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AN ANALYSIS OF EARNING STAGNATION AMONG WORKERS IN THE MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF JUSTICE EVALUATION OF WAGE FAIRNESS (JEID)

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ABSTRACT

This study examined factors that contribute to wage stagnation among manufacturing employees in Malaysia, with particular attention to the mediating role of Justice Evaluation of Wage Fairness (JEID). Although labour productivity increased by 5.3% in 2019–2024, real wages in the industry declined by 1.9% over the same period, further intensifying the cost-of-living pressure. Thus, this quantitative research uses multiple linear regression and bootstrap mediation analysis based on primary data from 300 employees in the main manufacturing sub-sectors. Notably, constrained wage flexibility (b = 0.295, p = 0.003) and Justice Evaluation of Wage Fairness (JEID) (b = 0.329, *p* = 0.003) constitute key direct predictors of stagnant earnings. Most importantly, JEID mediates the correlation between wage flexibility and stagnation to some extent. Overall, the paper concludes that policy interventions should extend beyond minimum wage changes and incorporate flexible wage-setting policies and perceptions of distributive justice to achieve sustainable wage growth.

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Introduction

The wage stagnation issue, broadly defined as the failure of earnings to keep pace with inflation and productivity growth, is a significant concern to the manufacturing sector in Malaysia. As a key contributor to the national economy, the sector is of great significance to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), exports, and employment. However, the gains from increased productivity have not been fairly distributed among workers. In 2023, average monthly income in the manufacturing industry was RM3,052.00, which was higher than the national median, though this provides limited information on changes in real income (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Notably, the gap between increases in labour productivity in 2019–2024 (5.3%) and real wages (1.9%) clearly demonstrates the decoupling as the

industry changes the wage-cost-of-living gap (The Edge Malaysia, 2024).

Past studies have widely reported this global phenomenon, attributing it to globalisation, technological shifts, and weakening labour bargaining power (Autor *et al*., 2017; International Labour Organisation, 2022). Structural factors in the Malaysian context include dependence on a low-cost production model, migrant labour, and conservative wage-setting practices (Rasiah, 2021; World Bank, 2022). Although policy actions such as the minimum wage increase (now RM1,700.00) have been taken, they remain insufficient to compete with urban wages estimated at RM2,700.00, reflecting a structural imbalance.

Furthermore, a large gap remains in the current body of knowledge on the micro-level, perceptual variables that underlie workers' experiences of stagnation, despite the well-known macroeconomic antecedents of wage stagnation (Mishel, 2018; Lee & Idris, 2021). In particular, the mediating effect of wage fairness perception as a psychological process linking structural economic factors (e.g., wage flexibility) to earnings stagnation has not been adequately explored.

To address this gap, the research paper examines the moderating role of Justice Evaluation of Wage Fairness (JEID) in the association between the key determinants and earnings stagnation. The research questions used in the study are as follows:

1. What is the direct relationship between wage growth flexibility, skills-industry fit, and cost-of-living pressures and earnings stagnation?
2. What is the mediating role of JEID?

The main goal of the study is to identify the reasons for earnings stagnation among Malaysian manufacturing workers and to assess the intervening effect of JEID. The specific objectives are:

1. The hypotheses to be addressed determine whether wage flexibility, skills-industry fit, and cost of living directly affect earnings stagnation.
2. To test the impact of these variables on JEID.
3. To establish the role of JEID in the relationship between the independent variables and the stagnation of earnings.

This study contributes to the literature by incorporating a psychological mediator (JEID) into an economic wage determination model, providing a more complex picture of stagnation. In this regard, the results may inform policymakers and companies, helping them formulate fair pay policies that consider both economic and perceptual aspects of remuneration.

Literature Review

Research Framework

Theoretical Background to Wage Stagnation

A lasting phase of real earnings stagnation refers to a period in which real earnings do not increase even as productivity and inflation rise (Mishel, 2018). Traditional economic theory assumes that wages should increase in line with productivity. Nevertheless, this connection has weakened worldwide due to factors such as deunionisation, globalisation that erodes wage floors, and technological changes that favour capital over labour (Stiglitz, 2012; Autor *et al*., 2017). Moreover, segmentation in the form of the existence of core and peripheral workers whose wage dynamics differ radically, a phenomenon common in the Malaysian export-oriented manufacturing sector, is further elaborated

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under the concept of labour market dualism (Doeringer & Piore, 1971).

