The Influence of Demographic Factors onto the Ethical Behaviours of Supporting Officers in the Immigration Department of Malaysia

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Abstract

Previous studies found that demographic factors influence the ethical behaviour of people. The demographic factors most researched are on age, gender, and years of service. However, those studies showed mixed results. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the influence of the demographic profile on the ethical behaviour. This study specifically focused on bribery as one form of behaviour. A cross sectional study among Malaysian Immigration Department's supporting officers of Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur was done using the questionnaire survey. The survey also have targeted towards the supporting officers from the work grade of KP17, KP22, and KP26 from five operational divisions. The results were analyzed using SPSS version 21. An independent t–test and ANOVA analysis were conducted to determine the influence of age, gender, and years of service onto ethical behaviour of the supporting officers. The results showed that the supporting officers 'ethical behaviour is not influenced by their gender, age, or their years of service as both men and women have approximately equal tendencies to behave ethically and unethically.

Keywords: *bribery, demographic factor, ethical behaviour*

INTRODUCTION

Public officers play a key role in the government's administration. The higher public officers are involved in the formulation of the public policy whereas the lower public officers implement the policy. All government's decisions are undertaken in the name of the public, using the public's resources, and affect the public's lives (Gortner, 1991). Therefore, they are expected to behave ethically while executing both of their tasks trusted to them.

A rising number of public officers in Malaysian enforcement agencies have been reported by the National Key Result Area (NKRA) (PEMANDU, 2010) and the statistics for bribery arrests (SPRM, 2014) has shown an increase in the number of arrest. It is a worrying trend as public officers are expected to act morally as the ethical agent of the government.

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There were many previous empirical studies conducted on individual characteristics that influence ethical behaviour. Most researched characteristics are cognitive moral development, Machiavellianism, and locus of control. Demographic factors such as age, gender, and years of service are among those researched on. However, these demographic factors have so far produced mixed results (Loe, Ferrell, & Mansfield, 2000). Therefore, this study aimed to determine the influence of demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, and years of service) onto the supporting officers' ethical behaviour.

ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

Ethical behaviour is that which is morally accepted as 'good' and 'right' as opposed to 'bad' and 'wrong' in a particular setting (Stead, Worrell, & Stead, 1990). Doing good instead of bad and doing right instead of wrong requires an understanding in ethics and morality. Ethics is derived from the Greek word 'ethos' meaning character. On the other hand, morality comes from the Latin word '*moralis'* meaning customs. Ethical and unethical behaviour have been studied mostly on decision making behaviour, ethical perspective, and ethical standards.

This study however has chosen bribery as an unethical behaviour because bribery is one of the highly likely ethical dilemmas that an enforcement agency's officer would face. Bribery is defined as an exchange between an individual and a public official in which the former gets a service to which he or she is not entitled and the official gets a material benefit (Rose & Peiffer, 2015).

Bribery is one form of corruption that poses one of the most dangerous threats to the public service. It has a negative effect onto the society and administratively, it acts as an obstruction by endorsing uneven access to service for citizens and eventually limiting the quantity and reducing the quality of available services (Kaufmann, Montoriol-Garriga, & Recanatini, 2008). In the long run, bribery produces consequences such as environmental pollution, safety, and health hazard or evasion of taxes (Carson, 2001). One of the contributing factors to unethical behaviour is the individual factor.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the survey was collected using a cross sectional survey. The questionnaires were distributed to the officers at the Immigration Department of Malaysia in Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur office. The respondents are the supporting officers of grade KP17, KP22, and KP26 working in the operational divisions. The officers are uniformed officers and professionally known as the Immigration Officers. The divisions act as the frontline to the services offered by the department. Hence, they deal with the public directly. There are 1440 supporting officers from both offices and the samples required is 306 according to (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). A systematic sampling was used to select the officers in both offices.

The self-administered questionnaires were collected within a week from the date of distribution. Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 324 questionnaires were valid for analysis. Descriptive analysis was conducted to describe the demographic profile of the respondents. Independent t-test was conducted to test the statistical significant difference between genders. ANOVA was conducted to between age and years of service.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: *Respondents' profile*

Profile		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	20-29 years	111	34.3
	30-39 years	164	50.6
	40 and above	49	15.1
Gender	Male	135	41.7
	Female	189	58.3
Years of service	1-5 years	93	28.7
	6-10 years	140	43.2
	11-15 years	45	13.9
	16 years and above	46	14.2

The respondent profile in
Table 1 shows that the majority of officers are between 30-39 years (50.6%), the younger officers aged 20-29 years (34.3%) and the older officers are the minority (15.1%). Gender wise, the female represented the majority (58.3%) whereas the male is represented by 41.7%. In term of service duration, most of the officers have a service year between 6-10 years (43.2%), 1-5 years (28.75), 16 years and above (14.3%) and finally 11-15 years (13.9%).

Table 2: *Results of the independent t-test*

Variable	Category	Mean	t-test (*p*-value)
Gender	Male	4.40 (0.44)	-0.569
	Female	4.43 (0.40)	(.570)

The Independent t-test in   Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between the male and female samples in term of their inclination to bribery (t(322) = -0.569, *p* =0.570). The analysis indicates that the average level of female's inclination to bribery (M = 4.43, SD = 0.40) is approximately similar to male's inclination (M = 4.40, SD = 0.44).

