

## The Perception of Public Servant towards Forms of Corruption at the Workplace

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### Abstract

Corruption among public servants shows a worrying trend due to the existing tendency for public servants to abuse their positions to gain any kind of remuneration for self-interest. This study was carried out to identify the perception of selected public servants towards forms of corruption that often occur in the working environment in the public sector. A total of 502 respondents were involved in this study. A quantitative approach was used in this study and the study data was collected using questionnaires and descriptive analysis used to analyse forms of corruption that often occur in the working environment of public servants. This study shows that respondents are more likely to prescribe giving bribes that often occur in their work environment in financial and the provision of valuables. While most of the respondents did not consider giving bribes in the form of career advancement as a corrupt practice. This study shows that there is a need to strengthen the level of understanding of public servants concerning the forms of corruption that can occur to ensure public servants can understand and prevent engaging in corruption.

**Keywords:** Crime, Giving bribes, Misconduct, Integrity, Public Sector

### Introduction

Corruption is a form of white-collar crime that has gained the attention of many not only academicians, practitioners in organisations, government, related agencies, communities, and stakeholders including politicians. Empirical evidence has largely shown that a country with a high crime rate of corruption is a failed country. In particular, corruption has become a major obstacle to sustainable economic and social development as there are disruptions in the system that affect the actual allocation of resources that have been planned to be executed. At the same time, corruption is capable of triggering social and economic inequality in the community due to the oppression and denial of the right of gaining something fairly (Churchill et al., 2013; Gnimassoun & Massil, 2019; Nordin et al., 2013). Similarly, the chances of attaining investment from foreign investors will decrease for countries with high rates of

corruption because of the lack of trust in the integrity and ability of a country in governing the country among foreign investors.

In the Malaysian context, the report by the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2022 released by Transparency International (TI), Malaysia has ranked 61st out of 180 countries. Past studies have also shown that there is a tendency for public servants to be involved in corruption crime. The situation has given the impression that there needs to be comprehensive serious action to address the issues related to corruption in the country, especially among public servants. As of April 2024, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has revealed that 452 arrests have been made and 161 cases involving public servants. Meanwhile, statistics in 2022 showed that out of 909 arrests made by the MACC, 323 cases involved public servants (Suruhanjaya Pencegahan Rasuah Malaysia (SPRM), 2023). Cases of arrests involving public servants have raised concerns about integrity and transparency as public servants are the driving force of the country's administration. If there is an element of misconduct and corruption crimes among public servants, consequently, the management and administrative system of the country will be weakened and unable to function efficiently and eventually, the country will be caught up in integrity issues and be facing destruction in terms of economic, political, and social aspects (Otusanya, 2011).

Therefore, there is a need to prevent the involvement of corruption crimes among public servants due to the negative implications to the country's progress. However, there is a fundamental aspect in need of concern regarding the understanding of public servants concerning corruption, especially the forms of corruption that occur in their working environment as past studies have shown that there is confusion in understanding the meaning and definition of corruption due to various factors. Therefore, this study examines the perception of public servants of the form of corruption that often occurs in their work environment.

### **Definition of Corruption**

A review of the literature reveals that there are various definitions proposed by past researchers regarding corruption (Gnimassoun & Massil, 2019; Márquez et al., 2011; Olken, 2009; Othman et al., 2014). Among them was Senturia (1931) who was among the earliest researchers to study corruption and defined corruption as an abuse of public authority for personal purposes and gain. While Nye (1967) defines corruption more specifically and explains that the practice of corruption is a behavior that strays from the official duties of a person who has a public role due to certain interests including personal interests, immediate family, and certain groups to obtain financial resources or status gains or violate the law through the use of certain personal influences. Smith (1971) briefly defined corruption as the use of public resources for personal purposes. Rabl and Kühlmann (2008) on the other hand, explained that corruption is a straying behavior that demonstrates the existence of an element of abuse of function and power whether in politics, society, or economics in favor of a particular person or institution in a way that violates rules. While Bîzoi and Bîzoi (2022) define corruption as a form that is used as a source of personal gain by individuals who have a role in public or in other words abuse of power for personal gain.

Despite the diversity of definitions put forward by past researchers, there is not a single universal definition that can be used by all parties. Therefore, Husin (2021) suggests that a much clearer definition of corruption is following each country's law. In Malaysia, the MACC Act 2009 has provided clear guidelines for understanding the meaning and definition of corruption and as an agency responsible for corruption issues in Malaysia, the Malaysian Anti-

Corruption Commission (MACC) explains the definition of corruption concerning the receiving or giving of bribes as rewards or encouragement for an individual for performing or not performing an act related to official duties.

