

## **Increasing and Reduction Factors in the Issue of Human Trafficking in Malaysia from the Perspective of Enforcement**

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### **Abstract**

The issue of human trafficking is a global issue that plagues most countries in the world, including Malaysia. This article aims to discuss the qualitative analysis findings on the factors that influence the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia from the perspective of enforcement. This study is an analysis of data obtained from in-depth interviews with five informants among the authorities who are directly involved in dealing with human trafficking issues. Based on the findings from the interviews conducted, the factors that influence the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia can be divided into two, namely, factors that influence the increase and factors that influence the reduction of the issue. Factors influencing the increase in human trafficking issues comprise economic factors in Malaysia and poverty factors of the victims in their country of origin while factors influencing the reduction in these issues are community awareness factors as well as operational and enforcement factors.

### **Introduction**

Human trafficking is a very complex and worrying global issue (Daily News Online, 2016). In Malaysia, although various efforts to address this issue have been carried out by the authorities, the issue still persist to this day. The Royal Malaysian Police issued the total number of human trafficking cases in Malaysia recorded from 2015 until March 2019 (Table 1).

Table 1

*Royal Malaysian Police Distribution of Statistics of Human Trafficking Cases in Malaysia from 2015 to March 2019*

<b>MATTER</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>March 2019</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Number of Cases</b>	127	439	410	281	48	1305
<b>Number of Suspected Trafficked Persons</b>	1261	2173	2298	1148	233	7113
<b>Number of Victims</b>	248	661	514	58	17	1498

Based on these statistics, human trafficking is indeed a very worrying issue. This record high number of human trafficking cases has led to a statement from The U.S. Department of State which indicated that Malaysia is still unable to address the issue of human trafficking as a whole and has not been able to achieve the best rankings in the human trafficking report that they released. (U.S. Department of State, 2018). The human trafficking report released each year by the U.S. Department of State gives a ranking to each country according to the efforts made by those countries in combating human trafficking in their respective countries based on the minimum standards set by the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

The ranking given to each country in the human trafficking report comprise rankings of Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 Observation and Tier 3. Tier 1 is the best ranking given through this report followed by Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch list and Tier 3 which is the lowest ranking. The ranking for Malaysia from 2015 to 2019 in the human trafficking report is shown in the table below. Based on human trafficking reports released from 2014 until 2019, Malaysia has never been placed at Tier 1 but has been placed once at Tier 2, six times at Tier 2 Watch list and once at Tier 3.

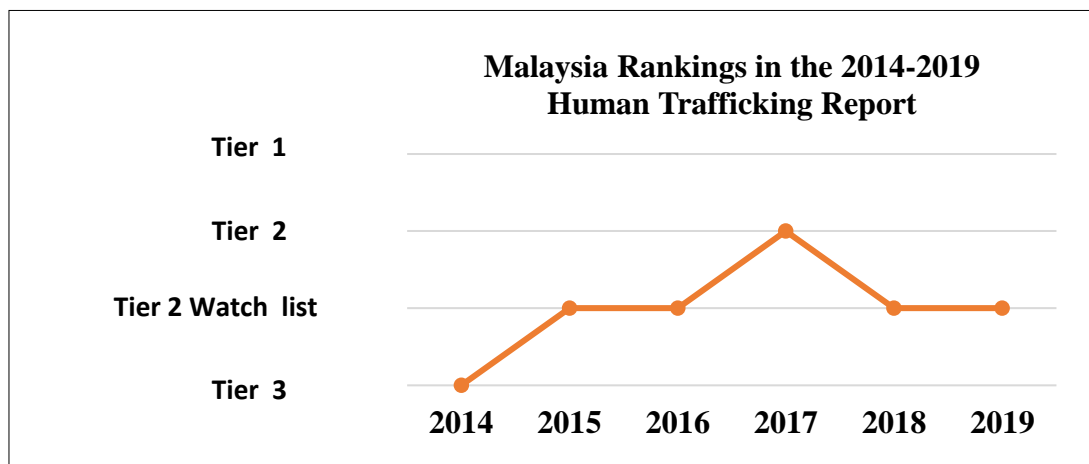


Figure 1: The Ranking for Malaysia In 2014-2019 Human Trafficking Report by The U.S. Department of State

The data show that Malaysia faces a big problem because it is not placed in a good position in the issue of dealing with human trafficking. Malaysia also faces a significant risk of being positioned at Tier 3 by 2020. According to the U.S. Department of State, if a country is placed for two consecutive years at Tier 2 Watch list, then the position of that country will be lowered to Tier 3 automatically the following year (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2014).

