

Employability of The Psychology Community in Malaysia

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The Malaysian Psychological Association (Persatuan Psikologi Malaysia; PSIMA), through the Bureau for National Development, studied the employability landscape of the psychology community in Malaysia. This study investigates the psychology communities' demographic particulars, academic history, interest in pursuing postgraduate studies, and employment details. A cross-sectional design, with an online survey link, was sent to all psychology communities' networks in Malaysia, including students, practitioners, and academicians. Two versions of this electronic survey were made available, one in English and one in Bahasa Malaysia. Participation was voluntary, and data was collected anonymously. A total of 601 responses were collected. Among 402 working respondents, 200 respondents (50%) worked in the public sector, 181 respondents (45%) worked in the private sector, 18 respondents (4%) worked in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and three respondents (1%) worked in statutory bodies. In term of income, the majority of respondents had an annual income of RM 30,001 – RM 60,000 (N=121) and RM 60,001 – RM 120,000 (N=127). The statistics also show an increase in income is positively linked to years of experience, education qualification, and work sector. Four implications can be drawn; first, this study is an inaugural study to map the present employability landscape of Malaysia's psychology community; second, the results indicate the direction of the future psychologist workforce; third, decision-makers need to reflect on the preparedness of the supply-demand of the psychology workforce in the national context, and lastly, the 'Psychology Act' is crucial to mitigate the country's psychology professional issues towards a top-notch psychological service in the world.

Keywords: employability; psychology community; Malaysia; income; job

The Malaysian Psychological Association (PSIMA) was established in 1998 to provide a platform for its members to meet and interact while encouraging them to practice psychology following ethical guidelines and a professional code of conduct (PSIMA, 2021). PSIMA

membership has risen from only a few hundred in the '90s to almost 2000 members in 2020. The increase in membership indicates that the psychology profession has received recognition in Malaysia and that Malaysians are aware of the need for the profession.

PSIMA's main objective is to work with the Malaysian government to institute registration for professional psychologists to safeguard the profession of psychology and ensure a high level of service and ethical practice. On the theme of safeguarding the profession of psychology, it is also crucial to know the employability landscape of the psychology community in a country, in this case, Malaysia. Employability has been the foremost concern of various parties such as university graduates, employers, organizations, and parents. The concept of employability refers to the ability of an individual to acquire employment (Glerum & Judge, 2020; Rätty, Hytti, Kasanen, Komulainen, Siivonen, & Kazlinska, 2020).

The field of Psychology, in general, has evolved since the time of the first founder, Wilhelm Wundt, who established the first experimental laboratory at the University of Leipzig in 1879. It was the mark of Psychology as a discipline to become recognized as a scientific discipline. Today, Psychology is both a science and social science, as well as being both academic and professional. The development of Psychology as a profession began in North America in the early 1900s and it continued to grow globally. Likewise, the development of Psychology as a profession in Malaysia has shown an upward trend, for example, the government of Malaysia, through its department known as the 'Public Service Department' (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam), inaugurated a position known as 'Psychology Officer' (Pegawai Psikologi). Furthermore, the two top professions in Malaysia are clinical psychologists and counselling psychologists. The other professions are school counsellors and private clinicians.

The psychology career in Malaysia is set to grow over the next several years, as seen in the growing demand for psychological services in educational, medical, and corporate institutions. A huge increase in

psychology graduates from the public and private universities, at both the undergraduate as well as at the postgraduate level, has been observed over these years (Malaysian Qualifications Register, 2021). Many higher institutions in Malaysia choose to offer psychology programs at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels to meet the market demand, and this number is still on the rise.

There are a total of 52 public and private universities in Malaysia that offer psychology programs (AfterSchool.my, 2021; EasyUni.my, 2021; HotCoursesAbroad.com, 2021; Malaysian Qualifications Register, 2021; StudyMalaysia.com, 2021). Among 20 public universities established in Malaysia, ten universities offer psychology courses, with six universities offering Bachelor degrees, ten universities offering Masters degrees, and nine universities offering Doctorate Degrees (Ph.D.). Similarly, for private universities, a total of 42 private institutions offer psychology courses, of which 14 private universities offer Diploma or Foundation, 34 universities offer Bachelor degrees, 14 universities offer Masters degrees, and ten universities offer Ph.D.

By focusing on university programs in more detail, it is possible to understand the most popular psychology programs in Malaysia. The top five most popular programs are, Developmental Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Industrial-Organisational Psychology, Educational Psychology and Counselling Psychology (AfterSchool.my, 2021; EasyUni.my, 2021; HotCoursesAbroad.com, 2021; Malaysian Qualifications Register, 2021; StudyMalaysia.com, 2021). The current program preferences are identified through looking at seven institutions offering Masters degrees in Clinical Psychology, Industrial-Organisational Psychology and Educational Psychology. Another five institutions offer Masters degree in Developmental Psychology and in

Counselling Psychology. Furthermore, seven institutions offer a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and Counselling Psychology, whereas 6 institutions offer a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology and Industrial-Organisational Psychology. Lastly, an additional of five institutions offer a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology.

