstabulation between Expected Salary and Education Level

Education	Monthly Expected Salary					Total
	RM0 - RM1000	RM1000 - RM2000	RM2000 - RM2500	RM2500 - RM3000	RM 3000 and above	
No school / primary / secondary	23(24.7%)	31(33.3%)	18(19.4%)	10(10.8%)	11(11.8%)	93(100%)
Upper secondary / pre-U/ Cert./Diploma	33(10.2%)	131(40.4%)	49(15.1%)	77(23.8%)	34(10.5%)	324(100%)
Degree	5(1.3%)	113(28.6%)	94(23.8%)	136(34.4%)	47(11.9%)	395(100%)
Postgraduate	-	8(25.0%)	5(15.6%)	13(40.6%)	6(18.8%)	32(100%)
Total	61(7.2%)	283(33.5%)	166(19.7%)	236(28.0%)	98(11.6%)	844(100.0%)

#### Expected Salary by Length of Unemployment

Cross tabulation analysis was performed to determine if there were differences between expected salary and respondents' length of unemployment. The analysis (Table 4) reveals that there is no specific pattern that can be derived from cross tabulations of the two variables. As expected, about 10% of the respondents who have been unemployed for less than 3 months put expected a salary of less than RM1000 per month as compared to 26.9% who have been unemployed for more than 3 years. This indicates that those who are desperate for job are willing to accept low pay. However, there are

still quite a number (11.5%) of respondents who were unemployed for more than 3 years expected a job that could pay them high salaries. This finding is against our prior expectation that those who are jobless in longer period should be more willing to accept less pay. Table 4 also reveals that those who had been jobless for 6 months to 1 year were still optimistic with their salary expectation, where about 52% of them were still hoping to get a minimum of RM2500 per month.

**Table 4: Cross tabulation between Expected Salary and Length of Unemployment**

Length of Unemployment	Monthly Expected Salary						Total
	RM0 - RM1000	RM1000 - RM2000	RM2000 - RM2500	RM2500 - RM3000	RM 3000 and above		
Less than 3 month	26(10.0%)	117(45.2%)	48(18.5%)	51(19.7%)	17(6.6%)	259(100%)	
3 - 6 months	3(1.7%)	58(33.5%)	39(22.5%)	47(27.2%)	26(15.0%)	173(100%)	
6 months - 1 year	16(4.9%)	70(21.5%)	70(21.5%)	122(37.5%)	47(14.5%)	325(100%)	
1 - 3 years	9(14.8%)	28(45.9%)	8(13.1%)	11(18.0%)	5(8.2%)	61(100%)	
More than 3 years	7(26.9%)	10(38.5%)	1(3.8%)	5(19.2%)	3(11.5%)	26(100%)	
Total	61(7.2%)	283(33.5%)	166(19.7%)	236(28.0%)	98(11.6%)	844(100.0%)	

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Are our youths the 'entitled generation' as they have often notoriously labelled? Millennials have been described as wanting too much, too fast yet with too little effort. Although findings in this study, to a certain extent concurred with the widespread reputation of millennials, however information regarding the respondents' expected salary provides an interesting twist to the situation. As a preliminary note, lateral comparison between the results of this study with past studies is rather impossible nor futile. Even past studies have produced mixed evidence regarding what millennials want in a job. Furthermore, research on millennials work attitudes are influenced by the scope and demography of the chosen samples such as their culture, educational background and work experience. Therefore, discussion of the findings provided here will be approached in more general than specific terms.