If that were to happen, Malaysia will be at risk of facing sanctions from the United States. Through these sanctions, the United States government can withhold or withdraw foreign aid in the form of non-human and trade that are linked to Malaysia (Abd Hamid, 2019). In addition, the United States may impose restrictions on any Tier 3 country in terms of financing and assistance concerning education, culture and assistance provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) except those concerning humanity, trade and also certain development sectors (US State Department, 2019).

Factors that are seen as elements or reasons that contribute to an outcome. In the context of the study conducted, the human trafficking factor is the reason that continues to influence the occurrence of this issue. According to Talib (2015) the factors that lead to the widespread issue of human trafficking are indeed very complex. This is so as the issue involves many parties and usually involves cross-border issues that are difficult to control.

The National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Action Plan 2010-2015 (2010) stated that several factors contribute to the issue of human trafficking. Among them are poverty, illiteracy, economic crises, domestic and regional conflicts as well as political instability and displacement factors. Apart from these, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council also stated that the increasing aspects of migration also increase the risks of human trafficking in this country (National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Action Plan 2010-2015, 2010).

The factors of human trafficking according to Zinin (2010) are poverty, lack of education (illiteracy), economic crises, internal and regional conflicts as well as political instability in the country involved. According to him, these factors then led to the decision to make Malaysia a destination country due to the rapid economic growth of Malaysia since the 1970s which

required a lot of manpower for various sectors such as industries, plantations and services. It is this need for the workforce that opened the doors to human trafficking issues.

Eusof (2016) in her study, also identified some factors as the main contributors to human trafficking issues in Malaysia. These include the position of Malaysia which is situated in the heart of Southeast Asia, Malaysia's vast borders, economic prosperity, poverty, illiteracy, economic crises, domestic and regional conflicts, political instability, displacement and global economic problems.

Several studies on the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia have been conducted locally. Among the preliminary studies on the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia was a study conducted by Wong and Saat (2002) which focused on Filipino women who were trafficked into Sabah only to be employed as sex workers later. The findings of this study indicated that the majority of Filipino women trafficked into Sabah work in the informal services sector, namely the sex service. The study also pointed out that there was no local crime involved in the issue of trafficking of the Filipino women into Sabah. However, this study did not discuss the causes and factors of human trafficking and the role played by NGOs in this issue.

Zinin (2010) in his study discussed several issues related to human trafficking among foreigners such as sexual exploitation, selling of babies and slavery. Apart from that, the legal aspects were also discussed such as enforcement actions taken by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) and the establishment of councils and committees that acted upon the issue of human trafficking to prevent it from becoming rampant in Malaysia. This was a qualitative study and several factors that triggered the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia had been described such as poverty, lack of education (illiteracy), economic crises, internal and regional conflicts as well as political instability. However, the study is different from the current study as it did not focus on the causes of human trafficking issues, the role of NGOs in addressing these issues and the involvement of local crimes in human trafficking issues in Malaysia and the sectors involved.

Samuni and Kanyo (2013) in their study discussed some of Malaysia's efforts in combating human trafficking crimes such as the establishment of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Council (MAPO), Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act (ATIPSOM 2007), National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Action Plan (2010 -2015), Malaysia's negotiations with foreign countries, enforcement as well as prosecution and protection. This was a qualitative study which only focused on Malaysia's efforts in combating human trafficking. Although several factors of human trafficking in Malaysia were presented in this study, those factors were found to be similar to the factors stated in the study by Zinin (2010). This study also did not discuss the root cause of human trafficking, the role played by NGOs, the involvement of local crime and the sectors involved in this issue.