Determinants of Wage Stagnation

Wage Growth Flexibility: This refers to the ability of wages to move with shifts in productivity, inflation, and market conditions. Institutional forces such as weak collective bargaining (Standing, 2011) and inflexible wage systems can lead to stagnation. In Malaysia, companies tend to prioritise profit margins over wages, particularly during economic uncertainty, which can create significant wage rigidity (Rasiah, 2021).

Skills-industry Fit: When the fit between workers and industry is poor, this may result in underemployment and negative wage effects (McGuinness *et al*., 2018). This issue is further compounded by the shift to Industry 4.0, where technological advances are outpacing the ability of current human resources. Consequently, this creates a wage premium for highly skilled workers and stagnation for others (Acemoglu & Autor, 2011; World Bank, 2022).

Mechanisms of Cost-of-living Pressure: When inflation in essential goods and services such as housing, food, and transport, exceeds the growth of nominal wages, real wages decline (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2022). However, government transfers such as *Bantuan Rahmah* provide only temporary relief and do not address the structural problem of wage stagnation (Anker, 2011).

Justice Evaluation of Wage Fairness (JEID) Role

According to distributive justice theory (Deutsch, 1985), employees assess the fairness of their outcomes (salaries) relative to their inputs (effort, skills, experience) and those of others. This serves as a critical perceptual filter (Jasso, 1980), conceptualised in this study as JEID. When wages are perceived as unfair, they may lead to dissatisfaction and reduced motivation, as well as a growing perception of financial stagnation, even when objective measures may be less apparent (Ford & Gillan, 2015).

Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

Although earlier literature has identified wage stagnation as a structural factor, few studies have incorporated perceptions of wage fairness as a mediating factor. This paper bridges this gap by suggesting that JEID can explain how structural forces such as wage flexibility translate into earnings stagnation. The theoretical model is as follows:
Nominal predictors: Wage flexibility, skills-industry alignment, cost of living
Mediator variable: JEID
Dependent variable: Stagnant earnings

Methodology

Research Design and Data Collection

The study employed quantitative cross-sectional research design. Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed to employees in the Malaysian manufacturing sector. Primary data were collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed via social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram) to the manufacturing sector in Malaysia. The target sub-sectors were electronics, textile, and food processing. In addition, stratified random sampling ensured representation across industries, job positions, and geographical locations (urban and semi-urban).

Sample Size

A sample size of 300 respondents was calculated using Cochran's formula for a

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finite population, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The final sample consisted of 300 validated responses from currently employed manufacturing workers.

Measurement and Variables

The questionnaire consisted of five parts as follows:

1. Demographic data: Age, gender, ethnicity, income, and education, among others.
2. Wage perception: A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly unfair, 5 = Strongly fair) was used to measure it, based on the JEID scale.
3. Cost of living: Tables 1–3: Perceived adequacy of wages to meet the cost of living, based on the Support for Economic Inequality Scale (SEIS).
4. Perceptions of inequality in earnings: Perceptions of wage inequality.
5. Wage Stagnation and income inequality: Direct measurements of the dependent variable.

The main constructs were operationalised as follows:

1. Earnings Stagnation (EarnStag): The dependent variable measures how much respondents agreed that their wages did not rise in line with the cost of living and productivity.
2. Wage Flexibility (WageFlex): An independent variable that indicates perceptions of wages as being responsive to both performance and economic conditions.
3. Skills-Industry Alignment (SkillMatch): An independent variable that measures the fit between the skills of the respondent and their job requirements.
4. Cost of Living (CostLiving): An independent variable measuring the perceived stress of living costs.
5. Justice Evaluation of Wage Fairness (JEID) (FairnessEval): The mediating variable measuring employees' perceptions of the fairness of wage allocation.

Research Hypotheses

The proposed hypotheses to be tested based on the literature review and the conceptual framework are as follows:

H1: There is a significant direct positive impact of wage flexibility on earnings stagnation.

H2: Skills-industry fit has a large negative direct impact on earnings stagnation.

H3: Earnings stagnation is significantly and positively directly influenced by the cost of living.

H4: JEID has a strong positive direct impact on earnings stagnation.

H5: JEID mediates the relationship between wage flexibility and earnings stagnation.

Data Analysis

Analytics were performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software in three phases:

1. Descriptive statistics: To summarise the demographic and perceptual characteristics of the sample.
2. Inferential analysis: Bivariate relationships between variables were analysed with the help of Spearman's Rank Correlation. The effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable were direct and were therefore tested using multiple linear regression.

