Job Seeking Practices of Ethnic Minority Youths in Hong Kong
Evaluation of employment support services

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Research conducted by

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Family Link - Family Service Centre for Local South Asians, Caritas Community Centre –
Kowloon, International Social Service Hong Kong Branch Hope Centre For Ethnic
Minorities, and Hong Kong Community Network Link Centre.
A. Objectives

This project delves into the job seeking practices and difficulties that ethnic minorities (EMs)\(^1\) in Hong Kong encounter. Going beyond existing similar researches, this research aims to provide recommendations on improving the design of existing government support measures and services that better identify current needs and hence enhance the employment prospects of ethnic minorities.

1. To understand the job seeking practices and difficulties encountered by ethnic minorities in Hong Kong;
2. To identify their needs which may help to enhance their employability;
3. To investigate the effectiveness of existing employment support measures provided by the government in helping ethnic minorities to secure employment.

B. Background

In recent years there are rising concerns in Hong Kong’s ethnic minority public policies. Here we briefly summarize several relevant studies after 2010.

A blog post of Labour and Welfare Secretary Law Chi-Kwong on 25 Mar 2018 (Law 2018) gives an overview of the government’s current policies on ethnic minority employment. From 2016 census figures there are 254,700 ethnic minorities (excluding domestic helpers) living in Hong Kong, which comprise 3.8% of the city’s population. 30% are South Asians, 23% are of mixed ethnicities, and 21.9% are whites. Indian, Pakistani and Nepalese males have a high proportion of working males: 82%, 71% and 87% respectively, which are higher than the Hong Kong average figure. Relevant public policies include the arrangement of “Chinese as a second language” in schools; specific counter and services at Labour Department job centres for ethnic minorities; training courses at two “Youth e-Start” resource centres (conducted in English) to provide start-up and career support for ethnic minority youths; encouraging employers to set up language requirements based on the genuine requirements of job positions; and language courses provided by the Employee Retraining Board.

A research team from Policy 21 and the University of Hong Kong conducted a study on ethnic minorities’ awareness and satisfaction towards selected public services (Policy 21 and HKU, 2018). The research interviewed 179 stakeholders on ethnic minorities’ awareness and satisfaction towards four major public services: the Employees Retraining Board (ERB), Home Affairs Department, the Labour Department, and the Social Welfare Department. The research identifies room for improvement in promoting social integration, understanding the needs of ethnic minorities, promoting public services, providing translation and interpretation services, and building long-term mutual trust relationships with ethnic minorities. 12 recommendations were made, such as the provision of more resources for various non-government organisations; regularly reviewing performance indicators on the provision of public services; and strengthening collaborations between government departments and various public bodies.

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\(^1\) In this report, all informants, survey respondents, focus group subjects, job seekers, employees, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers and service users refer to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.
The Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016 (HKSAR government 2018) shows that the poverty rate of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong climbed from 15.8% in 2011 to 19.4% (22,400 households and 49,400 persons) in 2016 before policy intervention. The South Asian ethnic group has the highest poverty rate of 40.1% and many of them live in a situation of “working poor”. They are associated with disadvantaged socio-economic properties such as low education qualifications, low skill levels, low salaries and large families to support.

In 2016 Hong Kong Unison surveyed 1,500 online job postings from 16 Hong Kong-based online job search databases, and found that over 90% of jobs required Chinese language abilities from applicants. Almost 70% of the job postings that did not explicitly state Chinese language requirements expected job seekers to have command of Chinese, and job seekers who did not know how to read and write Chinese could only access 19% of all advertised jobs. The abilities to speak other languages might not offset the disadvantage of not knowing Chinese. Job seekers in Hong Kong who did not speak and/or write Chinese encountered immense difficulties in seeking local employment (HK Unison 2017). In 2015 the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong surveyed 233 employers in Hong Kong by convenience sampling (mainly with trading, wholesale and retail companies) on their hiring experience, and conducted qualitative interviews on 23 ethnic minority working youths and 10 employers. Out of survey respondents, 70% had not been hiring any ethnic minorities, and a total of 40 ethnic minority employees had been hired in the recent 5 years. When ethnic minority job applicants were refused from job openings, reasons ranged from Chinese proficiencies, inadequate qualifications and skills, “smell on the body”, appearance, and clothing (e.g. the turban). The study captured discriminating phenomena such as salary disparity between employees with equivalent duties, and ethnic minority employees specifically allocated for offensive and dirty duties (Chinese YMCA of HK 2015).

C. Method
The research contains 2 parts: a survey questionnaire, and 5 focus group interviews.

A survey with 33 questions was conducted in January 2018 to collect quantitative data from ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. As ethnic minorities comprise less than 8% of Hong Kong’s population, to reach the target community more effectively we have adopted snowball sampling through 5 gatekeeper non-government organisations: HKSKH Lady MacLehose Centre, Hong Kong Christian Service Jockey Club Family Link - Family Service Centre for Local South Asians, Caritas Community Centre – Kowloon, International Social Service Hong Kong Branch Hope Centre For Ethnic Minorities, and Hong Kong Community Network Link Centre. The questionnaire was delivered by Google’s online survey platform (a “Google Form” URL), and as printed hard copies. A total of 172 effective samples were collected from ethnic minority subjects. 97 out of 172 subjects (56.4%) have sought for a job in the past 2 years, and 35 out of 97 job seekers (36.1%) have used the Labour Department job centre in the past 2 years.
A total of 23 ethnic minority subjects were invited to attend 5 focus group interviews during January – April 2018 to collect qualitative data on their job seeking practices. The participants were voluntary subjects among 172 survey respondents, or accessed through gatekeeper organisation Caritas Community Centre – Kowloon. The 5 groups were organized around gross themes such as blue-collar workers, youths, females, middle-aged males, and subjects indicating qualification mismatch. Each focus group lasted for 1-2 hours, and on completion each participant received an honorarium of HK$100.

D. Findings
Out of 172 survey respondents:

- Ethnicity composition is Pakistan 70%, Nepal 12%, India 8%.
- Gender distribution is female 56%, male 43%, N/A 1%.
- Employment status is Currently employed 47%, Only employed previously 23%, Never employed 30%.
- Mean age is 23.72, median age is 22, standard deviation is 6.88 years. Age distribution is 11.6% at 13-17, 29.7% at 18-20, 29.1% at 21-25, 11.1% at 26-30, 12.8% at 31-35, 4.1% at 36-40, 1.8% at 41-45
- Education background is No schooling 3.5%, Primary 7.6%, Lower secondary 16.9%, Upper secondary / F6 equivalent 36.1%, Tertiary / Post-secondary 36.1%.
- Mean year of arrival is 2003.6, median year of arrival is 2003.5, standard deviation is 8.00 years. Duration of stay in Hong Kong is 8.8% 1-3 years, 18.6% 4-8 years, 18.6% 9-13 years, 13.4% 14-18 years, 32.0% 19-23 years, 1.7% 24-28 years, 1.2% 29-33 years, 3.5% 34-38 years, 2.3% N/A.

1. Job seekers face resistance from white collar employment

Our survey data (Fig 1) shows that the Upper secondary / F6 equivalent group of subjects has an alarmingly low employment rate (33.9%), much lower than Primary (53.9%), Lower secondary (55.2%), and Tertiary/post-secondary (56.5%). The overall employment rate is 47.1% within our sample of 172.