### Forms of Corruption

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has listed eight forms of corruption that can be categorised as corruption. Among them are related to remuneration in the form of money, wages or salaries, gifts, votes, bonuses, positions, discounts, and services (Figure 1). While UNODC, UNDP, and the UNODC-INEGI Centre of Excellence in Statistical Information on Government, Crime, Victimization and Justice (2018) explained that six forms can be attributed as corruption, namely giving in the form of food and beverages, valuables, money, career benefits for personal or family, job positions for relatives or close friends, exchanges with services or other assistance. A study by Mangafić and Veselinović (2020) examined forms of corruption ranging from giving money, gifts, or services to professionals. Recently, Chen et al., (2022) explain corruption as an act that involves bribery in the form of money or valuables to influence the behavior of the recipient of such money or valuables to benefit the interests of the briber.

In the context of this study, there are six forms of bribe-giving studied which are giving in the form of food and beverages, valuables, money, career benefits, to obtain employment positions, and exchange with other services. The selection of these six forms is due to its often reports in the past studies taking place in public sectors involving the personal interests of a public servant.

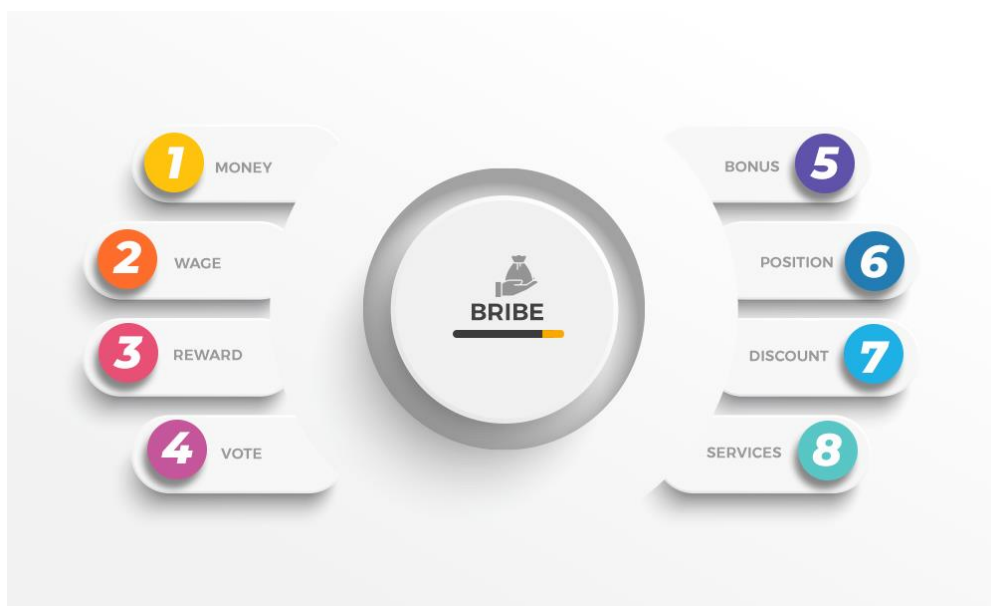


Figure 1: Forms of Corruption (Source: Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission 2023)

### Methodology

This study is a survey conducted to assess the perception of public servants on the form of corruption that often occurs in their working environment. A total of 502 respondents were involved in this study. This survey study uses simple random sampling methods as well as questionnaires as this study instrument and is in line with recommendations by UNODC, UNDP and the UNODC-INEGI Center of Excellence in Statistical Information on Government, Crime, Victimization and Justice, UNODC, UNDP and the UNODC-INEGI Center of Excellence

in Statistical Information on Government, Crime, Victimization and Justice (2018) which suggest a direct method based on experience and perception indicators to overcome the dispute of methodological issues, especially in terms of data validity and bias issues by using indirect method for example based on an expert assessment as well as a complicit indices.

In this study, respondents were asked to state the forms of corruption that exist in their working environment which consists of six forms, namely giving in the form of food and beverages, valuables, money, benefits in career aspects, working positions, and exchange with other services. The selection of these six forms of bribery is relevant in the context of public servants in Malaysia.

### Findings and Discussions

Table 1.1 shows the demographic profile of this study. A total of 240 (47.8 per cent) of the respondents were men while 262 (52.2 per cent) respondents were women. For the racial profile, the Malays and *bumiputras* recorded 238 respondents (47.4 per cent) and 231 respondents (46 per cent) respectively. The majority of the respondents were Muslims which were 451 people (89.8 per cent) while Christian and Buddhist respondents were 47 and 4 respectively. For the age profile, there are three highest ages ranging from 26 to 30 years, which is 136 respondents (27.1 per cent), 31 to 35 years old with 102 respondents (20.3 percent), and the range of 31 to 35 years consisting of 103 respondents (20.5 percent). Next, the educational profile shows that the majority of study respondents have a level of education at the undergraduate degree level and equivalent.