Table 3: *Results of ANOVA*

Variable	Group	Mean (SD)	Levene's statistics	F- test (*p*-value)
Age	20-29 years	4.41 (0.47)		
	30-39 years	4.41 (0.40)	2.610	0.391
	40 years above	4.46 (0.36)	(.075)	(.677)
Years of service	1-5 years	4.40 (0.45)		
	6 – 10 years	4.39 (0.41)		
	11- 15 years	4.51 (0.35)	0.936	1.064
	16 years and above	4.43 (0.42)	(0.424)	(0.364)

Table 3 shows that age categories (F (2, 321)=0.391, *p*=0.677 and years of services levels (F (3, 320)=1.064, *p*=0.364) did not significantly differ towards inclination to bribery variable. Therefore, it can be concluded that the average level of inclination to bribery for three groups of age categories (20-29 years old: M=4.41, SD =0.47; 30-39 years old: M=4.41, SD=0.40; 40 years old and above: M=4.46, SD=0.36) were approximately equal to each other.

The same conclusion can be concluded for the years of service's level. The analysis indicated that, the average level of inclination to bribery for four levels of years of services (1-5 years; M=4.40, SD=0.45; 6-10 years; M=4.39, SD=0.41; 11-15 years: M=4.51, SD=0.35; 16 years and above: M=4.43, SD=0.42) were approximately equal to each other.

DISCUSSION

Previous studies have explored differences in behaviour between gender (Swamy, Knack, Lee, & Azfar, 2001), age (Ross & Robertson, 2003), and work experience(Kim & Chun, 2003), and found mixed results (Loe et al., 2000).

Ross and Robertson (2003) found that women are more ethical than men whereas Keller, Smith, and Smith (2007) and Alatas et al. (2009) found that there is no significant difference between genders. This study has also found that there is no significant difference in male and female's ethical behaviour. Both men and women have approximately equal tendencies in to behave ethically and unethically. The general perception of women is likely ethical than men can be disputed as they stand the same chance as men in involving in unethical behaviour.

This result corresponds to previous researches conducted in some other countries which suggest that gender differences may not be universal but more cultural specific. Alatas et al. (2009) found that women are less tolerant to corruption in Australia but not in India, Indonesia, and Singapore. Study on women in China, India, and South Korea reveal no gender differences towards corruption either (Swamy et al., 2001). However, there are findings in the Western countries showing that women are more ethical than men (Swamy et al., 2001), Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti (2001). This finding has somehow shown that developing countries encourage more women to participate in its economic and political institutions (Alatas, Cameron, Chaudhuri, Erkal, & Gangadharan, 2009). Women generally scrutinize their work more and are concerned of others' opinion would be expected to take a conservative approach in managing the administration of the country.

In a study on gender response to corruption, Alatas et al. (2009) suggested that the response towards corruption may have resulted from biological and sociological differences. In developed countries, women are expected to be less tolerant to corruption due to their public domain presence is higher where they can expressed their views openly (Alatas et al., 2009). In developing countries, women's social roles are highly influenced by the men's view. Hence, less gender difference is observed in their ethical behaviour (Alatas et al., 2009). However, Esarey & Chirillo (2013) explained that women will be less tolerant to corruption when corruption is viewed badly but if corruption is an ordinary behaviour then there will be no gender differences.

Age too does not show any significant difference towards ethical behaviour in this study. This means that no matter what age group the respondents are from they are still hold the same chance of behaving ethically or unethically. Previous studies has

found that younger persons are more likely to engage in unethical behaviour (Ross & Robertson, 2003). However, studies have also shown that younger individuals are more ethical compared to their older colleagues (Marques & Azevedo-Pereira, 2009; Roozen, De Pelsmacker, & Bostyn, 2001). Age is usually associated with wisdom in thinking and action. Therefore, older individuals would be expected to make a wiser decision based on their life experience. Whereas, a younger individual would be expected to behave ethically as they are still full of behaviour ideals. However, that is not always the case.

This study does not find any significant difference in the years of service in relation to ethical behaviour. Immigration officers who have served the least years and the most years have an equal chance of behaving ethically in their work environment. Previous studies have found that the longer years a person serves the organization, the more ethical an individual is (Harris, 1990).This contrast with a study conducted on people working in various industries that shows people with longer work experience is less ethical (Roozen, 2001). Therefore, regardless of age, gender, and work experience, all Malaysian Immigration officers have equal chance and tendency to be involved in unethical behaviour.

CONCLUSION

While this study helps to understand the influence of demographic factors such as gender, age, and years of service on inclination to bribe, there are other factors that must be considered. Factors such as education level, marital status, and religion can be added in the future studies on other enforcement agencies. Understanding the influence of the demographic factors onto the ethical behaviour of public officers is beneficial to the administration. This is because it offers a good insight in the recruitment of new public officers into the enforcement agencies. As the current Malaysian public service is very keen on finding 'the right person' as public officers, knowing who to choose from the demography would likely assists in fulfilling the aspiration for an ethical administration.

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