There has also been growing evidence to show that mental health issues were increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ke, et al, 2022; McKnight-Elly et al., 2021; Wang, et al., 2021). This situation calls for more professionals in the mental health professions to help individuals cope with challenging times (Kokou-Kpolou, Cénat, Pérez-Marfil, & Fernández-Alcántara, 2020). More clinical psychologists and counselling psychologists are needed as psychological services are high in demand due to the inability of individuals to cope and the increased need for professional help (Kazak, 2020). Recently, suicide cases in Malaysia are in the news headlines (Hassan, 2021; Zolkepli, 2021). The increase in suicide cases is due to the inability to cope with the impact of the pandemic, such as job losses resulting in financial hardship (Lim, 2021). This is indeed a concern and proves that the psychology profession is needed more than ever (Free Malaysia Today, 2021).

Therefore, the current study aims to determine the prevalence of psychology community-related information such as employability and psychology communities' demographic particulars. This study is pertinent as there is a gap in the literature for such knowledge in psychology demographics in Malaysia.

Method

Participants

A total of 601 responses were collected, of which 188 were males and 413 were females. The mean age of respondents was 32 years old (min = 18 years old, max = 74 years old). In terms of nationality, 571 respondents were Malaysian, and 30 respondents were non-Malaysian. A majority of the local respondents originated from Selangor (N = 157), a major state in Malaysia, and the Non-Malaysian respondents originated from countries such as the United Kingdom (N = 5), Pakistan (N = 3), and Bangladesh (N = 2).

Instruments

The cross-sectional survey design was used in this study. Two versions of the electronic survey were prepared using Qualtrics, the English language version, and the Bahasa Malaysia language version. Professional psychology associations, universities, NGOs, industry partners, and government agencies were contacted through email for questionnaire distribution from July 2020 to April 2021. Participation was voluntary, and data was collected anonymously. The information sheet included the aims of the study. A consent form reminded participants of their rights; once consent was provided; they were automatically directed to the start of the survey.

Results

The results were divided into five sub-sections: academic history, interest in pursuing postgraduate studies, employment, annual income, and professional psychologists.

Academic history of graduates holding psychology degrees

Based on the highest academic qualifications in Figure 1, a total of 7 respondents held a diploma certificate, 234 respondents held a Bachelor degree, 225 respondents held a Masters degree, 16 respondents held a Doctor of Psychology (PsyD), 118 respondents held a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), and one respondent held a Doctor of Natural Science.

Undergraduate psychology students' and masters' degrees in psychology holders' interest in the postgraduate psychology specialization

A total of 234 respondents who held a bachelor's degree were asked about their interest in pursuing a Masters degree (see Figure 2), of which 68 respondents were interested in continuing their education in Clinical Psychology. Another 27 respondents were interested in pursuing their education in Counselling Psychology, followed by Forensic Psychology 17 respondents.

A total of 225 respondents who held a Masters degree were asked about their interest in continuing to Ph.D. studies (see Figure 3). A total of 169 respondents indicated interest. Results showed that 35 respondents were interested in continuing their Ph.D. education in Clinical Psychology, while 24 respondents were interested in Industrial-Organisational Psychology, followed by Educational Psychology, with 23 respondents.

The status of employment and sectors of employment

Results revealed that out of 601 respondents, 402 respondents were currently working. A total of 402 respondents were currently employed, while 199 respondents were unemployed. Out of the 402 respondents who were employed, 56 respondents were working students, 325 respondents were employed working professionals, and 21 respondents were self-employed. Moreover, out of the 199 unemployed respondents, 157 respondents were non-working students.

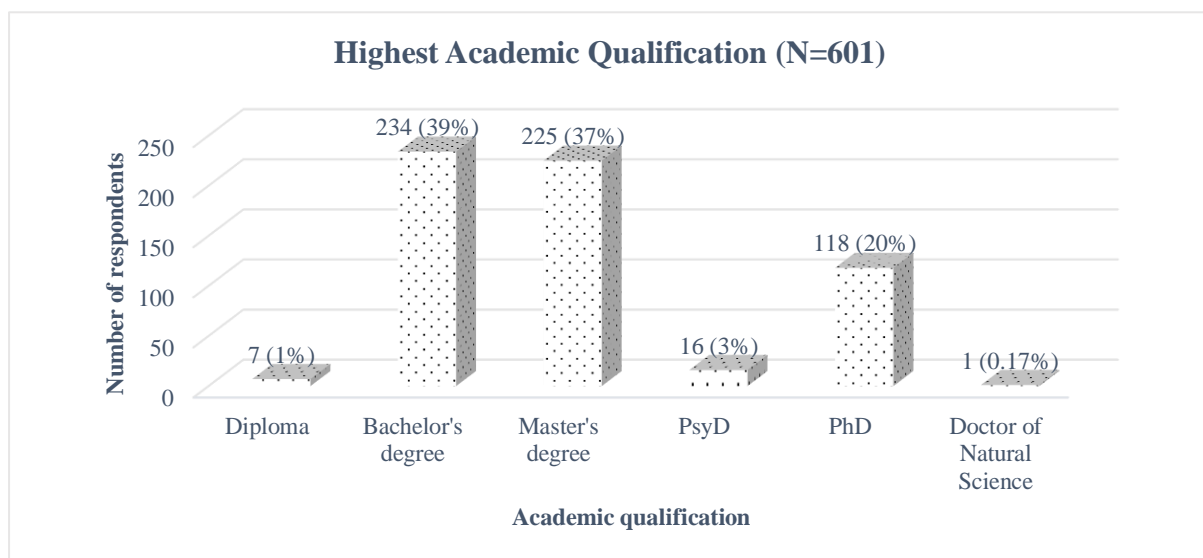


Figure 1 Highest academic qualification of respondents.

