International
Journal of
Education,
Psychology and
Counseling
(IJEPC)

eISSN: 0128-164X

www.ijepc.com
editor@ijepc.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING (IJEPC)

GAE
GLOBAL ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND POLICY RESPONSES TO TRANSNATIONAL FRAUD PARKS: EVIDENCE FROM A MALAYSIAN NATIONWIDE SURVEY

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Abstract:

Fraud parks—transnational scam compounds in Southeast Asia—pose acute challenges for security, governance, and human rights. Combining trafficking, forced labour, and cyber-enabled fraud, these hubs target victims globally while luring jobseekers from Malaysia and beyond. Despite media attention, systematic evidence on public awareness and policy expectations has been scarce. This article fills that gap through a nationwide multilingual survey conducted by the Tun Tan Cheng Lock Centre for Social and Policy Studies (TCLC) in late 2023. Findings show high awareness of fraud parks as systemic threats, but also persistent vulnerabilities: younger respondents underestimated risks from job offers and online relationships, and many reported knowing victims personally. Policy preferences were clear, with overwhelming support for stronger education, enforcement, institutional reform, NGO collaboration, and international cooperation. The results highlight the paradox of high awareness amid continuing victimisation, while underscoring public opinion as a mandate for integrated national and regional responses.

Keywords:

Fraud Parks; Cyber-Enabled Fraud; Human Trafficking; Malaysia; Public Awareness; Risk Perception; Victimisation; Governance; International Cooperation; Policy Expectations

Introduction

Over the past five years, the term "fraud park" (also rendered as "scam park," "scam compound," or "fraud factory") has entered policy and media discourse to describe fortified hubs in mainland Southeast Asia where organised groups combine cyber-enabled fraud with coercive labour practices, including trafficking for forced criminality (UNODC, Casinos, cyber fraud, and traficking in persons for forced criminality in Southeast Asia, 2023) (UN OHCHR, 2023). Victims are lured with job promises, transported into compounds, and compelled— under conditions akin to forced labour—to perpetrate scams targeting global audiences (INTERPOL, Global warning on human trafficking-fuelled fraud, 2023). These operations proliferated in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as casino-linked criminal economies shifted into scalable cyber-fraud and exploited governance vacuums in border zones (UNODC, Crushing scam farms: Southeast Asia's "criminal service providers", 2024).

Malaysia is directly implicated. Its citizens are among those deceived into travelling abroad and later coerced into fraud operations (Azizan & Ariff, 2024), while Malaysian residents are frequent targets of scams launched from such centres (Tower, Sims, & Clapp, 2024) (Dickson & Preputnik, 2024). Government statistics report 34,497 online scam cases in 2023 with losses of RM1.218 billion (Malay Mail, 2024), while media outlets have framed fraud parks as a national security and public health-like challenge.

Against this backdrop, the Tun Tan Cheng Lock Centre for Social and Policy Studies (TCLC) conducted a nationwide multilingual survey (Malay, English, Chinese) to assess Malaysians' awareness of fraud parks, risk perceptions, exposure to scams, and policy preferences. The survey, run from 20 October to 27 November 2023, was terminated early after detection of automated submissions, a development reported by national media (Astro Awani, 2023) (Hairom, 2023). Despite this, descriptive results revealed high baseline awareness, recognition of major scam risks, and strong support for multi-level responses including law enforcement resourcing, whistle-blower protection, NGO collaboration, and international cooperation (TCLC, 2023).

This article situates Malaysia's experience within the wider regional crime ecology, highlighting how public sentiment offers both legitimacy and design cues for state action. Specifically, the study addresses three questions: (1) What is the level and distribution of public awareness regarding fraud parks and their tactics? (2) Which socio-demographic groups exhibit lower protective awareness or higher risk exposure? (3) What policy actions do Malaysians prioritise, and how might these preferences inform a sequenced national strategy?

Literature Review

Fraud parks have emerged as a major regional security threat, attracting growing attention from international organisations and policymakers, yet scholarly engagement remains limited. Existing research on transnational cyber-fraud, trafficking for forced criminality, and governance weaknesses in Southeast Asia provides context, but systematic studies of public awareness and attitudes are scarce. This review synthesises three strands of literature: transnational organised crime, governance challenges in weak states, and theoretical perspectives on risk and prevention, while identifying the absence of population-level studies on fraud parks.