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3. Mediation analysis: Bootstrap mediation analysis based on the procedure of Baron and Kenny (1986) was conducted to assess the mediating effect of JEID (FairnessEval) in the correlation between wage flexibility and earning stagnation.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarises the demographic profile of the 300 respondents. The sample was mainly female (70.4%), young (56.5% were 20–30 years old), and Malay ethnic (61.1%). In urban areas where the cost of living is high, a large majority (64.8%) had a Bachelor's (47.2%) or higher degree and resided in urban areas. Most were early in their careers (73.1% had 0–5 years in their current job) and earned below RM4,000.00 monthly (78.7%), with 44.4% earning below RM2,500.00. In general, this suggests a population highly susceptible to the cost of living, further worsened by the 61.1% of married workers who are likely to have dependents.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents (N = 300)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	89	29.6
	Female	211	70.4
Age	20–30 years	169	56.5
	31–40 years	97	32.3
	> 40 years	34	11.2
Ethnicity	Malay	183	61.1
	Chinese	67	22.3
	Indian	38	12.7
	Other	12	4.0
Marital status	Single	183	61.1
	Married	105	35.2
	Other	12	3.7
Education	Bachelor's degree	141	47.2
	Master's degree	78	25.9
	Other	81	26.9
Location	Urban	194	64.8
	Semi-urban	55	18.5
	Rural	51	16.7
Years in role	0–2 years	108	36.1
	3–5 years	111	37.0
	6–10 years	39	13.0
	> 10 years	42	13.9
Monthly income	< RM2,500.00	133	44.4
	RM2,500.00–RM4,000.00	103	34.3
	> RM4,000.00	64	21.3

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the main variables. The mean score for Earnings Stagnation was 3.64, indicating that respondents generally perceived a moderate-to-high level of stagnation in their earnings. Cost-of-Living pressure recorded a mean score of 3.62, suggesting that many respondents experienced considerable financial pressure from rising living costs. Wage Flexibility had the highest mean score (M = 3.80), indicating that respondents generally perceived wage

adjustments to be somewhat responsive to economic and performance-related factors. Fairness Evaluation showed a mean score of 3.65, reflecting moderately positive perceptions of wage fairness.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the most important variables (N = 300)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
Earning Stagnation (EarnStag)	3.64	0.92	1.00	5.00
Wage Flexibility (WageFlex)	3.80	0.89	1.00	5.00
Skills-Industry Alignment (SkillMatch)	3.58	1.05	1.00	5.00
Cost of Living (CostLiving)	3.62	0.95	1.00	5.00
Fairness Evaluation (FairnessEval)	3.65	0.96	1.00	5.00

Correlation Analysis

Spearman's correlation analysis (Table 3) highlighted significant positive correlations ($p < 0.01$) across all variables. The strongest correlation was between Cost of Living and Fairness Evaluation (r = .685), with higher living costs being strongly correlated with the perceptions of wage unfairness. Skills-Industry Alignment (r = .602) and Fairness Evaluation (r = .581) also presented strong correlations with Wage Flexibility. Most notably, Earning Stagnation was significantly related to all predictors, with Fairness Evaluation being the strongest (r = .615).

Table 3: Spearman's correlation matrix of the major variables

Variable	WageFlex	SkillMatch	CostLiving	FairnessEval	EarnStag
WageFlex	1				
SkillMatch	.602**	1			
CostLiving	.548**	.577**	1		
FairnessEval	.581**	.629**	.685**	1	
EarnStag	.574**	.559**	.598**	.615**	1

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); ** = $p < 0.01$

Multiple Linear Regression

Multiple regression predicted Earning Stagnation using Wage Flexibility, Skills-Industry Alignment, Cost of Living, and Fairness Evaluation. The model was significant ($F(4, 295) = 22.775$, $p = .001$) and accounted for 46.9% of the variation in Earning Stagnation ($R^2 = .469$). Wage Flexibility (b = 0.295, $p = .003$) and Fairness Evaluation (b = 0.329, $p = .003$) were reported to be significant positive predictors, as presented in Table 4. Cost of Living was marginally significant (b = 0.203, $p = .052$), whereas the predictive power of Skills-Industry Alignment was not of great importance (b = -0.039, $p = .701$). In general, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictors were less than 2.5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern for the model.