Hussin (2013) also conducted a study on the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia which discussed the role of Tenaganita in addressing the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia, the effectiveness and drawbacks in the cooperation between Tenaganita and the Malaysian government in addressing human trafficking issues. This was a qualitative and the study sample was the Tenaganita NGO. Although the study discussed the role of NGOs in addressing the issue of human trafficking, it only focused on Tenaganita. The source of the problem was

not discussed but factors that gave rise to this issue were stated such as poverty, an economic downturn, unemployment, low literacy rate, family problems, a viable economic environment in the destination country, similarities in culture and language as well as the strategic position of the destination country itself. This study also did not discuss the involvement of local crimes and all other sectors involved in the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia.

Devi (2016) in her study stated that the poor living backgrounds, an unstable economy in the home country, family problems, employment opportunities in the destination country, globalization, tourism activities, Malaysian borders and corrupt practices among the authorities were some factors that exposed the possibilities and opportunities in the issue of human trafficking activities in Malaysia.

Given the current scenarios, the purpose of this study is to highlight and discuss the increasing and reduction factors in the issues of human trafficking in Malaysia. These factors were discussed based on data gathered from the perspective given by the enforcement officers.

### **Research Design**

The research design is the main framework in identifying methods and procedures when collecting and analysing the requirements of a study (Zikmund, 2013). Case studies were used as the study design in this study. Lebar (2007) stated that the case study design is a study that adopts an inductive approach to describe a phenomenon that is occurring. According to Merriam (2009), case studies allow a researcher to understand the phenomenon behind any issue. Accordingly, case studies have the capacity to go beyond the limits and are the best way to answer research questions that require a researcher to understand a particular phenomenon. For the researcher, the findings of a case study provide an in-depth explanation of an event that has taken place, hence, giving an added advantage to the study conducted.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques of the Study**

A study sample is a group, cluster or subset selected specifically to represent the population in a study. The selection of a study sample is an important step in any research in order to obtain reliable data. In this study, the study sample involved consisted of the authorities involved with the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia. The sampling technique used in this study is a sampling technique aimed at ensuring that the informant is the true source in providing the necessary information. The total number of samples involved in this study was based on the level of saturation of the data obtained by the researcher. Data in this study were obtained through interviews and the process of analyzing the data was done after each interview had been conducted. The list of selected samples, sample code and number of samples involved in the study are as in Table 1 below:

Table 1

*Selected Samples, Sample Codes, Sample Count And Selection Criteria*

	Selected Samples	Sample Code	Number of Sample (Persons)	Sample Selection Criteria
The Authorities	The Royal Malaysian Police	PB1	1	The authorities involved in the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia and permanent members in the Anti-Trafficking Council (MAPO)
	Department of Labour, Peninsular Malaysia	PB2	1	
	The Immigration Department	PB3	1	
	The Royal Malaysian Customs Department	PB4	1	
The Authorities	Secretariat of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Council (MAPO)	PB5	1	Implement and coordinate policies and programs related to human trafficking issues in Malaysia

### Data Analysis Methods

This study uses thematic analysis methods in analysing the data. The thematic analysis method is one of the most widely used research methods in qualitative research. Thematic analysis is an analytical approach based on or characterised by certain themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six processes used to analyse data using thematic methods:

- i) Collect and understand data
- ii) Generate initial coding
- iii) Find themes
- iv) Create theme highlights
- v) Refine theme categorization
- vi) Generate a report

The first process requires researchers to collect data. The data are collected through interviews conducted with the parties involved. For the purpose of data collection, the researchers record all interview sessions conducted using a recorder. The researcher then transcribes the data. Transcripts are imperative to carry out because through transcriptions,

researchers can better understand the data collected. A transcript is performed each time an interview is completed so that the data analysis process could be carried out until data saturation is reached and the sample size could be determined when all the findings have answered the research questions.

The second process is to generate the initial coding. The initial coding process begins when the researcher has read, understood and listed the key points of the transcribed data. This is important for generating initial coding. The researcher generates the initial coding manually by writing the code on the transcribed data. Once the initial coding has been generated, the researcher carries out the third process: the search for themes.

