

Exploring Factors Behind the Lack of Formal Employment Opportunities among Selected Transgender Women in Malaysia: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract: Since the founding of Malaysia as a sovereign independent nation, people belonging to the LGBTQ community have not been treated well in society. The legacy of colonialism still lingers in the Malaysian society, with laws such as the Penal Code 377A and government departments continuing to oppress members of these communities. Amongst those oppressed are transgender women who have had their employment restricted in formal sectors and forced to work in the informal economy. Hence, this study explores the factors limiting formal employment for trans women in Malaysia, the severe challenges faced in their job search and reasons this phenomenon continues to plague this community. Through a rigorous focus group discussion with a selected group of transgender women battling employment woes, the study utilised a focused ethnography approach using a social constructivist paradigm to study their narratives to ascertain why this segment of society faces more issues seeking formal employment than their cisgender counterparts in Malaysia. The findings demonstrate that the contributing factors are safety concerns, suppression by governmental bodies and discriminatory practices by employers. This preliminary study urges organisations to develop strategies to combat the disparity between trans women job seekers and their equally qualified cisgender counterparts making the Malaysian job market more welcoming for trans women in the near future.

Keywords: Women, transgender, equality, ethnography, social constructivist paradigm, employment, job market

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