Table 4: Multiple linear regression foretelling earnings stagnation

Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	*p*	VIF
(Constant)	0.745	0.245	–	3.041	**0.003**	–
WageFlex	0.225	0.075	0.295	3.000	**0.003**	1.892
SkillMatch	-0.031	0.080	-0.039	-0.387	0.701	1.987
CostLiving	0.154	0.079	0.203	1.949	*0.052	2.114
FairnessEval	0.283	0.094	0.329	3.011	**0.003**	2.345

Note: Dependent variable: Earning Stagnation; $R^2 = .469$; Adjusted $R^2 = .451$; * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$

Mediation Analysis (Bootstrap)

- The analysis employed a bootstrapped mediation analysis to examine whether the study's results are driven by variables (i.e., components of the predicted factor). Model 4 of the PROCESS macro was used with 5,000 bootstrap samples for the mediation analysis in SPSS. The mediation analysis results indicate a significant indirect effect. Path a (IV-Mediator): FairnessEval was strongly predicted by WageFlex (b = .581, $p < .001$).
- Path b (Mediator → DV): EarnStag was significantly predicted by FairnessEval (b = .425, $p < .001$).
- Direct effect (c'): The direct effect of WageFlex on EarnStag remained significant following the consideration of the mediator (b = .328, $p < .001$).
- Indirect effect (a, b): The bootstrap output of the indirect effect was 0.247, with a 95% confidence interval that was not equal to zero [0.142, 0.368].

The change in the direct effect coefficient of the total effect (b = .574) to the direct effect (b = .328) indicates partial mediation. This confirms that the impression of fairness accounts for much of the impact of wage flexibility on the sense of wage stagnation.

Discussion

This paper analysed the determinants of wage stagnation in the Malaysian manufacturing industry, including structural and perceptual aspects. Accordingly, the findings clearly indicate the effect of wage flexibility and the key moderating role of Justice Evaluation of Wage Fairness (JEID). In addition, the findings were interpreted in light of the proposed hypotheses and the supporting literature.

Wage flexibility is a main positive predictor of stagnation (H1 supported), suggesting that fixed pay systems are a key factor. In this sense, employees who perceive that their pay does not reflect either their performance or the nature of the economy tend to stagnate. This aligns with the institutional economics literature, which underscores the adverse effects of wage rigidity (Standing, 2011).

In contrast, skills-industry alignment (H2 not significant) did not have a direct, significant effect. While this implies that a skills mismatch might lower absolute wage levels, it does not lead to perceived stagnation. Rather, its high correlation with fairness (r = .629) suggests an indirect influence. As such, employees whose skills are poorly aligned may perceive their compensation as unfair, contributing to a sense of stagnation.

The marginal direct predictor, though statistically significant, was the cost of living

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(H3 partially supported), with the strongest effect being a high correlation with perceptions of fairness (r = .685). This implies that rising living costs are a major contributor to earnings stagnation because they reduce perceptions of wage fairness, although they do not necessarily have a direct effect on earnings stagnation.

The strongest result was that of the direct influence of Justice Evaluation of Wage Fairness (JEID) (H4 supported). Attitudes toward wage equity strongly indicated earnings stagnation. This is consistent with distributive justice theory (Deutsch, 1985), which emphasises that subjective judgments of fairness are as significant as objective economic facts in determining financial well-being in workers.

The cornerstone finding is the mediation analysis, which provides partial support for the relationship between wage flexibility and stagnation, supporting JEID only (H5 supported). This implies that flexible wages lower perceptions of stagnation both directly (by raising nominal wages) and indirectly (by strengthening the belief that the wage system is equitable and fair). Overall, this underscores the important role of economic policies as a critical psychological channel shaping workers' experiences.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This study examined the multifactorial causes of earning stagnation among employees in the Malaysian manufacturing sector, with specific emphasis on the moderating effect of JEID. The findings reveal that stagnation is a complex issue driven by economic systems and psychological perceptions. In particular, the absence of flexible wage-setting mechanisms and high levels of wage injustice are considered the most important direct influences. More importantly, perceived equity is a key mediator of wage flexibility's impact on stagnation, suggesting that policy interventions on wage floors, without considering perceived justice in wage-setting, may be ineffective.

Recommendations

According to the results of the investigation, the following recommendations can be offered:

For policymakers:

1. Move away from a one-size-fits-all minimum wage policy by promoting more flexible, productivity-related wage models through sector- or region-based wage councils.
2. Encourage openness in wage-setting and provide guidelines for reasonable pay to help set standards across the industry.

In case of employers/manufacturing firms:

1. Adopt performance-based, transparent pay frameworks that explicitly link individual/company performance to wage increases.
2. Conduct regular wage audits and communicate the compensation philosophy with employees to increase perceptions of distributive justice.
3. Invest in skills upgrading and training to enhance skills-industry fit, which may indirectly promote a sense of fairness.