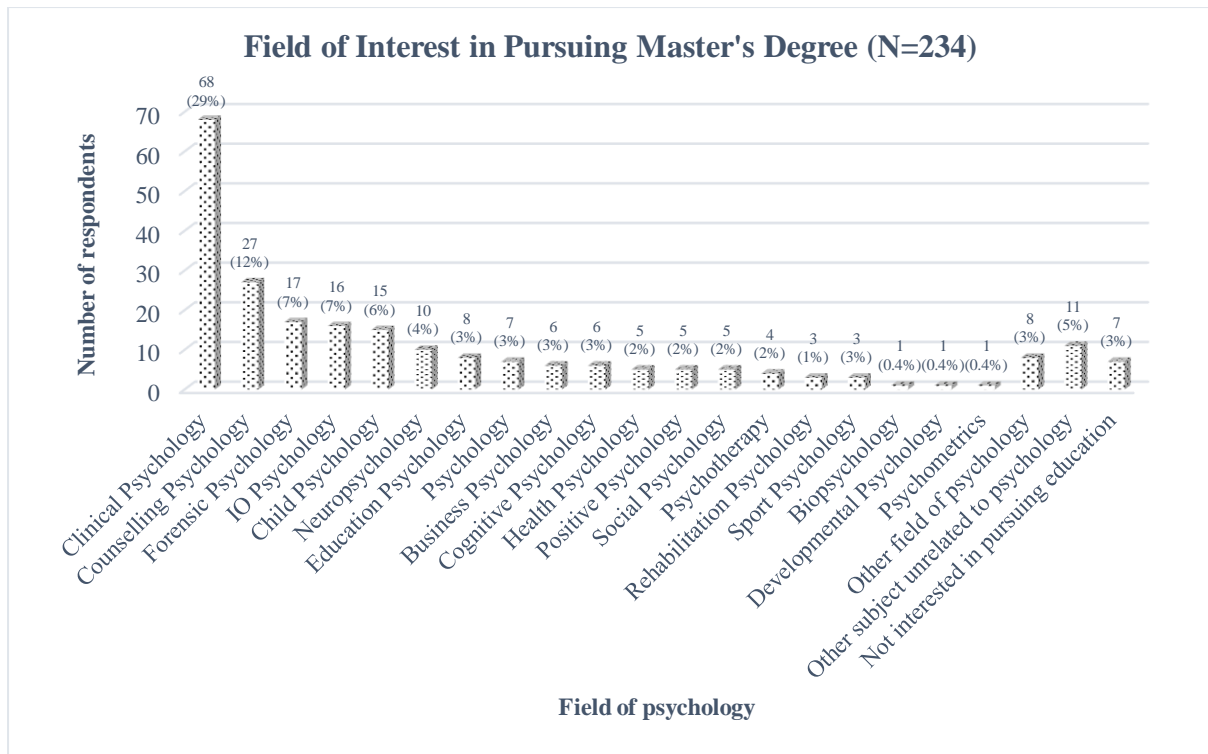


Figure 2 Interest in pursuing a master's degree.