Out of 97 subjects who have been seeking for jobs in the past 2 years, more job seekers with Tertiary/post-secondary education qualifications get current white collar jobs (55.3%), more job seekers with Primary (83.3%) and Lower secondary (62.5%) qualifications get current blue collar jobs (Fig 2a). Chi-square analysis (Fig 2b) returns a

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2 7% filled in “Hong Kong” as country of origin and could not be reached for further information on ethnicity. 1% or less: The Philippines, Bangladesh, Indian Philippin, Thailand, N/A.

3 “White collar jobs” include Teacher/tutor/teaching assistant, Clerk/Secretary, Social worker/Welfare worker/Programme worker, Manager/administrator, Salesperson/Customer service, Others (Engineer, Translator, Testing specialist, Labour Department Ambassador, dance performer, videographer, Self-employed).

4 “Blue collar jobs” includes Construction worker, Cook/waiter/waitress/kitchen helper, Security guard, Delivery worker/Driver, Production/warehouse/ramp worker, Cleaner.

5 Chi-square test is a general test to see whether two nominal variables are correlated. The cases in different cells have to be mutually exclusive. “Observed/actual” cells are the actual data collected;
strong P-value of 0.000012%, showing that there is a significant correlation between current employment (blue collar, white collar, unemployed) and education qualifications among job seekers.

On comparison between the type of jobs subjects search for and their actual employment, the widest mismatch occur in the following. For the Upper secondary/F6 group (Fig 3d), Clerk/Secretary; Teacher/Tutor/Teaching Assistant; Social Worker/Welfare Worker/Programme Worker. For the Tertiary/Post-secondary group (Fig 3c), Teacher/Tutor/Teaching Assistant; Social Worker/Welfare Worker/Programme Worker; Clerk/Secretary jobs.

Those searching for blue collar jobs have wide mismatch in: Lower Secondary for Cook/Waiter/Waitress/Kitchen Helper; Lower Secondary for Security (Fig 3e). However, as Construction provides a steady percentage of “safety net jobs” for Primary (33.3%) and Lower Secondary (37.5%), these two qualification groups do not see the low employment rate (Fig 1) of Upper Secondary/F6.

Fig 1: Employment status vs. Education (by % within group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% Within same education level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No School</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently employed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only employed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never employed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Expected" cells are expected values derived from row margins and column margins, which correspond to the situation when the null hypothesis holds --- the two variables are totally uncorrelated. A low P-value indicates that "actual" deviates a great deal from "expected". When P value < 0.05, common industry standard will accept the two variables as correlated with 95% statistical significance.
Current job versus Education qualification (by %)

N=97 job seekers

Fig 2b Chi square test between education level and current employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>1.2 What is your highest education attainment?</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Schooling</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>Upper Secondary</td>
<td>Tertiary/ Post Secondary</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current job</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>1.2 What is your highest education attainment?</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Schooling</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>Upper Secondary</td>
<td>Tertiary/ Post Secondary</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current job</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>8.62</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White collar</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>11.51</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td>16.33</td>
<td>17.24</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P-value of chi square test | 0.00000012

N=97 job seekers

Figure 3a: Types of jobs searching for vs. Education (by % within qualification group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.2 What is your highest education attainment?</th>
<th>No Schooling</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Lower Secondary</th>
<th>Upper Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary/ Post Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.5 What type of work</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>35.33</td>
<td>31.25</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cook/Caterer</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>31.25</td>
<td>27.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delivery/Walk</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>8.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Production/Wh</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security Guard</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>31.25</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clerk/Secretary</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>44.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salesperson/</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>8.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher/Tutor</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>30.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>30.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manager/Adm</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=97 job seekers, allow multiple ticks, % = number of ticks / actual headcount
Fig 3b: Actual employment status vs. Education
(by % within qualification group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>No Schooling</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Lower Sec</th>
<th>Upper Sec</th>
<th>Tertiary/Post-Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>37.60</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook/Waiter</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery/Log</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production/Av</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>15.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security/Gu</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk/Secret</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Tuc</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>18.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>21.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager/Adm</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>13.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>18.67</td>
<td>18.75</td>
<td>61.11</td>
<td>44.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=97 job seekers

Fig 3c: Comparison between % searching and % employed

Fig 3d: Comparison between % searching and % employed
Several focus group subjects believe that talents and hard work enable them to possess a higher calibre and overcome an upward mobility bottleneck. “Most advertisements [on average jobs] are in Chinese. Only high profile jobs have ads written in English.” [25 Jan group, Subject 4] “They [employers] look at your application, they start to recognize you [as ethnic minorities]. If you are already on high levels, in multi-national companies, with high qualifications, [being an ethnic minority] is OK… If you have the will, you can achieve… I came here in F4 without knowing any Chinese. After 6 months I got a “B” in DSE Chinese. Some Chinese teachers helped a lot. I actively sought for their help…. Once you get high marks, you are someone, and they come to you.” [25 Jan group, Subject 1]

However, unemployment figures in our survey shows that such beliefs may not always be true when applied to the general ethnic minority population. Our survey data shows that white collar jobs pose resistance to job seekers even if they have higher qualifications. One discussant points out that the success of individual elites through exceptional talents and hard work only applies to a small number of people. It is not an effective answer to a structural problem of inequality. “Elites can probably survive irrespective of ethnicity. But for those who are normal… as most people are normal… being an ethnic minority can be difficult.” (25 Jan group)

2. The services provided by Labour Department job centres for ethnic minority blue collar workers (and their employers) are unsatisfactory

When we grossly classify occupations into blue and white collar jobs, our survey data shows strong evidence that blue collar ethnic minority workers (12.12%) have a much lower usage rate of Labour Department job centres as a job seeking channel compared with their white collar (42.42%) or unemployed (45.45%) counterparts (Figure 4). 40% blue collar ethnic minority workers rely on friends and relatives as their only job seeking channel, compared with 16% ethnic minority white collar workers. When these groups are isolated for chi-square analysis, despite the small effective sample size, a P-value of
2.04% shows strong statistical significance (Figure 5). The usage rate of Labour Department job centres by ethnic minorities seeking for blue collar jobs (32.73%) is also lower than those seeking for white collar jobs (63.27%) (Figure 6).

Current blue collar workers have significantly lower ratings on the effectiveness of Labour Department job centres. Only 10.00% blue collar ethnic minority workers think Labour Department job centres can help them to find a job successfully, which is much lower than their white collar (63.64%) and unemployed (46.67%) counterparts (Figure 7). Upon chi-square analysis, the difference shows a significant P-value of 3.95% (Figure 9). Satisfaction rating is also lower among blue collar ethnic minority workers: 30.00% blue collar ethnic minority workers are satisfied with the services provided by LD job centres, compared with 54.55% white collar workers and 53.33% unemployed job seekers (Figure 8).

These survey findings are consistent with our focus group findings. Out of 5 focus groups, 2 groups (21 Jan 18 & 3 Mar 18) are mainly male blue-collar workers. Members of these groups talk about a strong reluctance to use Labour Department job centres, and a strong preference to use friends and relatives as a job seeking channel. The other 3 groups which consist of white collar workers and students do not show such a trait.