Finding themes is an important process. This process is a process that requires researchers to perform more detailed analyses to identify the themes involved. After the themes are identified, the researchers incorporate the codes obtained during the initial coding process into those themes. To facilitate researchers to incorporate the codes obtained during the initial coding process into predefined themes, researchers use mind maps to represent each theme as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Next is the process of creating theme highlights. This process is important to determine whether the themes that the researcher has chosen during the search process are the right ones. In the process of highlighting themes, researchers need to make sure the themes selected are proven through the data obtained. If the selected theme cannot be supported by the data obtained, then it is not the right theme. Through this process, researchers are able to identify themes that can be incorporated and that there are also themes that need to be separated (Patton, 1990).

After the theme highlighting process, the researcher goes through the process of refining the theme categorisation. The process of refining theme categorisation is important for the reason that through these process researchers can refine the themes selected during the process of highlighting the theme in more detail. Researchers can determine whether the selected theme is a standalone theme or needs to be broken down into sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At the end of this process, every selected theme is named with the most appropriate names before writing the report.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings show that there were two types of factors, namely factors that influence the increase in human trafficking issues in Malaysia and factors that influence the reduction of human trafficking issues in Malaysia.

#### **A. Factors Influencing the Increase in Issues of Human Trafficking in Malaysia**

Factors identified to have an influence in increasing the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia were:

### **i. Economic Factors in Malaysia**

The economy in Malaysia was identified as one of the important factors as it had become the main attraction for foreigners to come to Malaysia from their home countries in search of better employment opportunities. The arrival of foreigners who wanted to work in Malaysia due to the rapid economic growth rate was actually increasing the risks for them to be exploited as victims of human trafficking in various forms such as sex workers and even forced labor especially if they had entered Malaysia illegally. This indirectly influenced the increase in human trafficking issues that occurs in Malaysia as stated by the authorities interviewed.

"Our country's economy is a major factor in increasing human trafficking. A good economy creates many job opportunities. Many people came here to work but were exploited." (PB1)

"Our economic development is fast, we need many workers in a short time. This raises the issue of human trafficking because many foreigners are brought in to work." (PB5)

"This situation further increases their risk of becoming victims of human trafficking. They can come to work legally or illegally. If it is illegal, it will be easier for them to be exploited." (PB5)

The Malaysian economy which is not only growing rapidly but is also stable is also the reason why many foreigners often make Malaysia a country of choice compared to other countries in order to seek employment opportunities. The economic stability in Malaysia compared to other neighboring countries makes many foreigners feel safe and confident to work in this country.

Therefore, they easily trust the job offers to work in Malaysia that is offered to them. This situation gives room to irresponsible parties to exploit them thus further raising the issue of human trafficking that occurs in the country as stated by the enforcement personnel in the interview.

"Our economic stability. If you want to compare with Thailand, Philippines, people are not sure if they want to work there. But in Malaysia, many people want to work because they feel confident and safe." (PB4)

Foreigners always believe that there would be someone to offer them a job in Malaysia because they know what the Malaysian economy is like. But this creates a gap for them to be exploited." (PB4)

This was supported by another enforcement personnel who had been interviewed in a statement given by him:

"Our economy is good, there are many job offers. Foreigners are assured lucrative salaries, a comfortable life. They are waiting to come to Malaysia. This leads to



frequent exploitation of these people and results in the escalation of human trafficking issues.” (PB2)

This situation makes Malaysia a country of choice for foreigners to come for work in order to improve their standard of living. However, there are irresponsible parties that view the situation as an opportunity for them to exploit foreigners who want to come to work in Malaysia. Exploitation of foreigners based on the rapidly evolving Malaysian economic conditions not only makes foreigners the victims of human trafficking but also adds to the escalation of human trafficking issues in this country.

Rapid developments in the economy of Malaysia in various sectors such as industry, services, enterprises, plantation and others have lured foreigners to work in Malaysia. Such a situation puts them at risk of being exploited in various forms and directly causes escalation in human trafficking issues in Malaysia.