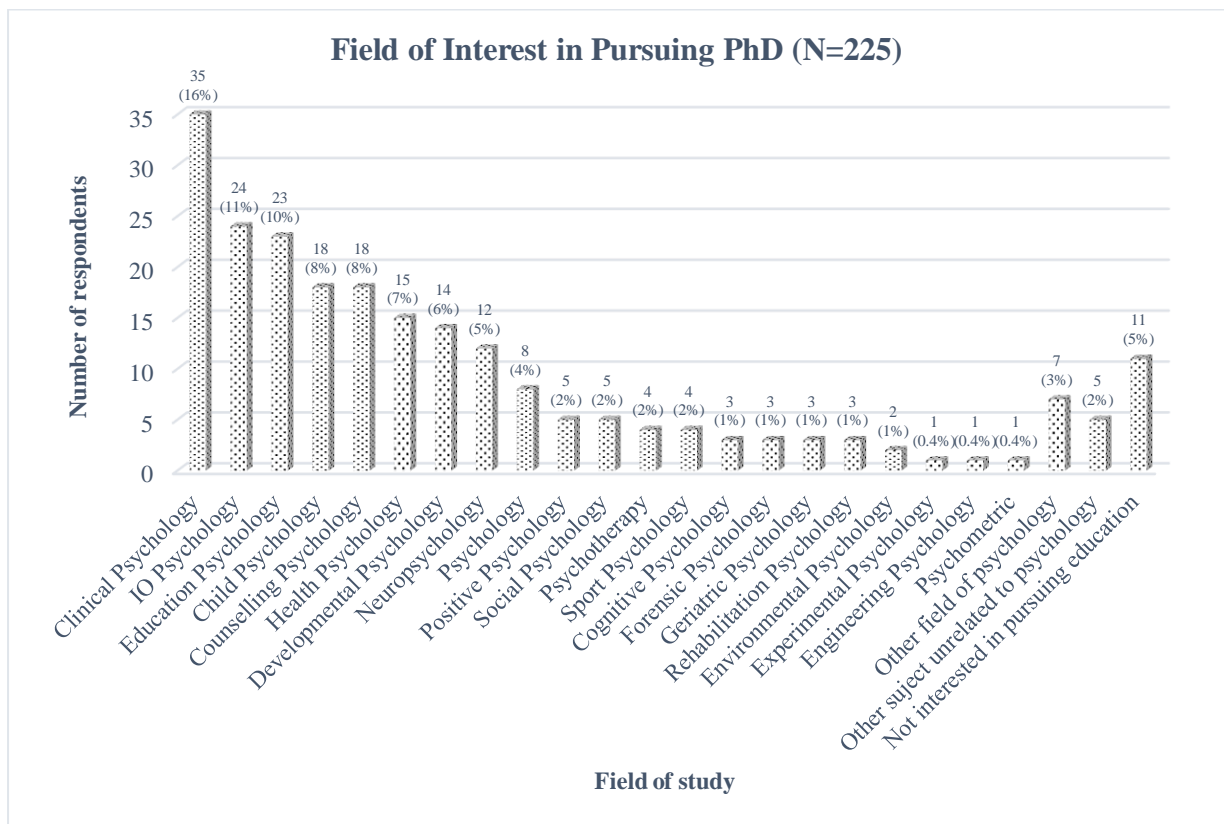


Figure 3 Interest in pursuing a Ph.D./PsyD.

Table 1

Field of interest in pursuing a Masters Degree (responses by Bachelors degree students)

Field of Study	Count	Percentage (%)
Clinical Psychology	68	29.1
Counselling Psychology	27	11.5
Forensic Psychology	17	7.3
Industrial-Organisational Psychology	16	6.8
Child Psychology	15	6.4
Neuropsychology	10	4.3
Educational Psychology	8	3.4
Psychology	7	3.0
Business Psychology	6	2.6
Cognitive Psychology	6	2.6
Health Psychology	5	2.1
Positive Psychology	5	2.1
Social Psychology	5	2.1
Psychotherapy	4	1.7
Rehabilitation Psychology	3	1.3
Sport Psychology	3	1.3
Biopsychology	1	0.4
Developmental Psychology	1	0.4
Psychometrics	1	0.4
Other fields of psychology	8	3.4
Other subjects unrelated to psychology	11	4.7
Not interested in pursuing education	7	3.0
Total	234	100

Table 2

Field of interest in pursuing Ph.D. (responses by Masters degree students)

Field of Study	Count	Percentage (%)
Clinical Psychology	35	15.6
Industrial-Organisational Psychology	24	10.7
Educational Psychology	23	10.2
Child Psychology	18	8.0
Counselling Psychology	18	8.0
Health Psychology	15	6.7
Developmental Psychology	14	6.2
Neuropsychology	12	5.3
Psychology	8	3.6
Positive Psychology	5	2.2
Social Psychology	5	2.2
Psychotherapy	4	1.8
Sport Psychology	4	1.8
Cognitive Psychology	3	1.3
Forensic Psychology	3	1.3
Geriatric Psychology	3	1.3
Rehabilitation Psychology	3	1.3
Environmental Psychology	2	0.9
Experimental Psychology	1	0.4

Engineering Psychology	1	0.4
Psychometric	1	0.4
Other fields of psychology	7	3.1
Other subjects unrelated to psychology	5	2.2
Not interested in pursuing education	11	4.9
Total	225	100

Figure 4 shows that 200 respondents (50%) worked in the public sector, 181 respondents (45%) were working in the private sector, 18 respondents (4%) were working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and three respondents (1%) were working in statutory bodies.

From these statistics, 132 respondents were working in the teaching field, and 88 respondents were working in the field of Psychology for their primary occupation. Figure 5 illustrates the field of work. Top of the list was the teaching profession, followed by practicing psychology and counselling.

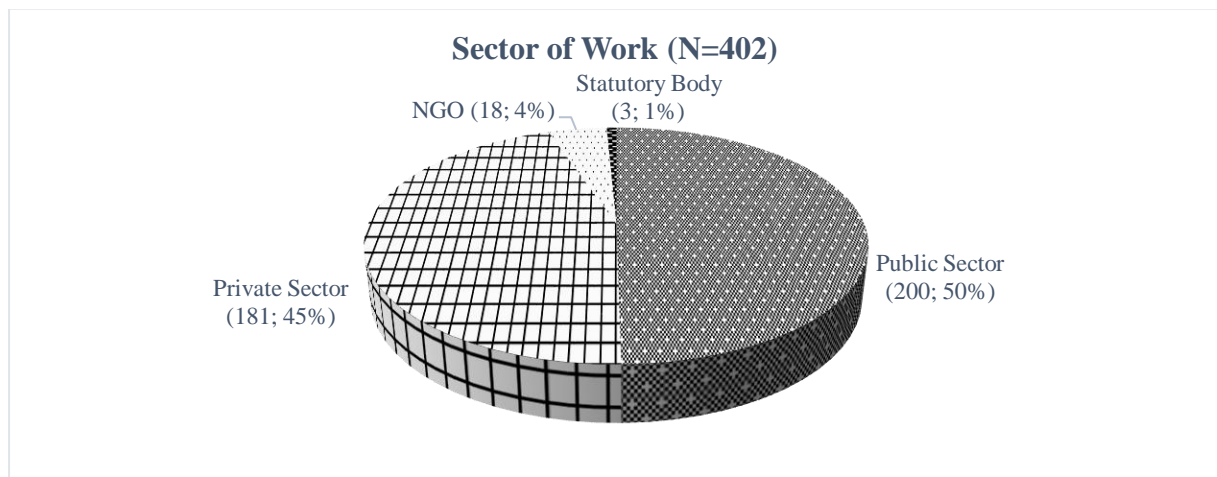


Figure 4 Sector of work.