On why blue collar workers find Labour Department job centres not useful, subjects say the jobs posted at Labour Department job centres give lower salary (21 Jan), there are language barriers (notices and documents in Chinese; communication with staff), long waiting time for notification is involved, job requirements contain something they do not possess (education, language, experience, skills), and the environment settings and processes often make blue collar ethnic minority workers lose confidence. The negative impression may be from direct experience, or from what they heard from friends and relatives.

“You don’t have the confidence. Got to figure out how to fit that kind of situation”
“Once they lost confidence they don’t go anymore”
“Take more time, keep me waiting [for further notification]”. (9’-14’, 21 Jan group)
“Now I don’t trust the Labour Department, I never get a single job there” (3 Mar group)

**Figure 4. Job seeking channels used VS. Current occupation**
(by % within channel)
Out of 97 job seekers, 25 subjects relied on “friends and relatives” as their only channel of job seeking; 33 subjects indicated that they have used LD job centres as their job seeking channel. After conducting chi-square test, we find that the “friends and relatives only” group has a higher % with current blue collar jobs, while the LD job centre users have a higher % with current white collar jobs. The correlation is statistically significant, with P-value = 2.04%. Unemployment rates of the 2 groups were similar.
97 jobseekers, 363 ticks. Both variables allow multiple ticks

"Blue collar jobs" include construction worker, Cook/waiter/waitress/kitchen helper, Security guard, Delivery worker/Driver, Production / warehouse worker, Cleaner.

"White collar jobs" include Teacher/tutor/teaching assistant, Clerk/Secretary, Social worker/welfare worker/programme worker, Manager/administrator, Salesperson/Customer service, Others (engineer, translator, dance performer, videographer).

**Fig 7**

4.3.1 Do you think the LD Job Centre can help you find a job successfully?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>No current job</th>
<th>Current white collar</th>
<th>Current blue collar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue coll</td>
<td>45.67</td>
<td>52.17</td>
<td>32.73</td>
<td>21.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White coll</td>
<td>54.33</td>
<td>47.83</td>
<td>67.27</td>
<td>78.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=36 LD job centre users, by % of current occupation

**Fig 8**

4.3.2 Are you satisfied with the services provided at the Job Centre?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>No current job</th>
<th>Current white collar</th>
<th>Current blue collar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue coll</td>
<td>45.67</td>
<td>52.17</td>
<td>32.73</td>
<td>21.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White coll</td>
<td>54.33</td>
<td>47.83</td>
<td>67.27</td>
<td>78.43</td>
</tr>
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<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=36 LD job centre users, by % of current occupation
We conduct inferential analysis upon opinions of question 4.3.1 versus current occupation breakdown. A chi-square test returns a strong P value of 3.95%. There is a significant correlation between subjects’ opinions on whether LD job centres can help them find a job successfully, and their current occupation (blue collar/ white collar/ no current job). Subjects with current blue collar jobs have low ratings on LD job centre’s effectiveness compared with white collar / unemployed subjects.

3. General ratings on Labour Department job centres

Regardless of occupation types, the general ratings of Labour Department job centres are lower than 50%. Out of 35 ethnic minority users of these centres, 58% think the job centres cannot help them find a job successfully (Fig 10), and 53% are not satisfied with the services provided (Fig 11).

Ethnic minority job seekers have low awareness of the job centres and their services. Out of 97 ethnic minority job seekers (Fig 12), 36% have used the job centres, 63% have never used them, and 21% have never heard of them. Out of 35 centre users (Fig 17), 60-63% indicated “N/A” when asked to give comments on Employment Officers. (Fig 15-16) 37.1% have heard of job search advice, 14.3% have heard of telephone simultaneous interpretation service, 11.4% have heard of Training / retraining, 2.86% have heard of information on the employment market, and 2.86% have heard of career aptitude assessment.

Out of 8 detailed bi-directional rating items (Fig 21-23) of Labour Department job centre services, only 2 items get more positive than negative ratings by centre users: “Staff were helpful” (28%:17%), “the meeting duration was appropriate” (8.6%:5.7%). The other 6 items have more negative opinions than positive ones: “I did not get enough assistance at the Job Centre” (22.9%: 48.6%), “The job does not match my educational qualifications/experience” (20.0%:42.9%), “Staff could not provide me with concrete/update information” (14%:31%), “Most information were in Chinese” (17%:31%), “They did not understand what I needed/ I couldn’t tell them what I wanted” (8.6%:28.6%), and “Ambassadors / Employment Assistants were not available” (5.7%:20.0%).
On the ethnic minority ambassador programme (Fig 18-20), 69% centre users have never used the services, 29% have never heard of them; 31% have used them. Out of actual users, ambassadors score higher in language (82% positive) and understanding (82% positive). They score lower in the provision of concrete job information (55% positive).

From our focus group data, one subject works as a job centre ambassador for 6-7 months. Her duties include “open the door, remove job cards, if an ethnic minority person comes in help them to find suitable jobs and help them to apply”; most of the time she is dealing with Pakistani males who apply for construction jobs. She is confident in her Chinese abilities (which is the job requirement), and she has the impression that most male Pakistani job seekers are weak in self-introduction / interviews, and they are unwilling to speak up “just a little bit of Chinese”. Her narration may be consistent with survey data that ambassadors are effective in providing a friendly setting, but less effective in actual job seeking outcome.

“Even if they [applicants] don’t get the job, they would be happy to speak to someone in their own language (at LD centres)” (10:00-11:00) (27 Jan group A).

A small number of subjects have negative opinions on ethnic minority ambassadors.

“The ambassador programme is not usefull! [For job seekers] If their English is OK they don’t need you [ambassadors]; if they don’t know English they [ambassadors] can’t help you.” (25 Jan group, Subject 1)

**Fig 10**

4.3.1 Do you think the LD Job Centre can help you find a job successfully?

![Survey Results](image1)

N=36 LD job centre users

**Fig 11**

4.3.2 Are you satisfied with the services provided at the Job Centre?

![Survey Results](image2)

N=36 LD job centre users
Fig 12

3.10 Have you ever used the employment services provided by the Labour Department Job Centres?

Answered by 97 job seekers.

Fig 13

3.11 Why haven’t you sought help from LD job centres? (by % of valid respondents)

Answered by 42 job seekers who have heard of LD job centres but did not use their services. Other reasons include: Most jobs are low education / low pay; just teaching me how to use the machine is not useful; arranged interview --> no interview.

Fig 14
4.1.1 Have heard of the services provided by LD employment officers (by user%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never heard of any</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job search advice</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone simultaneous interpretation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training / retraining</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on the employment market</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career aptitude assessment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB Can tick more than one

4.1.2 Have used the services provided by LD employment officers (by user%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career aptitude assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone simultaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on the employment market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training / retraining</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job search advice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.2 Have you ever used the following services provided by the Employment Officers? (Can tick more than 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>% of users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of the above services</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job search advice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training / retraining</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on the employment market</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone simultaneous interpretation service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career aptitude assessment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid respondents = 35

**Fig 17**

4.1.3 Opinions about Employment Officers (by % of LD job centre users)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He/she followed up your progress and provided assistance when you need help</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/she understood your job aspiration and suitable job vacancies</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/she can provide the latest job vacancy information</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid respondents=35

High % of N/A: 60-63%
Actual usage rate is low

4.1.3 Opinions about Employment Officers (by LD job centre users)

4.1.3 Opinions about Employment Officers (by LD job centre users)

4.2.1 Have you ever used the services of Employment Services Ambassador/Employment Assistant for EM from the Labor Department Job Centres?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>% of users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, but I have heard of it</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, never heard of it</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=35 LD job centre users
Fig 19

4.2.2.1 Do you agree that the service/assistance from the Ambassador/Employment Assistant was useful in helping you find a job?