**Table 1.1 Respondent Demographic Profile**

<b>Demographic</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	240	47.8
Female	262	52.2
<b>Race</b>		
Malay	238	47.4
Chinese	11	2.2
India	22	4.4
Bumiputera	231	46
<b>Religion</b>		
Islamic	451	89.8
Christian	47	9.4
Buddha	4	.8
<b>Age</b>		
20 years down	3	.6
21-25 years old	31	6.2
26-30 years old	136	27.1
31-35 years old	102	20.3
36-40 years old	103	20.5
41-45 years old	54	10.8
46-50 years old	37	7.4
51-55 years old	23	4.6
55 years and above	13	2.6

Education			
UPSR and equivalent	3		.6
PMR and equivalent	7		1.4
SPM and equivalent	55		11.0
STPM and equivalent	68		13.5
Skills Certificate and Equivalent	68		13.5
Bachelor's degree and equivalent	275		54.8
Master's degree and equivalent	21		4.2
Doctor of Philosophy and equivalent	5		1.0

### Forms of Corruption

Table 2 summarises the respondents' perception of the forms of corruption that occur in their environment. Based on the findings, the majority of the respondents agreed that the practice of corruption is in the form of giving money where 88.4 percent of the respondents stated that giving money for personal interest is a form of corruption while 11.6 percent disagree that giving money is a form of corruption. Next, the respondents agreed that giving bribes in the form of valuables is a form of corruption practice. The findings showed that 58.2 per cent of respondents agreed that giving valuables is a form of corruption practice while 41.8 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement that giving valuables is one of the forms of corruption. For giving in the form of food and beverages, the findings showed the same percentage of 50 percent of respondents who agreed and disagreed that giving in the form of food and beverages is a form of corruption.

In contrast to such forms of practice as exchange with other services, to get a position in employment, as well as career benefits that indicate a trend in which the respondent are more likely to express no occurrences in their working environment where 78.7 per cent of respondents said that corruption did not occur in the form of exchange with other services, while 60.6 per cent of the respondents in this study perceive that corruption does not occur in the context of getting a position in employment. Similarly, bribery in the form of career benefits where 72.7 per cent of respondents said it is not a form of corruption that exists in their environment.

Based on the findings, most of the survey respondents, namely public servants, are more likely to consider the form of corruption that often occurs in their environment are in the form of money and valuables giving. For giving in the form of food and beverages, the findings showed that the respondents were divided between either as a form of bribery or not. This perception is influenced by the sentiments of Eastern customs and culture that emphasise the concept of "*Orang berbudi, kita berbahasa, orang memberi kita merasa*" which means as when people treat us kindly, we treat them similarly and when people give, we kindly receive. Where every gift from a person is reciprocated with a token of gratitude for the help that has been given. Therefore, there is a tendency to consider giving in the form of food and beverages to be considered as a sign of gratitude to public servants.

Concerning career advancement, most of the respondents in this study were more likely to assume that the kind of corruption did not exist in their environment. However, based on the

definition issued by the MACC, the form of practice such as exchange with other services, to obtain a position in employment, as well as career benefits is a form of corruption that should not be taken lightly. The providing of bribes not only exists in the form of finance and valuables giving but is following the definition of corruption in Malaysia by agencies with authorised authority namely MACC has also included the form of practice such as exchange with other services, to gain position in employment, as well as career benefits.

**Table 2: Forms of Corruption**

<b>Conclusion</b>		
<b>Forms of giving calculated as Corruption</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Food and Beverage	251 (50%)	251 (50%)
Valuables	292 (58.2%)	210 (41.8%)
Money	444 (88.4%)	58 (11.6%)
Career Benefits	137 (27.3%)	365 (72.7%)
Get a position in employment	198 (39.4%)	304 (60.6%)
Exchange with other Services	107 (21.3%)	395 (78.7%)

The implication of the findings shows that there is a need to increase the basic level of understanding of the definition or meaning of corruption due to failure to understand the meaning of corruption, especially in the context of legislation causing many public servants to be caught up in corruption. Similarly for the understanding of the forms of corruption that can occur in their environment. This confusion should be avoided to ensure that public servants always provide service well without expecting a return in the form of personal interest. In addition, public servants need to be wise in distinguishing between gifts and rewards that can lead to corruption.

The establishment of integrity units in each department is one of the good efforts made by the authorities to address problems related to corruption and integrity. The existence of this unit will be able to shed light on corruption misconduct and other integrity issues among public servants. However, statistics released by the MACC show that there are still improvements to be made to environment are corruption or not. This awareness requires a concerted effort, especially in the context of continuous education to be given to raise awareness of the dangers of corruption to individuals as well as families. Apart from the campaigns that can be carried out by the authorities, every department or organisation in the public sector must also play a significant role because forms of corruptions are impossible to prevent without the cooperation of all levels of employees in the organisation. Awareness through religious and moral values talks should be intensified as past studies have also revealed that a person who has a high adherence to religious and moral values will seek to avoid getting involved with any kind of corruptions.

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