## **ii. Poverty Factors in the Country of Origin**

Poverty in the country of origin, which refers to the poverty of human trafficking victims in their home country is also a factor that has instigated a rise in human trafficking issues in Malaysia. Based on interviews conducted with the authorities, it was found that the majority of victims of human trafficking in Malaysia consisted of foreigners who came from a background of poor living in the country of origin. In addition to living in poverty, they also did not receive job opportunities to change the standard of living in their home country. Therefore, they were always looking for better job opportunities in destination countries like Malaysia to get out of a life of deprivation in their home country. Some authorities interviewed were of the view that the poverty experienced by most foreigners in their home country is one of the influencing factors in the increase in human trafficking issues in Malaysia for the reason that the poverty they endured in their home country makes them exposed and vulnerable to a high probability of being exploited as victims of human trafficking by irresponsible people.

“The destitute conditions in the country of origin is a factor that increases human trafficking. Most victims of human trafficking came to Malaysia to get out of the hardships of life and meet their own needs by working here but they get exploited.” (PB1)

“They left their home country because of serious poverty conflicts. They want to change their standard of living by working in Malaysia but in many cases, they are being exploited. If it continues, the issue of human trafficking will persist.” (PB3)

“We know their situation in their own countries like in Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Myanmar. Tough. Poor. Many of them wanted to come to Malaysia but eventually became victims. Their numbers are many, and the factor is human trafficking.” (PB4)

Due to their desire to get out of poverty, some foreigners are willing to accept any job offer in Malaysia. Such a situation rendered them to be easily deceived by irresponsible parties who want to exploit them. Also, there were foreigners who were willing to work and receive

low salaries, which did not commensurate with the work they did. This made it easier for those irresponsible parties to exploit them on an ongoing basis while causing the issue of human trafficking to continue and escalate. This was stated by the authorities that were interviewed.

"These foreigners usually did not know... when working in Malaysia there are rules, there are contracts. All that he knew was to go to work get money and go home. That is why they are easily deceived as victims of human trafficking. There are many cases like this." (PB3)

"No matter how little they would get, they still wanted to come to Malaysia. For them, even though their salaries are lower than the salaries of local workers, theirs are still higher than the salaries back home." (PB5)

"If this is the case, then, exploitation on them will continue. So the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia persists." (PB5)

Apart from that, PB5 also added that there were a handful of foreigners who were victims of human trafficking who came to Malaysia not only to work to get out of poverty but also to work to improve the image of their families in their country of origin.

"There is a case of a worker from India, he came to Malaysia to work because in his hometown in India, if anyone's son works abroad, they will be respected by their own caste." (PB5)

Based on the views and information provided by the authorities, the poverty factor in the country of origin was one of the factors that added to the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia. The poverty factor in the home country had exposed many foreigners to the risk of being victimized by human traffickers in the form of forced labor in various sectors. Irresponsible parties who traded on foreigners looked at the poverty experienced by these foreigners in their home country as an opportunity for exploiting them. The poverty in their home country also rendered them so vulnerable and desperate that they were willing to do any kind of job despite receiving disparate payments. Such a situation encouraged the issue of human trafficking to occur continuously and indirectly led to an increase in the occurrence of this issue in Malaysia.

The poverty factor in the country of origin, which refers to the poverty of human trafficking victims in their home country, is a factor that influences the increasing issue of human trafficking in Malaysia. The majority of victims of human trafficking in Malaysia are foreigners living in poverty in their home country and they were always looking for better job opportunities in destination countries like Malaysia to change their standard of living. Such a situation makes it easier for irresponsible parties to exploit them in various forms. Therefore, the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia is always directly on the rise.

A study conducted by Eusof (2016) and Devi (2016) also stated that the economic situation in Malaysia and the poverty of human trafficking victims in their home country caused them to want to migrate and work in Malaysia but were exploited by irresponsible people. Such a

situation causes the issue of trafficking to continue in Malaysia. The findings of this study were also supported by studies done overseas such as one conducted by Kranrattanasuit (2014), Yang (2016) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2017) which stated that the economy in the destination country in addition to poverty in the country of origin is an influencing factor in the continual occurrence human trafficking issues.