N=35 LD job centre users
Other comments on ambassadors: Helpful(1), very inexperienced(1)

Fig 20 Evaluation of Ambassador / Employment Assistants

N = 11 subjects with valid response. Warning: small sample

Fig 21

View on capability of the services of Job Centre (by % of centre users)
4.3.1.1 What’s your view on the capability of the services of Job Centre? (Freq  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The information of job seeking provided is helpful</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The job matching services is helpful</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They helped me to overcome my job seeking difficulties</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>57.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=35 LD job centre users. Can tick more than one

**Fig 22**

*View on incapability of the services of Job Centre (by % of centre users)*

4.3.1.2 What’s your view on the incapability of the services of Job Centre? (Freq  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I did not get enough assistance at the Job Centre</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The job does not match my educational qualifications/ experience</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They did not understand what I needed/ I couldn’t tell them what I wanted</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is quite fine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=35 LD job centre users. Can tick more than one

**Fig 23** Positive and negative views on the service provided at the Job Centre (by % of centre users)

N=35 LD job centre users
Others: "Staff lacking information",
"No one come to help, look for job myself in the machine with the help of friend."
"Less resources they have they are not employers to hire EM."
"Most jobs information provided at lower level. There was less opportunity in field like finance, banking for those EM who have post-secondary education or Bachelor."

Fig 24

**4.3.3 Would seek assistance from LD Job Centres if the following are made available (by % of jobseekers)**

N=97 job seekers
Total ticks = 308

4. **Training and career guidance support**

Triangulated from focus group data, **ethnic minority subjects are in high demand of internships, but there are few opportunities offered.** Especially for ethnic minorities without any experience of a first job, internships can **effectively break the vicious cycle of first-time entrance barriers** into the job market. Focus group subjects mention about two existing vicious cycles:

(1) Most jobs require 1-2 years of relevant experience, but ethnic minority youths often find it difficult to find an employer willing to offer them a first job to start with. No first job → no experience → no job ... becomes a cycle. (3 Mar group, 29 Apr group)

(2) For those who grew up in segregated schools or those who recently arrive at Hong Kong, they have very few local Chinese friends in their social networks. It is difficult for them to learn Chinese in a daily language environment, or to get introduced to job positions via non-ethnic minority social networking. The less Chinese they speak / fewer Chinese friends they have, the more difficult it is to integrate with the Chinese workplace. (25 Jan group)

From survey data, internship has the highest rating (89%) as the most effective form of training (Fig 26), but the lowest usage rate (9 out of 55 subjects, Fig 25). Interview skills and job seeking skills have relatively high % of positive evaluation (79-80%); Language/Cantonese classes and job market seminars have relatively low positive evaluations (64-67%). (Fig 26)
Access to career guidance is far from satisfactory. Out of 172 relevant subjects, 68% have never received any career guidance (Fig 27). On comparison between different channels of career guidance (Fig 28-30), tertiary institutes receive the highest positive evaluation: 93.33% are rated "very effective" and "effective". They provide near a quarter (24%) of career guidance for the audience pool. NGOs have satisfactory positive ratings (83.33%) and they provide 19% of the guidance received. Secondary schools have relatively lower positive ratings (63.89%), but they are providing a sturdy part of guidance service (57%) to the audience pool.

**Fig 25: Evaluation of types of career guidance / training (by frequency)**

![Graph showing evaluation of types of career guidance / training (by frequency)](image)

55 subjects, 113 ticks

**Fig 26: Evaluation of career guidance / training (by % within type of training)**

![Graph showing evaluation of career guidance / training (by % within type of training)](image)

55 subjects, 113 ticks
Fig 27

Attendance of career guidance training / workshops

- No attendance: 1% (N/A)
- 1 channel of access: 1% (N/A)
- 2 channels of access: 3% (N/A)
- 3 channels of access: 27%
- N=172

Fig 28

Indicated attendance of career guidance training / workshop

- Secondary school: 57%
- Tertiary institution: 24%
- Non-governmental Organization (NGO): 19%
- N=172

Fig 29

Evaluation of career guidance workshops (by freq)

- Very effective
- Effective
- Not very effective
- No use at all

My secondary school
My tertiary institution
NGO
5. **Disadvantaged situations after 1997**

A number of focus group subjects think ethnic minorities in Hong Kong are facing more difficulties in job seeking after the 1997 handover. Some mention about the additional language requirement of Mandarin (in addition to Cantonese); some are hindered by the new specialist certificate system in construction industry; some mention about the current requirement of Chinese to enter the police force, which differs from the times of their fathers and grandfathers.

“The situation is getting worse after 1997. Due to stronger mainland Chinese influences (e.g. mainland Chinese buying private flats, visiting, receiving delivery…) most jobs such as security guards and delivery now require Chinese reading and writing. Often Mandarin is required too. The language requirements are now doubled… Before 1997 I get so many jobs to choose from at LD centres. Now with language requirements and construction cards, the system is very hostile.” [3 Mar group, Subject D]

With the new system of specialization and certificates, subjects in construction used to earn more in the past (taking up specialized / skilled jobs) find themselves worse off. “Now we can only work as “general labour” 散工, because we don’t have VTC training or certificates.” [21 Jan group, 1 subject]

“[On dream job] Policeman. Hope is diminishing, now Chinese is a requirement, but that is my dream job.” [25 Jan group, Subject 4]

“Policeman is also my dream job. My grandfather was a policeman [worked for the disciplinary forces]… he used to work for the Correctional Services.” [25 Jan group, Subject 5]

6. **Discrimination experienced by informants**

The focus group subjects recalled various instances when they experienced discrimination during job seeking, or at work. The accounts included bullying from
colleagues, refusal of duty allocation, or the job is simply not offered due to racial differences.

Example of stereotyping: One subject (born and raised in HK) applied for event helper in Wanchai, sent CV in Chinese and talked on phone in Cantonese. “我想見工呀。” She got hired, but on the first day the employer was actually shocked about her race. “吓，你唔係香港人嚟架？我暈咯。” She worked for the first day but never received calls from the employer again. [27 Jan group 1:00:45]

Bullying from Chinese colleagues. “They said some bad words using Chinese when I was having my lunch. Suddenly I say I know Chinese. They were so surprised... I ask them why you said bad things, they say it’s just in general about ethnic minorities, not only you... I said please respect my religion, we are working together. If you don’t want to work with me, just go from here.... Afterwards they’re like different, some helped me a bit.” [27 Jan group Subject 3, 30:52-32:20]

Chinese candidates preferred: “For finding someone to fill the same job, usually Chinese are preferred. Often me and some Chinese fill in forms together. The Chinese get interviews, I am just told to go home and wait, then hear nothing.” [3 Mar group Subject B]

Caterers in Hong Kong are often concerned about chefs with a beard --- which is an unnecessary requirement, but poses difficulties for those males who keep a beard for religious reasons. (29 Apr group)

7. **Chinese proficiency requirement as (unnecessary) hurdle**

Most local jobs, especially those with lower to mid-ranged prospects, require Chinese communication abilities. While basic Cantonese/Chinese proficiency is a *de facto* ability for most local Chinese, it is only possessed by around 1/3 of survey respondents. The English abilities of the informants have their strongly correlated to their education qualifications, but their Chinese abilities have no direct relationship with their education level.