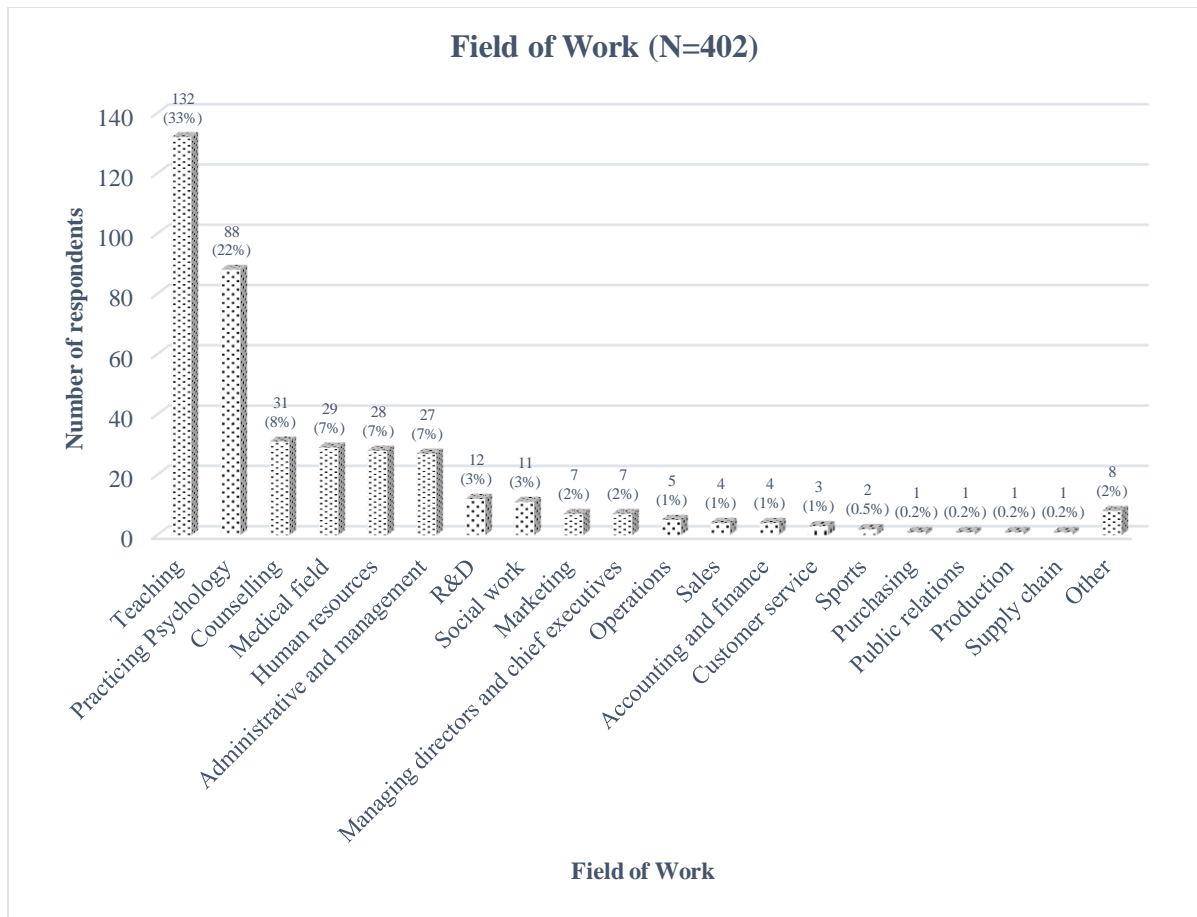


Figure 5 Field of work.

The field of employment of professional psychologists and their annual income

In term of income, most respondents had an annual income of RM 60,001 –

RM 120,000 (N=127) and RM 30,001 – RM 60,000 (N=121) (see Figure 6). The statistics also show an increase in income is positively linked to years of experience (see Figure 7).