## **B. Factors Affecting the Reduction of Human Trafficking Issues in Malaysia**

Factors that influenced the reduction of human trafficking issues in Malaysia were as follows:

### **i. Public Awareness Factors**

The awareness factor among the general public is one of the factors that does influence the reduction of human trafficking in Malaysia. Through the interviews with the authorities, it was found that public awareness in Malaysia on the issue of human trafficking is very crucial in reducing the occurrence of this issue. Public awareness towards human trafficking activities will materialize and can be fostered when they have knowledge and a clear understanding of the issue. This awareness will indirectly be a role factor in the reduction of human trafficking issues that occur in Malaysia as stated by the authorities interviewed.

"What reduces the issue of human trafficking is the awareness factor. That awareness is very important. When there is awareness among the community, the issue of human trafficking will be reduced" (PB1)

"This issue is more for our society. If there is a lack of awareness, this issue continues to occur but if there is awareness, it can contribute to the lessening of this issue, it will decrease" (PB4)

"Community awareness can influence the reduction of human trafficking cases but first, they need to know what the indicators of human trafficking are. Only then will there be awareness and the issue can be reduced." (PB5)

According to the authorities interviewed, awareness among the public in Malaysia will develop a sense of responsibility in them to report any human trafficking activities around them to the authorities. For the general public such as employers, awareness in them on the issue of human trafficking would ensure that they were more responsible for the welfare of the workers under them so as not to be exploited as victims of human trafficking. Actions that stem from community awareness might help the authorities in gathering information related to this issue as well as could help save more victims of human trafficking and those at high risk of becoming victims of this issue.

Awareness among the community should exist simultaneously with awareness among the authorities, too due to the fact that the authorities are the most important party responsible in the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia. The authorities in the interviews acknowledged this.

"Public awareness is important. Need to make a report if anyone has information. Because, the victims who are exploited are afraid to report to the police so how can we save them"? (PB1)

"Human trafficking cases have been reduced with public awareness. From this awareness, the community may notice if there is an element of human trafficking and they can lodge a report to the authorities." (PB5)

"When the contract of an outsource company to supply foreign workers to a company ends, after which no other company offers a new contract, the outsource company usually sells these foreign workers to another party." (PB2)

"Employers who have awareness will give show more care to their employees. If it is a company, he will pay extra attention to all suppliers, manufacturers, and retailers. He will make sure that no one is exploited." (PB5)

"Our own staff must be aware because this is a global issue. We want the officers in the front line to tackle this matter from the beginning so when he looks at the situation he knows this is human trafficking." (PB4)

"The officers must also have awareness and knowledge on this issue. So when he meets a foreigner, he can know if the person is a victim of human trafficking. So you can prevent it at the beginning." (PB1)

Through interviews conducted with the authorities, awareness among the community has been proven to reduce the occurrence of human trafficking issues in Malaysia, especially through programs conducted by the authorities. Through these programs, community understanding of the issue of human trafficking has improved and their inner awareness can also be developed.

"We have a program like a walkabout, we make announcements during flights so as to raise public awareness. To reduce the issue of human trafficking" (PB1)

"Through the programs held, awareness among the community begins to show itself. We created programs like this to promote this issue so that people become more aware and hence, can lessen it." (PB2)

However, not all communities in Malaysia had an understanding and awareness on the issue of human trafficking. There was no denying that there were still many people in Malaysia who lacked understanding and awareness towards this issue. This situation might cause human trafficking to continue in Malaysia and the enforcement personnel interviewed supported this.

"There are societies in which this awareness on the issue of human trafficking is lacking. They do not understand what human trafficking is. The attitude of some of our people is that they do not care about matters like this. " (PB4)

Awareness among the community plays a very important role as a factor that influences the reduction of human trafficking issues in Malaysia. Not only is it important to prevent this issue from happening again but also the awareness among the community on the issue of human

trafficking is also important to produce a generation that is more sensitive and concerned about the situation and the people around them. This is because human trafficking has the potential of happening anywhere and this issue can also involve anyone as a victim regardless of age and gender. Therefore, if there was awareness among the community in Malaysia on the issue of human trafficking then the issue could be addressed from an early stage.