A subject who works as LD job centre ambassador generalises the situation of language abilities mismatch she sees: [About Pakistani males] “Job seekers prefer jobs using English, but employers prefer job seekers who know Chinese.” [27 Jan group, Subject 6, 11:00-12:09]

One informant works in a local kindergarten. The principal invites her to work there (teach English and serve as Urdu translator with parents), but she refuses her wish of becoming a class teacher. “Sorry you cannot be a class teacher, because you don’t know Chinese”. [27 Jan group Subject 3, 27:38-30:00] How Chinese proficiency is relevant to the duties of a class teacher was never clear to the informant.

We observed that many employers demanded jobseekers to be able to read and write Chinese for jobs that do not genuinely require Chinese. “Even English tutoring! They
want someone who can speak Cantonese and write Chinese.” (19:05) “Even there is no rule, we are supposed to know Chinese... 17:52 ... The first day I go to work, the boss told me you’re working in HK, you should know a little bit of Chinese.” [27 Jan group, Subject 4]

Some informants, therefore, end up limiting their pool of prospective jobs to those that emphasize English instead of Chinese, such as working in the airport, in hotels, or as engineers.

“I am studying an associate degree in aviation management... job prospects is good, my professor says I should be able to find a job.” [29 Apr group Subject 1]

“At first I wanted to be a doctor, but in HK language is an issue - I cannot understand local patients. Then I changed my plans to become an engineer. An engineer works in labs, speaking in English is OK.” [25 Jan group, Subject 1]

E. Discussion

It is regrettably a common phenomenon that some ethnic minorities, especially the socially under-privileged ones, tend to confront problems of employment in mainstream societies all over the world. There has been literature and scholarship that boil down to the reasons of low education attainment, lack of access to relevant information and support from government, social exclusion, or even discrimination, for the problems facing ethnic minorities in finding jobs that match their interests and qualifications. Whilst there have been considerable surveys, including from Hong Kong, that converge on the common problems over various stages / nodes along the employment nexus facing ethnic minorities, this research sought to delve into the stage of job seeking among ethnic minorities. Through examining the existing job seeking practice, including i) job seeking channels, availability and quality of job training resources, we wish to uncover, and identify, the possible clues and reasons behind the gaps in employment opportunities and job satisfaction among some ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

It must be mentioned though, that this survey tends to cover those ethnic minorities that do not fall in the top educational or economic notch of society. Those who have attained university or higher qualifications, or come from wealthier family background, will have better access and means to actualizing their potentials and pursuing their career or other aspirations. Those who are less endowed, or have less educational attainments, should be the focus of our survey which aims to identify the needs and gaps of existing job seeking channels.

From the above findings, we have the following analysis:

1. **Mismatch 1: Upper-secondary graduates in need of career guidance**

This survey (D1) reveals that ethnic minority job seekers who have attained upper-secondary education qualifications tend to find great difficulties seeking for jobs. Some
of them assumed their qualifications could lift them out of blue collar jobs, but in reality the qualifications of white collar jobs keep rising out of their reach. Some focus group respondents expressed doubts that even with the right qualifications, the requirements of Chinese and racial stereotypes may hinder them from their goals. “So I don’t want to graduate yet. Phew.” (27 Jan group, subjects 3 & 4)

The gap between expectations and reality would often lead to a long and frustrating period of job seeking and self-doubt. While the same phenomenon applies to non-ethnic minorities, the situation of ethnic minorities is further aggrieved by social isolation, language barriers and discrimination.

This specific social group would benefit from career guidance, but our survey data (D4) shows that two-thirds of our subjects have no access to any form of career guidance or training. Such guidance is important to ethnic minority youths to get in touch with mainstream reality; to formulate executable plans for career development and further training; to acquire interview skills, and to learn about handling cultural differences in the workplace. Our focus group subjects specifically look up to the provision of internships as a helpful first step to enter the mainstream workplace and social circles, and to acquire important starting experience.

The low access to career guidance and training among respondents could stem from a) job training institutes promotion materials, although distributed, failed to reach the ethnic minority communities; b) ethnic minority communities lacked the incentive to reach out for information about available training/ courses that help them access better jobs; iii) job seekers do not think these job training channels could improve their employment prospects.

Various institutes are identified as providing vocational training to youths who left secondary school but being not eligible for university. Our survey asked respondents on their usage of the institutes ERB, VTC, IVE and others. Besides low recognition and low access, most respondents who are aware of the institutes either did not apply for these institutes, or did not think the training provided at the institutes could elevate their job seeking/employment prospects. This could reflect a gap in the contents provided by these institutes, and the expectations of job seekers. Some specifically opined that the elements of hands-on practice in ERB’s training courses (kitchen, coffee, cakes) are more helpful than VTC’s courses on “some knowledge but little practice” (21 Jan group).

By placing phone enquiry to some institutes, we are surprised to discover that a small number of courses have stopped running for the past five years due to low enrolment, but they are still listed on promotional websites. These courses may have a problem in recruitment and promotion, or worse, the aims and curriculum design may need a thorough review. The existence of lip-service training courses for ethnic minorities may imply a vacuum of service provision towards previously identified sectors. The mismatch of training provision – and the resources incurred – needs urgent attention.

2. **Mismatch 2: The consequences of unnecessary job requirements**
Our survey data (D1) shows that a high proportion of subjects who applied for jobs in clerk/secretary, education, social work, and security were unsuccessful. Focus group respondents echo experience of themselves, or that of their friends and relatives, that their qualifications back home are not recognized in Hong Kong. However, a more prevailing and central hurdle to the employment opportunities for ethnic minorities in Hong Kong is the requirements for Chinese proficiency.

While in many situations there is a genuine need for Chinese proficiency to carry out job duties, we wish to point out that these requirements are sometimes unreasonable, and not relevant to the nature of the job. “Even English tutoring! They want someone who can speak Cantonese and write Chinese.” (19:05) “Even there is no rule, we are supposed to know Chinese... 17:52 ... The first day I go to work, the boss told me you’re working in HK, you should know a little bit of Chinese.” [27 Jan group, Subject 4]

The crux of the issue here is that Chinese language requirements are often ASSUMED, for reasons beyond the job requirements itself. While Chinese is often used in formal and informal writings in the ethically Chinese dominant workplace, being able to communicate in Cantonese becomes a ‘non-verbal’ job requirement, as it makes inter-collegial communication convenient, and is even seen as vital for collegiality and efficiency (HK Unison 2017). The other side of such mismatch is that the English proficiency of ethnic minority job seekers tend to be undervalued, or offset by the Chinese language requirements. The cases over the kindergarten class teacher, or even English tutoring jobs, are evidence of Chinese language being posed at ethnic minority job seekers as unnecessary hurdle, and might even indicate discrimination. This unnecessary hurdle to the ethnic minority job seeker permeates along different stages of the job seeking and employment process.