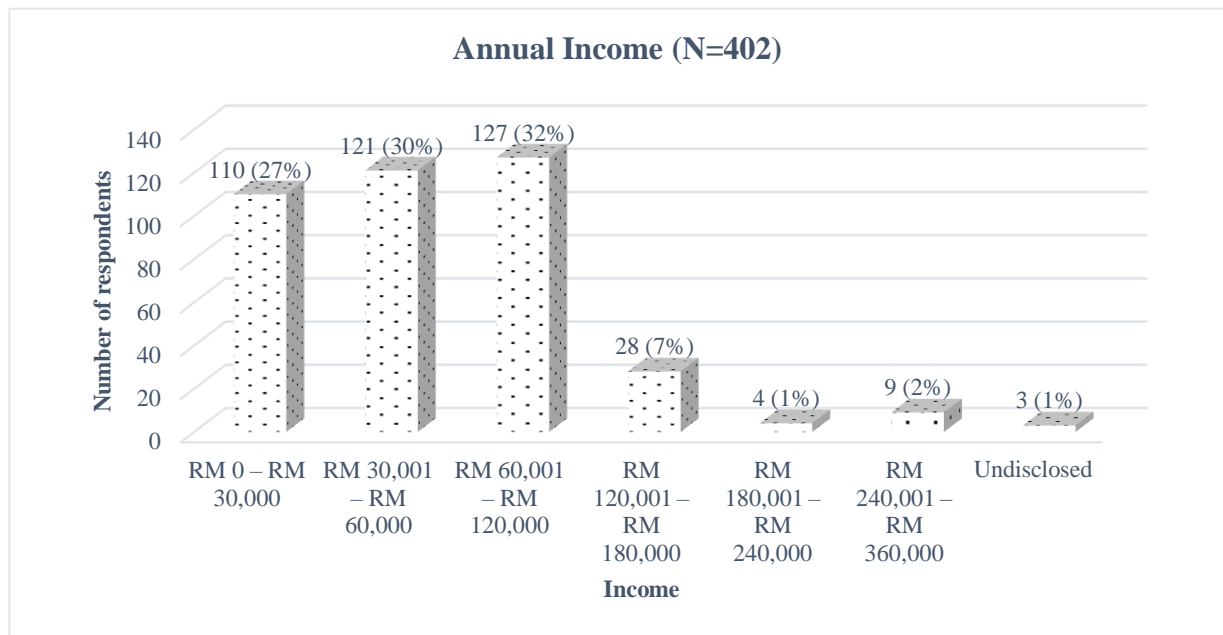


Figure 6 Annual income.

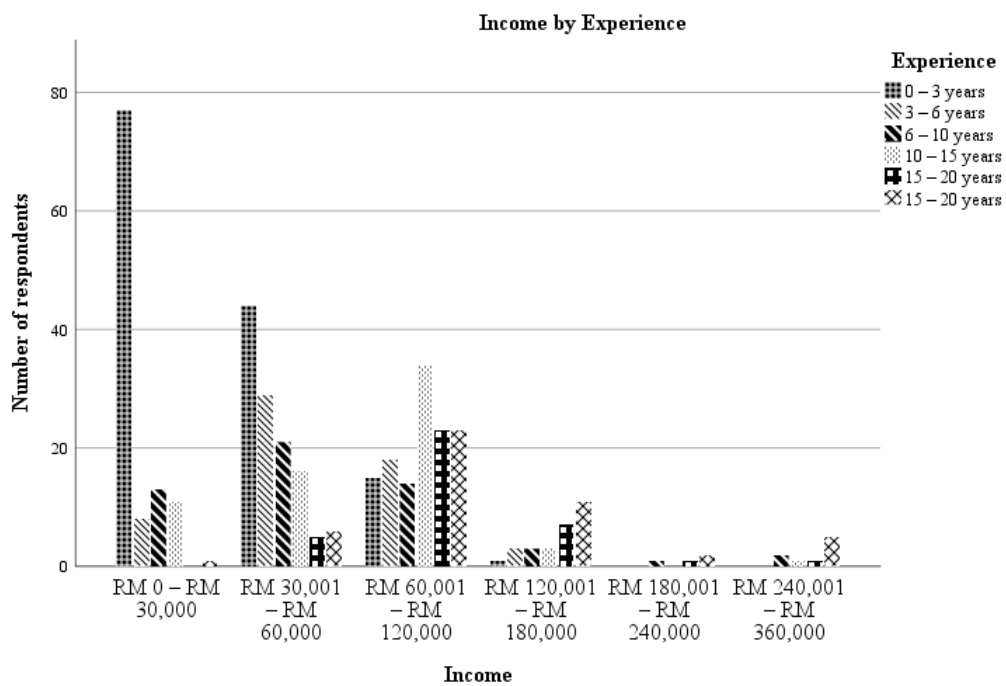


Figure 7 Income by experience.

Table 3
Field of work

Field of Work	Count	Percentage (%)
Teaching	132	32.8
Practicing Psychology	88	21.9
Counselling	31	7.7
Medical field	29	7.2
Human resources	28	7.0
Administrative and management	27	6.7
R&D	12	3.0
Social work	11	2.7
Marketing	7	1.7
Managing directors and chief executives	7	1.7
Operations	5	1.2
Sales	4	1.0
Accounting and finance	4	1.0
Customer service	3	0.7
Sports	2	0.5
Purchasing	1	0.2
Public relations	1	0.2
Production	1	0.2
Supply chain	1	0.2
Other	8	2.0
Total	402	100

Professional Psychologist

In terms of the professional psychologists (N=82), a total of 43 respondents (52%) were working in the public sector, 34 respondents (42%) in the private sector, and five respondents in various NGOs (6%). Regarding the profession in Figure 8, 23 respondents were listed as psychology officers, 19 respondents were clinical psychologists, 9 respondents were education psychologists, 7 respondents were cognitive psychologists, 6 respondents were counselling psychologists, 4 respondents were IO psychologists, 2 respondents were child psychologists, 2 respondents were positive psychologists, 1 respondent was a developmental psychologist, 1 respondent was a rehabilitation psychologist, and 8 respondents were other professionals.

were cognitive psychologists, 6 respondents were counselling psychologists, and 4 respondents were Industrial-Organisational psychologists and other professionals.

Figure 9 shows the income by profession, with Cognitive Psychologist at the top of the list, followed by Industrial-Organisational Psychologists, then Psychological Officers who were working in government services.

