

Expatriates' Life Satisfaction and their Willingness to Stay Longer in
Malaysia

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Extended Abstract

International migration of the highly skilled has existed for decades as a mean of circulating knowledge, promoting scientific and technological development. Malaysia is an important destination country especially to the South Asian countries skilled labour migrants. The overall migrants make up about 12.7 per cent of the workforce and skilled labours accounted for 9.4 per cent of the foreigners working in Malaysia.

With the increasing need of skilled human capital in the next few decades and the "Malaysia My Second Home" (MM2H) program launched by the government, it is one of the Government's objectives to promote the pull of expatriates, which can integrate into the community and continue to contribute to society rather than become a burden to the country. There are many dimensions to well-being or that well-being needs to be measured across a range of domains or spheres of life (Brownlee, 1990). As life satisfaction often provides a good indication of one's future mental health (Green et al., 1992; Baruffol, Gisle and Corten, 1995), the way the expatriates view their quality of life in Malaysia has become of interest and importance. Thus, this study presents the life satisfaction of expatriates in four domains, mainly job; local people and culture; living environment; and community facilities. Factors that attract expatriates to Malaysia are identified and their willingness to stay longer in Malaysia is also analyzed.

The investigation was carried out using self-administered questionnaires, completed by both public and private institutions. Information regarding age, gender, nationality, religion, highest academic qualification, years of work experience upon arrival to Malaysia and present monthly income were required from all expatriates. The global response rate was 90 per cent. A total of 121 valid questionnaires were received. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is employed to analyse the four aspects of life

satisfaction according to their demographic stratification. Binary logistic regression is used to examine the determinants of expatriates' willingness to stay longer.

From the results, the expatriates in Malaysia are relatively satisfied with their job at a mean value of 4.12 out of 5.00, local people and culture (4.07), living environment (3.92) and community facilities (3.88) for the life satisfaction index. The respondents are fairly satisfied with 'Malaysian society and customs' at a mean value of 4.11. Since Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country enriched with multi-cultural customs, expatriates find living in Malaysia as an interesting experience and full of diversity. In the job category, 'supervisions and guidance of subordinates' received the least satisfaction score of 3.83. The level of job bureaucracy in Malaysia is high. The domains of life that the expatriates are most dissatisfied with are the health care facilities as well as commuting time and method. ANOVA tests conclude that religion, education qualification, industry involved, length of stay and family support are found to be significant in all life domains. Previous research on the relationship between the perception of marital quality and coping with negative life events showed that good marital quality buffers the effects of stress and contributes to the ability of the partners to cope with readjustment (Lev-Wiesel and Shamai, 1998).

Binary logistics show that age, marital status, previous migration experience and industry involvement increase the expatriates' probability of staying longer in Malaysia. Expatriates aged 41-50 years old are significantly most likely to stay longer followed by those aged 21-30 years old as compared to 50 years and above with odds factor of 53.7 ($p < 0.01$) and 24.1 ($p < 0.05$), respectively. Married expatriates increase the odds of staying longer by a factor of 21.1 ($p < 0.05$). Social attachment in the host country positively predicts staying longer in Malaysia. Having a spouse and children in Malaysia raises the probability of staying longer and the odds grow nine times ($p < 0.05$). Expatriates who have no previous migration experience will increase their odds of staying longer more than four times ($p < 0.05$). Industry attachment seems to have a more pronounced effect among expatriates who join the education sector with odds factor of 15.2 ($p < 0.05$) as compared to other industries.

The optimistic perceptions of expatriates regarding their life satisfaction during their stay in Malaysia as mentioned by Aycan (1997), whereby maintaining good mental health and psychological well-being with a feeling of satisfaction is important for expatriates to choose Malaysia as a source of destination. Thus, the likelihood of retaining the expatriates would also increase. From this study, policy makers and service providers, from both public and private sectors, would be able to gain a better insight on the type of initiatives and services that could improve the well being of the expatriates and retain them.

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