There are other unnecessary job requirements linked with culture and religion. For example, keeping beard is required for religions such as Sikh and Muslim males, but focus group subjects mention about caterers who prohibit chefs from keeping a beard due to so-called 'sanitary' reasons. (29 Apr group). Such unnecessary requirements, whether they arise from default habits or cultural intolerance, may wipe out the opportunities of some potentially outstanding candidates and fruitful employment relationships. The Labour Department may need to take up a more proactive role to check on unnecessary job requirements in recruitment advertisements, and provide practical advice and awareness education for employers.

3. The needs of blue collar workers

From survey data (D2), blue collar subjects indicate alarmingly low usage rate and evaluation ratings concerning the Labour Department as an official job seeking channel. Focus group data identifies low salary, high qualification requirements and unpleasant user experience as the major underlying reasons.

Based on the experience and observation of the DPCW-Kln, when some employers advertise jobs at the Labour Department Job Centre, they tend to lower the salary offer
because they do not trust the Job Centre to be able to return the most desirable employees. An existing stereotype is that only those desperately looking for jobs would approach the Labour Department; they are the ‘rejects’ of existing job seeking channels who would accept lower salaries. As this research does not collect data from employers, we have no evidence to assess to what extent this is a common practice. However, most blue collar focus group subjects do notice that salaries offered by Labour Department job advertisements as significantly lower than their kinship network and other agencies, hence they consider the Labour Department as a less preferred job seeking channel.

Blue collar job seekers find their experience at the Labour Department unsatisfactory and discouraging. Open-end comments from survey respondents include “Staff lacking information”, “No one come to help, [I] look for job myself in the machine with the help of a friend”. From focus group data, especially for blue collar job seekers with lower education background and English/Chinese proficiencies, many have difficulties expressing and articulating themselves well at the Labour Department Job Centre. Some are not able to effectively consolidate their work experience and qualifications [ambassador in 27 Jan group], so as to help the staff at Labour Department identify their needs and background. Some are not assertive enough to seek help, and they can be easily discouraged by negative experience. “Once you lose confidence you don’t go [to Labour Department] anymore” [21 Jan group].

On the contrary, both survey and focus group data shout loud and clear that blue collar subjects rely on friends and relatives as their most preferred, if not only, job seeking channel. In both blue collar focus groups, subjects unanimously convey they enjoy the trust, understanding, language compatibility, and convenience found in their social network, which is unmatched by any other job seeking channels. By staying within in-groups they do not need to face a variety of misunderstanding and discrimination from mainstream channels. Generations of working experience among ethnic minorities have accumulated into a culture / practice which becomes a spiralling circle, making them experts in the construction, security operations, and cleaning sectors. Some have gained agency, network, and even more say in the employment and recruitment stage. Employment agencies run by ethnic minorities can have more update information and better pay on the job vacancies in these sectors.

Despite the abovementioned merits, this ‘virtuous’ cycle becomes vicious when these job seeking patterns become ‘comfort zones’ so steadfast that minority communities cannot escape: they lose the incentive to venture out of the typecast jobs, even if these jobs cannot match their qualifications and potentials, not to mention interests and aspirations. On the outside, they confirm mainstream stereotypes that ethnic minority are only capable of menial jobs. In some extreme cases, some Nepalese who were doctors/ professionals in Nepal resort to working in construction, simply because ‘jobs are always available, and the pay is relatively high compared to security guards, although it’s hard work and can be dangerous’. Although both blue and white collar job types deserve recognition, respect and dignity, a cultural lock-in that confines ethnic minorities to a narrow set of blue collar jobs is damaging to the life chances of individuals, and detrimental to the productivity of society as a whole.
4. **From “Being Nice” to Efficacy**

Apart from staff being friendly (this is consistent with Policy 21 and HKU [2018: p.23 point 10.8]), the Labour Department is getting low ratings in almost all evaluation items by ethnic minority job seekers.

The unsatisfactory situations include language barriers: a high proportion of job advertisements are only available in Chinese, including jobs that do not require a high level of Chinese proficiency. “Most advertisements are in Chinese. Only high profile jobs have ads written in English.”  [25 Jan group, Subject 4] While it may be habitual local practice that job ads are scripted in Chinese, there is room to consider if this has to be the case. If job ads are bilingual, at least for jobs that do not require high level of Chinese proficiency, this might incur some administrative costs especially for small and medium enterprises. However, if we factor in the positive benefits of hiring ethnic minorities (their English qualifications, Cantonese ability, work ethos such as loyalty and reliability), the change can add value to employer organisations as well.

Ethnic minority ambassadors employed at the Labour Department are seen as understanding and competent in language skills, but less competent in providing concrete and update information. This incompetence may arise from the short-term nature of ambassador contracts, and there may be a mismatch between the training they receive and their actual duties. “I got training for 9 days. It was on social work but not on specific duties.” [ambassador in 27 Jan group] Some subjects indicate that ambassadors were not available when they visited the Job Centre. While ambassadors may have different duties during their working hours, the Labour Department may consider openly specifying certain periods of time when ambassadors (and interpretation service) are available to walk-in job seekers.

5. **The many faces of discrimination**

Although this research focuses on procedures and practices of job seekers, the findings also reveal various forms and levels of discrimination **along different nodes of employment experience** in Hong Kong, which, when seen together, present a complicated **cycle of ‘employment deficit’** among ethnic minorities.

For those subjects who are proficient in Chinese, exclusion and rejection can occur without justifiable excuses. In one case, a Pakistani girl who speaks fluent Cantonese got hired as event helper after a phone interview. On the first day of work, the employer was shocked at her race and exclaimed, “Gosh, you are not a Hongkonger? I want to faint.” (“吓，你唔係香港人黎架？我暈咯。”) [The girl actually has permanent Hong Kong identification] The Pakistani girl worked for the first day, but never received calls from the same employer again for work arrangements. [27 Jan group 1:00:45]

In other cases, subjects have to cope with bullying from Chinese colleagues who gossip about them right at their face, assuming they do not know Cantonese. “They said some bad words using Chinese when I was having my lunch. Suddenly I say I know Chinese. They were so surprised... I ask them why you said bad things, they say it’s just in general
about ethnic minorities, not only you... I said please respect my religion, we are working together. If you don’t want to work with me, you can just leave.... Afterwards they’re like different, some helped me a bit.” [27 Jan group Subject 3]

These are a few anecdotes but are often happening to subjects in their employment experience in Hong Kong. They all point to a more deep-seated problem of discriminatory practices from job seeking to coping with colleagues, which are not related at all to the employability, the competence, and productivity of ethnic minorities. These discriminatory practices permeate throughout the employment chain, starting from the language in job ads, to job training, to staff/colleague interaction in the workplace. Many of these practices stem from a deep-seated stereotyping in the mainstream society that a lack of Chinese proficiency has a direct bearing on their performance, hence their employability. Stereotypes are persistent, convenient ideas formed on groups of people which are not entirely true. The stereotypes that ethnic minorities do not speak Cantonese, hence will under-perform, or even cause disharmony in the workplace, hence undermine efficiency and productivity, are based on unfounded ideas. They are doubly harmful to the respondents, with such throwaway remark that “it’s not personal, it’s about your community”. Stereotypes are especially damaging to minority communities just because it’s the majority who often use and perpetuate these stereotypes as a form of ‘othering’. If it is not intentional, often it is just an unthinking habit to advertise vacancies in Chinese language, expect all colleagues to be ethnically Chinese, ‘because because’. The ‘habitual’ practice becomes rooted in the working culture that whenever someone with a different ethnic background shows up in the workplace, he/she sticks out simply because he/she is different. Hence, the ‘linguistic’ barrier is only a ‘legitimized’ cover/sheepskin for the more deep-seated racial barrier. The accumulated consequence of racial stereotyping – or any form of stereotyping – is a continuous process, which in due course, becomes a justification for exclusionary practices down to the point of scripting job ads, interviewing, the first day of work, and throughout employment. To the ethnic minority employee, once you dare to fight your way in the mainstream Hong Kong workplace, the precarity is predictably unpredictable. It can be disempowering and infuriating at times, because no matter how much you strive to gain recognition and respect through your hard work, the next moment could be a random racially charged comment that poses like a hard wall which you can never break.