## **ii. Operation and Law Enforcement Factors**

Apart from the awareness factor in the community, the operations and enforcement undertakings carried out by the authorities are also one of the factors that could reduce the issue of human trafficking from taking place in Malaysia. Based on the interviews with the authorities, the operations carried out and strict enforcement, especially in terms of the law, have been very helpful in reducing the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia.

In terms of operations, the enforcement personnel have the authority to conduct ad hoc or planned operations periodically and the frequency of executing these operations have also been helpful in reducing the occurrence of human trafficking in Malaysia. This was stated by the enforcement personnel who were interviewed.

"The operational and enforcement factors carried out play an important role in reducing the issue of human trafficking. The frequency of operations we perform is very helpful. Once we have done all the operations, less of this will happen." (PB1)

"For the industrial sector, we conduct regular inspection operations at every business premise. In addition to those periodic ones, inspection operations can be sudden, abrupt, at anytime. Yes, indirectly, we have reduced the numbers." (PB2)

"We also have a Private Employment Agency Ops. We conduct this all year round to track and prosecute illegal employment agencies involved in human trafficking issues." (PB2)

"We organize our operations and enforcement. This is an important factor that reduces human trafficking. When we conduct operations, the law is enforced, if they want to do it, they will think about the risks... the risks are very high." (PB4)

The operations carried out usually involve cooperation between the authorities who are members of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council including the Royal Malaysian Police, the Royal Malaysian Customs Department, the Malaysian Immigration Department, the Peninsular Malaysia Manpower Department and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency. With good teamwork among the authorities, the best plans and strategies to carry out an operation could be formulated properly and carefully. This determined the smoothness and effectiveness of an operation carried out. Operations carried out jointly between the authorities also become more effective as each authority involved applied their respective expertise to help each other so that the goal of each operation could be achieved.

According to the personnel interviewed, the cooperation involving all the authorities in conducting operations has helped to combat human trafficking and has been effective in reducing the occurrence this issue.

"When we carry out an operation, we usually ask for help from the other authorities. Each has its own expertise that we can use. We plan every operation to be successful." (PB1)

"Those operations really helped to reduce cases of human trafficking, but these kind of operations cannot be rushed this is why we need the cooperation among all five agencies to plan before we do. Otherwise, the operation will not reach its target." (PB3)

"Operations can indeed reduce cases. We do have integrated operations. We work together among the five agencies to ensure that our operations run smoothly." (PB4)

From the point of view of enforcement, strict law enforcement has helped in reducing the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia. Strict enforcement of these laws includes aspects of fines and penalties imposed on offenders such as illegal employment agencies, employers and individuals who were found victimizing any individual into human trafficking.

"Strict enforcement is important. If found guilty of trafficking a human being who is not a child, he will be sentenced to not more than 15 years in prison and fined. When there is a punishment like this, people are afraid to do it. Can reduce this, the occurrence of this issue." (PB1)

"For example, if the victim exploited was a child, he would be imprisoned not less than 3 years but not more than 20 years with a fine. Whoever wants to do this will think many times." (PB3)

"For those who can profit from the exploitation of others, the fine is imprisonment of not more than 15 years, can be fined RM500000 but not more than one million. This is what people fear most." (PB4)

"As for those employers who want to hire maids, they need to comply with the conditions we have set. Need to apply for a valid permit and contract with the immigration. This is to prevent the occurrence of human trafficking issues against the maids involved." (PB2)

"If they hire maids illegally, they will be blacklisted for 5 to 10 years. If the employer is found guilty under the terms of the Employment Act, they will be fined a maximum of RM10 000 for each offence." (PB2)

Strict enforcement of the law is a factor that had reduced the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia as it prevented irresponsible parties from engaging in human trafficking activities.