Perhaps the most obvious pattern that can be observed from the findings is in terms of how much emphasis the respondents placed on short term vs. long term desired work attributes. Although the respondents perceived all of the work attributes from moderately important to very important (mean scores of 3.85 to 4.29), subtle differences can be seen in their responses. The study shows that their top four priorities are compensation and benefits, work life balance, job location, and basic salary. Whereas, job-related factors like task variety, challenging tasks, and possible contribution to CSR issues were given the least emphasis. Several observations can be inferred from these findings. First, the findings seem to suggest that the respondents seemed to have prioritized short-term, instant gratifications (i.e. compensation and benefits, salary, location and work-life balance), than longer term work attributes (like task variety and challenging tasks). In this sense, the study to a certain extent concurs with similar past studies in Malaysia such as by Queri *et al* (2015), Hay Group (2011) and Islam *et al* (2011) that suggest our young generation is largely motivated by financial returns. Secondly, the findings shows that job security was the fifth most important desired work attribute, which may suggest that the respondents still held on to the traditional nature of employment, i.e., long term, fixed contract jobs. Thirdly, our respondents did not really desire jobs that provide them opportunity to make a social impact, an attribute that is prevalent in millennials studies in the North American settings. Although our respondents placed work life balance and job location high in their list of desired work attributes, we however suspect that these choices were mostly motivated by practical reason, possibly due to strong family values in the Malaysian culture. Given that our respondents are unemployed youths and mostly single, it is normal that they stay with their parents perhaps until they are more financially independent. In overall findings on desired work attributes suggest that the

respondents were just being reasonable and practical by prioritizing more on the salary, benefits, work-life balance, and job location in their job decisions to sustain their lives given the high cost of living.

So, does preference for short-term and financial values of a job necessarily make our respondents the entitled generation? Are the above findings adequate to describe our youths as job choosy and demanding? Our findings on their expected salary do not support this argument. Overall the majority of the respondents (61.5%) stated that they expected to be paid only between RM1000 to RM3000 per month. Cross tabulation analysis was done on the expected salary with the respondents' qualification levels and length of unemployment. The findings show that the qualification level does not seem to explain much difference in their expected salary. The majority of respondents from each of the four qualification groups requested salaries of only between RM1000–RM2000. For degree holders, the group whom Malaysian employers claimed to have had unrealistic salary expectations, the majority of them (58.2%) requested salaries of between RM2000 to RM3000 per month. This amount is within the average salary of RM2,393 as reported by MEF in 2018 (New Straits Times). The findings show that only 11.9% of the respondents with degrees requested salaries of more than RM3000, hence is very far from the claim made by JobStreet.com (i.e. 60% of fresh graduates requested RM3,500 monthly and 30% expected as much to RM6,500 per month).

Contrary to our expectations, longer unemployment period would not necessarily make the respondents downgrade their salary expectations. Our cross tabulation analysis does not show any specific pattern between expected salary and length of unemployment. It seems that the respondents had already set their mind about how much they are worth and are not affected by their lack of job success. Regardless of the unemployment period, the majority of the respondents (33.5%) maintained their salary expectations at between RM1000 to RM2000 monthly.

As a conclusion, our study did not find strong evidence to suggest that our youth respondents had unrealistic work and salary expectations. They were in fact very reasonable for wanting basic necessities for them to sustain live. Their expected salary is also within the market rate offered in Malaysia. These findings suggest that their unemployed status may be less due to them having unrealistic work expectations, being choosy or demanding. Contribution of this article is twofold. It sheds more light on what youths in Malaysia look for in jobs, hence, enriches knowledge about work attitudes of our millennial generation. Most importantly, the strength of the article may fall on the selection of samples, i.e. unemployed youths. The study findings provide the much needed alternative perspective on the issue of youth unemployment through the viewpoint of the job applicants



themselves. Finding explanation of their unemployment by looking at their work and salary expectations has contributed, although minimal, in illuminating the topic of youth unemployment. The study is not without limitation. Due to the difficulties in identifying unemployed youths, the study had primarily focused on career fairs for data collection that were mostly attended by youths with degree qualification. Therefore, some age groups may not be effectively captured in the samples. Further research may address this limitation by expanding the sampling scope to less-represented age groups. Also, the study was designed to be descriptive in nature and the survey items were designed as such. Future research may adopt a more solid research design and employ more sophisticated data analysis to determine the roles of variables involved in the issue of youth unemployment.

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