The working of racial segregation (if not discrimination) at the workplace means a deprivation of opportunities for ethnic minorities to gain social mobility to get out of their spiralled poverty cycle. This survey confirms that the vicious cycle of minority employment occurs at different levels: i) discrimination at the workplace makes ethnic minority job seekers more liable to be dismissed, which confirms for the employers that minority employees are ‘trouble’ and hence not desirable as employees. ii) this works back at the recruitment level where Chinese language is used in job ads and interviews, as an enforced barrier/gatekeeper against ethnic minority job seekers. iii) ethnic minority job seekers have less/little access to job openings; iv) lacking necessary/relevant job training, ethnic minority youths face much more difficulties in find their first jobs. The more layers of discrimination, the harder the minority community finds work, and the harder it is for them to break the circuit of unemployment/
underemployment, hence the harder to break their cross-generational poverty.

6. **The Curse of Minoritized Culture**

By repeating the job seeking and employment cycle, the ethnic minority community also contribute to the spiralling circuit of employment that deepens the ‘self-stereotyping’ among the ethnic minorities that these are the only jobs they can attain. Just as the mainstream society has accumulated a discriminatory practice against ethnic minorities, so have the ethnic minorities generated a ‘culture’ of seeking the same jobs through kinship ties which gives them the beset guarantee for a job, even though the job is far from their qualifications and expectations. Years of unsatisfactory or even humiliating job seeking and employment experience have passed along and across generations, to have formulated a culture of fear and disappointment among the ethnic minorities to not seek any assistance from the mainstream society for jobs. Each ‘horror story’ confirms that the mainstream society will not help them access relevant jobs. Worse still, they will not, or cannot, dare to expect that their hopes and aspirations can be realized in Hong Kong. During our focus group meetings, we constantly encounter phrases ‘there is no other way’. The expressions on their face were one of desperation, or display of lack of confidence or faith in getting anywhere near what they dream about, or have hopes of becoming. The lack of awareness and access to relevant job/career information also stems from a lack of confidence or trust in mainstream job seeking channels, or jobs themselves that could elevate their chances of a better career path. On the other hand, they tend to be more practical and down to earth especially in finding a job quickly, because many South Asian males have to support not just their immediate family here in Hong Kong, but the extended families (also of the in-laws) at their ethnic country, even though they might not be born or raised there (21 Jan and 3 Mar focus groups; HKSAR government 2018:ES.42). While familial and kinship ties remain a strong emotional and financial hold to the South Asian informants, they also compel these informants to be down to earth, giving up on their dreams and hopes for a career, or placing stability over social mobility. This is what we would coin as ‘minoritized culture’, a deep-seated complex accumulated and perpetuated over generations, which cause them to feel fearful and suspicious against the mainstream. They might also be, a determination to be too dignified to confront the mainstream, lest they become hurt and discriminated again; all in all a loss of self-confidence in finding a job that realizes their career and personal goal, in the face of layers of harsh realities. While this complex might be all too common amongst many at the lower ebb of the society, the ethnic minorities face a further layer of injustice just because of their racial difference. Mismatch of jobs because of discrimination leads to a mismatch and deprivation of talents and potentials, especially for the minority communities.

It is our hope that this survey could demonstrate the complexities and the nuances behind apparent realities about the problems facing ethnic minorities’ employment situation in Hong Kong – the circuit of minority employment, or the ethnic employment deficit. We found layers of mismatch from qualifications, aspirations to the actual jobs that are available to ethnic minorities, or jobs that ethnic minorities tend to have. Behind such mismatch, the Chinese language poses the biggest barrier at different nodes of job seeking/employment practice by employers, which could camouflage the
more deep-seated racial stereotyping or discrimination. Failing to realize/recognize these gaps, job seeking and training channels created another level of mismatch – a mismatch of available services and resources from helping ethnic minorities to find relevant jobs, or enhancing their chances of employment. Less still could they provide a more welcoming and encouraging atmosphere that boost the confidence of ethnic minorities in their job seeking experiences. Where ‘employment’ and ‘labour’ are crucial means to the actualization of goals and aspirations, as well as their dignity and worth, they are best indicators to how open a society towards cultural diversity/minorities: ‘employment’ is the only means where ethnic minorities/poor can lift their poverty cycle and advance their social mobility.

F. Policy Recommendations

We call on the government to stem the above mentioned vicious cycle of “employment deficit” by addressing the multifaceted barriers the ethnic minorities face in looking for jobs. The survey revealed that EMs often encountered unreasonable Chinese language hurdle in job requirements, courteous but unhelpful job seeking service provided by the Labour Department (especially for the blue-collar job seekers or those who lack the ability to express themselves), lack of appropriate job training and career guidance for ethnic minority job seekers, and above all, the prevalence of discriminatory practice in hiring which is so deep-seated that permeate throughout the employment chain. We believe that the Labour Department can take up a more proactive role. It should encourage and educate employers to build up an ethnically diversified workplace, explore with employers the genuine requirements (especially on Chinese proficiency) of the vacancies and open up more employment opportunities to ethnic minorities. For the job seekers, it should provide them with career guidance, a pathway for progression, job training that meet their needs, and a more effective job matching service (especially for blue-collar workers). To do this, it is crucial to adopt the following ways:

1. **More proactive engagement with employers to open up job opportunities**

As mentioned above, DPCW-Kln observed that when employers tended to lower the employment terms but heighten the requirements (e.g. the language requirement) for the post when they advertised vacancies. The reason is that they did not trust that the LD would be able to return the most desirable candidates to them. In case of a large number of applications for the job they were afraid that they did not have sufficient personnel to screen out unwanted candidates. Sometimes, employers set a higher Chinese proficiency requirement out of a “habitual practice” even though it is not relevant to the job nature.

We suggest that instead of playing a passive role in providing vacancies, the Labour Department job centres take more proactive part to work with employers, engaging with them to open up underexplored opportunities that do not require high proficiency of Chinese Language, especially for white-collar occupations. The job centres should also explore with the employers the genuine requirement for the vacancies. With more
liaisons, more job opportunities may be provided to ethnic minorities especially in the field where there is a shortage of manpower. From DPCW-Kln’s experience, language requirement can be adjusted to suit the job if both jobseekers and employers are provided with enough support, e.g. follow-up service after recruitment and on-the-job workplace language trainings.

2. Cultural sensitivity or anti-racial discrimination trainings for employers to encourage an ethnically and culturally diversified workplace

Although racial stereotyping is still prevalent which deprives ethnic minorities of equal opportunities to employment, it is not irreversible. The form of “othering” can be broken if we can bridge the gap between “us” and “others” by enhancing the understanding of “other” cultures and situations. In 2015, Equal Opportunity Committee has conducted a research about the condition of hiring ethnic minority in different industries. One of the results shows that around 80% of employers interviewed do not know much about ethnic minority cultures.