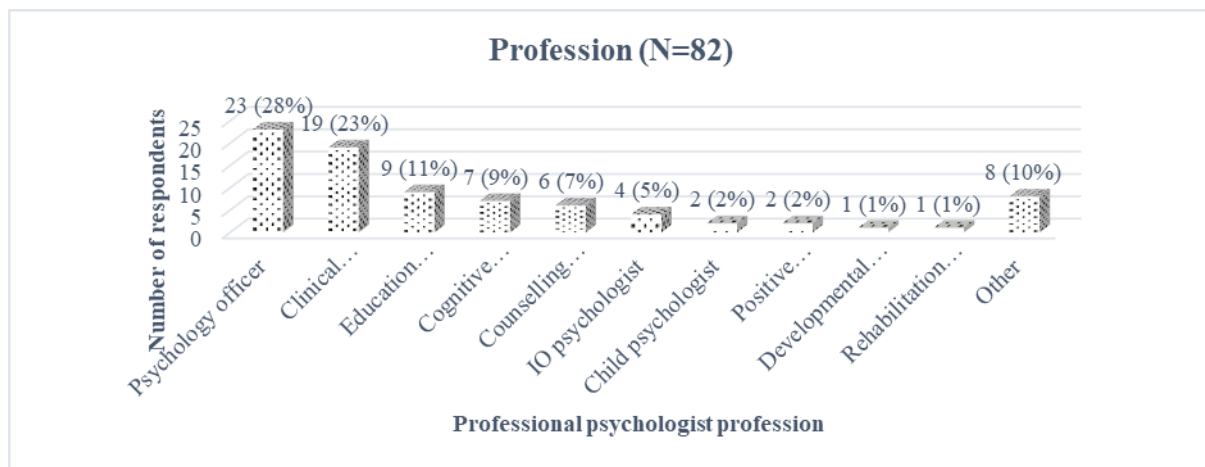


Figure 8 Professional psychology.

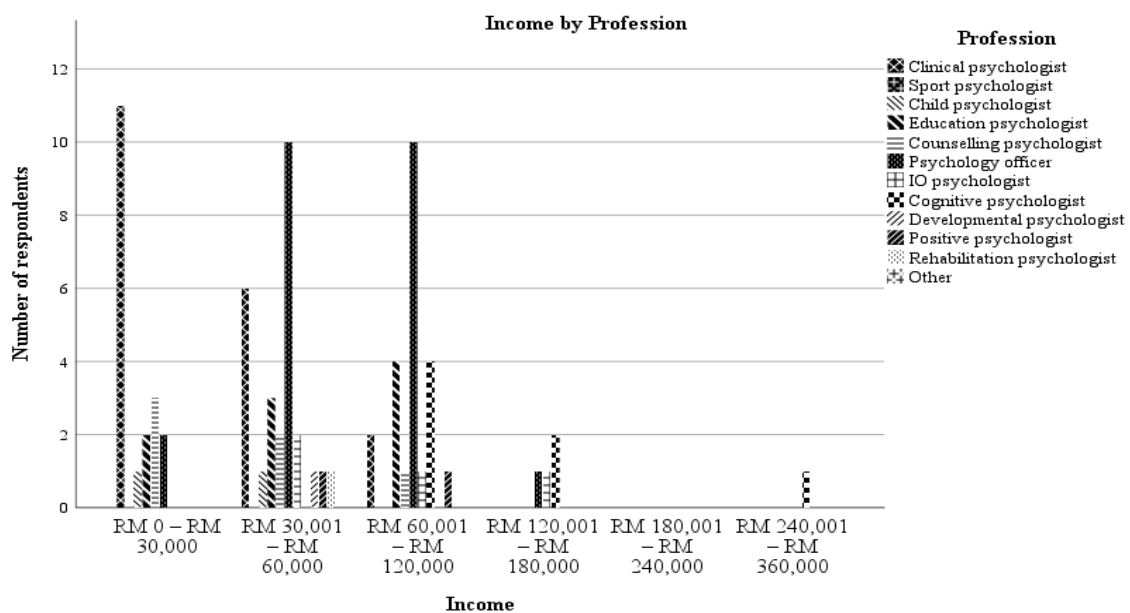


Figure 9 Income by profession.

Discussion

The present study showed that most respondents held a Bachelor degree, followed by a Masters degree. In recent years, psychology has become a degree of choice in many countries, including Malaysia; for example, in the USA, 3.5 million people hold a bachelor's degree in psychology, with 19% holding postgraduate degrees (Conroy, Christidis, Fleischmann & Lin, 2019) and in South Africa (Senekal & Smith, 2021). More respondents are interested in pursuing a clinical psychology Masters degree compared to other fields in Malaysia. Other psychology fields that garnered much interest from respondents were counselling psychology, forensic and industrial-organizational psychology. Interestingly, the fields of interest for Ph.D. and PsyD in psychology went in a different direction, with industrial and organizational psychology and educational psychology garnering more interest following clinical psychology. Similar to our data, the American Psychological Association (APA; 2021) statistics showed that clinical psychology and counselling and school psychologists are predicted to grow even higher with a forecast of 20% increase, and the prediction for growth for the non-health-related field, industrial-organizational psychology is 19%.