For Future Research

1. A longitudinal study is needed to establish causality.
2. The research (in the future) needs to incorporate more mediators (e.g., union

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presence, job satisfaction) and moderators (e.g., firm size, sub-sector).
3. A qualitative approach involving interviews should be used to provide more information on workers' lived experiences.

Limitations

This research has the limitations inherent in a cross-sectional study, which precludes drawing conclusive cause-and-effect conclusions. Although self-reported perceptual measures were appropriate for addressing the research questions, they may be prone to common method bias. Furthermore, although the sample is strong, it may not fully represent the manufacturing workforce, particularly older, male, and less skilled workers.

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Author Contributions Statement

The research was done by Yushitra Kumaravelu, who was the only author of the manuscript and its revision.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted without any self-benefit, commercial, or financial conflicts, and declare no conflicts of interest with the funders.

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Appendix A

Research Questionnaire

Wage Stagnation and Cost of Living among Workers in the Manufacturing Industry in Malaysia

Participant Information

We are Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) students from the School of Management, currently enrolled in AOW 202, Talent Management, conducting a research project titled "Wage Stagnation and Cost of Living among Workers in the Manufacturing Industry in Malaysia". The objective of this study is to understand how stagnant wages affect the cost of living for workers in the manufacturing sector and to identify key factors contributing to financial stress or coping strategies. Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential. The survey consists of seven sections. Thank you for your time and participation.

Section 1: Demographic and Contextual Factors

1. Gender
   ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age Range
   ☐ 20–30 ☐ 31–40 ☐ 41–50 ☐ 51–60
3. Ethnicity/Race
   ☐ Malay ☐ Chinese ☐ Indian ☐ Other: _____
4. Marital Status
   ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed

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5. Educational Level
   ☐ SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) ☐ Certificate/Diploma ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐ Doctorate or Professional Degree
6. Location
   ☐ Urban ☐ Semi-urban ☐ Rural
7. Nationality
   ☐ Malaysian ☐ Non-Malaysian
8. Years in current role
   ☐ 0–2 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 6–10 years ☐ More than 10 years
9. Monthly gross income (RM)
   ☐ Less than RM2,500.00 ☐ RM2,500.00–RM4,000.00 ☐ RM4,000.00 or more
10. Industry currently working in, or most recently worked in
    ☐ Electronics ☐ Textile & Garment ☐ Automotive ☐ Chemical & Pharmaceutical ☐ Heavy Industries ☐ Other: _____
11. Household dependents
    ☐ 0 ☐ 1–2 ☐ 3–4 ☐ More than 4

Section 2: Wage Growth Flexibility

Instructions: Rate your agreement with each statement on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. My employer conducts annual wage reviews based on performance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Wage increases in my company keep pace with inflation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Seniority is rewarded with proportional wage growth.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Our union/association effectively negotiates wage adjustments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Wage cuts occur during economic downturns.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Bonuses are tied to company profits.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Overtime pay rates are fair relative to base wages.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Wage structures are transparent and clearly communicated.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

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Section 3: Skill-Industry Alignment

Instructions: Rate your agreement with each statement on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. My formal qualifications match my job requirements.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. My company provides regular technical training.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I utilise advanced skills in my daily work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Promotions are based on skill development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. New hires often lack necessary skills.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Training programs are outdated for industry needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Managers recognize and reward skill upgrades.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. I feel overqualified for my current role.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

Section 4: Cost-of-Living Control Mechanisms

Instructions: Rate your agreement with each statement on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. Government subsidies (e.g., fuel, food) help my household.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. My wages cover rent/mortgage payments comfortably.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Healthcare costs are manageable with my income.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Transportation allowances offset commuting costs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Childcare subsidies significantly reduce my expenses.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. My savings buffer against price inflation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Employer-provided benefits (e.g., meals) reduce living costs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Tax relief policies improve my disposable income.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

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Section 5: Justice Evaluation of Wage Fairness

Instructions: Rate your agreement with each statement on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. CEO-to-worker pay ratios in my company are justified.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Wage differences reflect actual contributions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Management shares profits fairly through wages.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. My workload justifies my current pay.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Foreign workers are paid unfairly compared to locals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Gender pay gaps exist in my workplace.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Overtime compensation policies are equitable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Performance bonuses are distributed transparently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

Section 6: Earnings Stagnation

Instructions: Rate your agreement with each statement on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. My real wages (after inflation) have declined since 2020.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I need secondary income to maintain my lifestyle.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. My purchasing power has weakened over 5 years.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

UNCORRECTED PROOF