In the experiences of NGOs which provide employment support to ethnic minorities, some employers would like to have a cultural workshop to prepare their staff, especially the front-line staff, for acquainting with ethnic minority culture before considering to hire EMs. However, they don’t know where to find the resources. Therefore, we suggest the LD to provide trainings on cultural sensitivity to employers and support them to set up diversity policies in working environment. Funding should also be made available to employers for adaptations and accommodations of the EMs after they are hired, e.g. translation of internal notices, instructions and safety precautions. "Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities" can be taken as an example that provides subsidies for cases of procurement of assistive devices and/or workplace modifications.

3. Post-recruitment follow-up services provided for both employers and employees

Unfamiliarity of ethnic minority cultures and fear of miscommunication may discourage employers to hire ethnic minorities. Therefore, we urge the LD to act as a moderator for at least three months to communicate with both parties in order to deal with working culture or sometimes ease conflicts. Most of the time, ethnic minority employees are very few or even just 1 or 2. In such circumstances, support for EM employees is limited and barriers in the communication between employer and employees exist. Therefore, extra service is needed to remove the barriers, facilitate cultural exchange in workplace and improve the work practice. Information packages on social and cultural accommodations can be provided to employers or corporate HR personnel. Above all, post-recruitment and follow-up services can further remove any hesitations and worries of employers if the job centres can intervene when problems arise at least for a period of time.

For the employers, the LD should keep in touch with the HR staffs and the front-line managers to review the daily performance of the EM employees. If there are any
comments from the management side, the LD should follow up with the employees. For the employees, the LD staff should pay them workplace visits and home-visits regularly. In case the employees lodge complaints or mention difficulties during the visit, the LD staff should render the necessary assistance.

4. **Employment Officers for Ethnic Minorities should be hired and a more attentive service should be adopted by the LD**

In view of the low usage rate of the LD service by blue-collar job seekers revealed by the survey, their uneasiness with using the service and the language barriers they came across in the job centres should be addressed. Though two full-time Employment Assistants for Ethnic Minorities has been hired currently at the Cheung Sha Wan job centre and the Employment in One-stop in Tin Shui Wai, the meagre pay is hardly appealing to job seekers with talent, technical knowhow and experience of the labour market. Even if the job is taken by gifted persons, it is foreseeable that they will not stay long in the post. We believe that Employment Officers for Ethnic Minorities who can speak ethnic minority languages and have more knowledge of the job market are crucial to help ethnic minority jobseekers more familiarize with the job centres’ environment settings and processes which often made blue collar workers lose patience and confidence. The Officer can also provide further assistance and follow-up, including vocational assessment, job matching, and job coaching and post-recruitment service in ethnic minority languages.

Besides, DPCW-Kln observed that when ethnic minority job seekers approached the LD job centres to seek assistance, the staff did not receive them proactively if the Employment Services Ambassadors (ESA) or Employment Assistants (EA) for Ethnic Minorities were not there. Since most of the vacancies posted on the boards were in Chinese only and there was nobody to help them, the job seekers had no alternative but left the job centre with disappointment. Thus, we suggest more EA or ESA should be employed by the LD to make sure that ethnic minority job seekers can be assisted to make use of various job search facilities and services at the job centres.

5. **Providing case management and employment support services for follow-up actions with social work intervention**

Their job seeking experience of being discriminated discouraged them to use channels other than the network of their friends and relatives to find jobs. Some of the job seekers even lost their hopes and confidence to achieve better career prospects. Apart from the concerns of the discrimination issue, more supports should be provided to job seekers to raise their aspirations and build their employment networks. We suggest the government to provide intensive employment counselling in the form of case management with social work intervention. Job seekers’ job preferences and talents should be explored. Their vocational and non-vocational barriers should be also addressed. The LD job centres can act as an intermediary between the employers and the job seekers and help them to match up with job opportunities and job seekers’
talents. Post-recruitment follow-up should also be provided to prevent discriminatory acts in the workplace. The job seekers will see more hopes if they can see their career pathway and work hard on it.

6. **Providing allowances for on-the-job training**

To reinforce the efforts in engaging employers in breaking barriers for ethnic minority employment, we suggest the LD to make reference to the “On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities” and the “Employment Programme for the Middle-aged” to launch incentive and supportive schemes for employers to hire ethnic minority jobseekers, or provide job attachment/trial programmes for these jobseekers. Allowances should be provided to employers who allow their employees to attend language and vocational courses during working hours. Funding should also be available to employers to support them in making adaptations and accommodations when they hire ethnic minorities, e.g. translation of internal notices, instructions and safety precautions. Informants remarked a serious lack of appropriate career guidance, as well as practical job seeking skills, as well as job training exposure, from the existing job training institutes. For example, they look up to the provision of internship as a relevant and important ‘first step’ to gaining practical job experiences in working in the mainstream society. Gaining these first steps are especially crucial for job seekers, not just because of the practical exposure, but also because of the network they can start building as important initial steps into the mainstream society.

7. **Making best use of the $500 million to beef up employment support service for EM jobseekers**

It is stated in the 2018-19 Budget that a provision of $500 million will be earmarked for enhancing support for ethnic minorities. We urge the government to allocate part of the $500 million to enhance employment support service for ethnic minority jobseekers by commissioning NGOs in districts densely populated by ethnic minorities to operate integrated employment assistance service for ethnic minorities. The service should be operated in the ways outlined above to supplement the existing insufficient services provided by the LD.

6. **Limitations**

Due to the low percentage of ethnic minorities within Hong Kong’s population (3.8%), it is difficult to implement random sampling or obtain a large sample size. By snowballing with a sample size of 172, we notice that the ethnic composition of our survey sample is different from that of Hong Kong’s average proportion, e.g. our sample has a higher percentage of Pakistanis and lower percentages of Indians or Nepalese. Bias may be introduced by the use of five NGOs as access gatekeepers, e.g. our sample may have a higher percentage of NGO service users. When it comes to questions on job seeking and Labour Department services, the numbers of valid respondents become even smaller (97 job seekers, 35-36 Labour Department service users).
Remedial measures have been implemented as far as possible. For those descriptive survey data with apparent social and policy implications, inferential analysis has been conducted to verify for statistical significance. Despite our small sample size, for those findings with P-values < 5%, we can be > 95% certain that the observed phenomena also apply to the whole ethnic minority population of Hong Kong. We have also invited focus group subjects from a balanced mix of ethnicities, genders, age groups and education backgrounds as a remedial measure towards the non-representative ethnicity proportion of our survey sample.

Due to non-random sampling method and small sample size, for most of our descriptive sample data, we do not advise readers to treat them as literally applicable to the whole population. e.g. 12.1% current blue collar employees among 97 job seekers have used the Labour Department job centre (Fig 4), but it should not be assumed that the usage rate of LD job centre by blue collar EM employees in Hong Kong is exactly 12.1%. Rather, our findings are more helpful for identifying significant phenomena in the full population. Our study has found that subjects with higher education qualifications have significantly higher unemployment rates than those with lower qualifications. The Labour Department is having significantly lower usage rate and effectiveness rating from blue collar workers than from white collar workers. For such findings, we can state with >95% certainty that the same phenomena apply to the full population.

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