### **Conclusion**

Human trafficking is a complex issue involving many parties. The rapidly growing state of the Malaysian economy has attracted the interest of many parties, especially foreigners, to come to this country. Poverty experienced by the foreigners in their home country makes them want to leave and look for new economic grounds as a way to improve their existing standard of living. This situation is an influencing factor in the increasing issue of human trafficking in Malaysia. At the same time, public awareness plays a very important role in influencing the reduction of human trafficking issues in Malaysia. Awareness of the public arises through a clear understanding of the issue of human trafficking thus, efforts must be taken to foster a sense of responsibility among them to play their respective roles in reducing the human trafficking issue in this country. Apart from the public, the role of the authorities, especially through operations and enforcement of the implemented laws also influences the reduction of human trafficking issues in Malaysia.

Based on information obtained from the authorities, operations and law enforcement is viewed as a factor in reducing the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia. The operations in combating the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia had always drawn in very close cooperation between the authorities and this indirectly showed the seriousness of the authorities in combating this issue. In terms of law enforcement, punishment and stern action have been imposed on the parties responsible for the crimes. This could indirectly curb the flow of human trafficking issues in Malaysia and show that Malaysia is committed in her efforts to eradicate the issue.

The findings obtained in this study had identified the factors that influence the issue of human trafficking and these factors were categorized as factors that influence the increase in human trafficking issues and factors that influence the reduction of human trafficking issues in Malaysia. It is pertinent that these factors, which have been identified, be given attention by the authorities in order to be better prepared in dealing with this issue. Figure 2 shows the findings related to the factors influencing the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia:

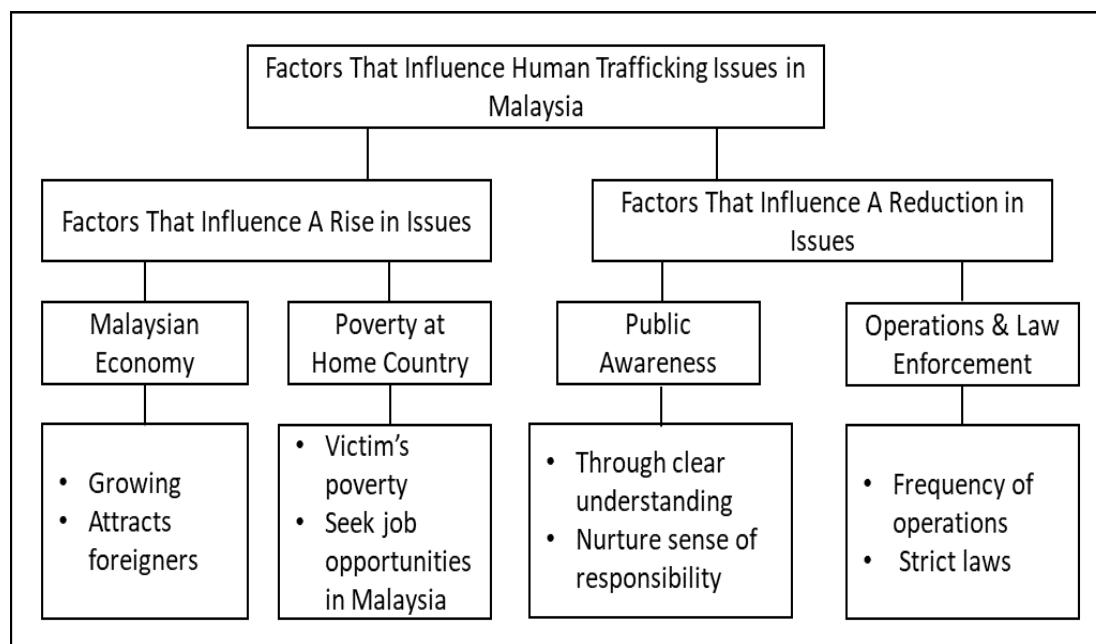


Figure 2: Factors Influencing Human Trafficking Issues in Malaysia

In conclusion, the economic situation in Malaysia makes it inevitable for this country to be the focus of foreigners in search for work, as they want to change their standard of living in their home country albeit being exposed to the risk of becoming victims of human trafficking here. Therefore, the awareness of Malaysians themselves as a civil society is indeed important in helping to reduce the issue of human trafficking in this country through the responsible actions carried out by the citizens in various positions. The awareness and role of the public should be supported by the function of the authorities in order to create a strong partnership factor in reducing the issue of human trafficking in Malaysia.

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