Such a prediction is associated with the global deteriorating of mental health; the World Health Organization data showed that globally, 294 million people are affected by depression (WHO, 2019). With the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health issues further deteriorated with a tremendous increase in people and workforce who need professional mental help. The latest data on global prevalence estimates for depression and anxiety were 28.0% and 26.9%, respectively, and globally, the prevalence was higher than pre-COVID-19 (Nochaiwong et al., 2021). In Malaysia, a study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that 60% of

respondents had depression, and 55.1% experienced anxiety (Wong et al., 2021). With the pandemic not showing signs yet of ending, the burden on the healthcare system is tremendous.

Along with the increase in cases related to mental health, the number of professionals provided by the country is not showing a comfortable upward trend; for example, a report on the Malaysian Society of Clinical Psychologists showed that only 348 clinical psychologists are registered, with 24 of them being international affiliates (Malaysian Society of Clinical Psychologists, 2021). Our data showed graduates' interested in pursuing postgraduate degrees in clinical psychology and counselling psychology, indicating a healthy choice to support the mental health system in the country. However, there is a growing concern that the supply will not meet the demand for students interested in pursuing clinical psychology. After 13 years, the results from the present study, in line with Khan (2008), indicate the importance of increasing the training of clinical psychologists in the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Indeed, the higher institution in Malaysia have included clinical psychology training in clinical psychology programs, but this increase has yet to meet the demand of the unprecedented situation of COVID-19 and the students' interest. Similarly, other country studies indicate that clinical psychological assessment training is becoming an issue in the COVID-19 (Gicas, Paterson, Narvaez, Nicolás, Loken, & Wendy, 2021).

In terms of employment, the present findings showed that most respondents were employed, and most respondents who were employed were working in the public sector (i.e., government sector), with employment in the private sector a close second. The majority of respondents worked in the teaching field, followed by respondents working in the psychology-related field. Similar trends were observed in the USA, where the APA reported that

employment opportunities for psychology graduates in the United States of America (USA) indicates an upward trend, with a 19% growth between the years 2014 to 2024, higher than the forecasted growth for any other occupations (Clay, 2017).

The majority of the psychology community in Malaysia are employed as psychology officers in government services or work in the public sector. Similarly, this employment trend was also witnessed in the United Kingdom; a survey conducted by the British Psychological Society (BPS) showed that most psychology graduates were employed in the public sector (Coulthard, 2017). With regards to annual income, cognitive psychologist and industrial-organisational psychologists were more highly paid than in other fields of psychology. This is consistent with other countries, for example, in the USA, graduates holding industrial and organizational psychology degrees enjoyed higher incomes than any other field of psychology (APA, 2016). Our results showed that the majority income ranges from RM 60,001 – RM 120,000 (USD14,441.14 - USD28,882.27). The annual income corresponded to the respondents' experience; for example, respondents with more than 20 years of working experience received higher annual incomes than those who had three years of working experience.

When interpreting the findings, a few limitations should be considered. First, the participants are volunteers from the public, with different demographic backgrounds and experiences. Second, the research was conducted in Malaysia only, and the findings may not apply to the psychology population in another country. Third, a cross-sectional design was used in this study which limits the in-depth information on participants' experience

Fourth, this study is not widely distributed despite reaching out to the Malaysian Psychology Society or Persatuan Psikologi Malaysia (PSIMA) members and

universities that offer psychology courses. Fifth, we also noted that the PSIMA registry is limited as not all psychologists and psychology students register with PSIMA. We, therefore, recommend an establishment of a database listing all psychologists in Malaysia. One way to populate this database is to have all psychologists registered under a professional psychology act that has yet to be established. The 'Allied Health Act' is the only Act that governs the Clinical Psychology field, which falls under the Ministry of Health, Malaysia. Hence, it is pertinent to establish and approve a 'Psychology Act' by the Malaysian Government as it will enforce registration and show the actual numbers of registered and qualified psychologists in the country.

Additionally, this 'Psychology Act' would have as an aim the protection of the public from 'Bogus' practitioners who claim to be psychologists without any formal psychology qualifications and training. This Act would also allow members of the public to check for qualified psychologists and ensure full ethical conduct by psychologists (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020). In other countries, a well-established Psychology Act, along with a professional body, has been long-established to safeguard practices of the country's psychology community, for example as in the USA, UK, and Canada. Psychologists who want to practice in these countries, are registered and are bound by the rules and regulations for practicing psychology (APA, 2021; BPS, 2021; College of Alberta Psychologists, 2021).

This inaugural study of Malaysia's psychology community provides data for the decision-makers to plan the supply and demand chain of the psychology workforce in the country. Our findings revealed that most respondents had a Bachelor degree in Psychology, with interest in pursuing Clinical Psychology as the top choice at Masters level. However, more participants with Masters degrees opted for Industrial

and Organizational Psychology as their top choice at PhD level. Most participants were employed, and the sector showing higher employment of psychology graduates was the public sector, with 'Psychology Officer' being the top job. In terms of the income, the cognitive psychologist gained the top spot, followed by industrial and organisational psychologist and psychology officer, having the highest incomes compared to other psychologist professions in Malaysia. Our results indicated the future direction of the psychology workforce and the importance for decision-makers to reflect on the preparedness of the supply-demand of the psychology workforce in the national context. Lastly, the 'Psychology Act' should be on the priority list of the Malaysian Government to mitigate the

country's psychology professional issues and take a big step towards a world class psychological service.

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