Transnational cyber-fraud and trafficking. Organised crime groups exploit digital technologies and global economic shifts to sustain illicit markets (UNODC, The globalization of crime: A transnational organized crime threat assessment, 2010). Telecommunications fraud—including investment, romance, and e-commerce scams—has expanded since the mid-2010s, particularly in East and Southeast Asia. In the Mekong sub-region, fraud converges with trafficking: thousands have been lured to compounds in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar under false job promises, then forced into online scamming (Campbell, 2024). INTERPOL (2023) describes these as a global threat, with victims sourced worldwide and profits in the billions (INTERPOL, Global warning on human trafficking-fuelled fraud, 2023). Scholars highlight how such operations resemble professionalised "fraud industries," complete with recruitment, training, and technological infrastructures. This dual victimisation—where trafficked individuals are compelled to offend—complicates justice responses (Luong, 2025).

Governance gaps underpin the expansion of fraud parks in parts of Southeast Asia—particularly in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar—where weak institutional capacity, pervasive corruption, and contested authority provide fertile ground for transnational crime. Casino zones, special economic areas (SEZs), and conflict-affected border zones function as permissive enclaves for illicit enterprises (Malaney, Clarey, Horsey, & Kwek, 2024) . Scholars note that in such environments, state–crime relationships often range from tacit collusion to outright neglect, effectively allowing criminal enclaves to persist (USIP Senior Study Group, 2024). Furthermore, globalization enables localized illicit operations to scale into sophisticated transnational crime networks (Stewart, 2011).

Public awareness and prevention. Awareness and behaviour shape vulnerability to fraud. Routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) suggests that online routines expose individuals to motivated offenders when guardianship is weak. Risk society theory highlights that fraud parks exemplify manufactured global risks, distant yet digitally proximate (Beck, 1992). Surveys show that awareness campaigns help but cannot eliminate victimisation, as impulsivity and trust remain decisive (Button & Cross, 2017). In Southeast Asia, data remain limited: most surveys address broad categories like phishing, not fraud parks specifically (INTERPOL, ASEAN Cyberthreat Assessment 2021, 2021) (IPSOS, 2023). Scholars emphasise integrating awareness with enforcement and cooperation, but work directly linking citizen attitudes to responses against transnational organised crime remains sparse (Cross, Smith, & Richards, 2014).

Research gap. Despite attention from UNODC, OHCHR, and Interpol on the scale and human rights implications of fraud parks, academic studies are rare and often Western-centric. Trafficking for forced criminality is acknowledged but under-researched. Most significantly, there is no prior large-scale survey of public awareness and policy preferences on fraud parks. The TCLC study addresses this by operationalising awareness, risk, and expectations within a Malaysian context. It thus offers empirical foundations for future comparative and theoretical work on citizen perceptions of transnational organised crime (TCLC, 2023).

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative survey design to examine Malaysians' awareness of fraud parks, their exposure to related scams, and their expectations for policy responses. A structured questionnaire was chosen as it enables systematic comparison across demographic groups, a widely used approach in survey-based crime research (Button & Cross, 2017). To reflect

Malaysia's multilingual context, the instrument was administered in Malay, English, and Chinese, using a forward–back translation process to ensure validity and linguistic accuracy, consistent with best practices in multilingual survey research (Dorothée Beh, 2020). A pilot test across different linguistic groups further refined clarity, sensitivity, and functionality.

The survey covered four domains: awareness of fraud parks, encounters with scams, risk perceptions of common fraud entry points, and expectations of government action. Awareness items asked whether respondents had heard of fraud parks or could identify their tactics, while encounter items measured direct or indirect victimisation. Risk perception items included behaviours such as applying for unverifiable high-paying jobs overseas, engaging in long-distance online relationships, or disclosing personal data online. Policy expectation items captured support for measures such as strengthening enforcement, cooperating with NGOs, protecting whistle-blowers, and enhancing public education. Demographic variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, education, and employment status, were also collected to facilitate subgroup analyses.

The survey was conducted online between 20 October and 27 November 2023. Online administration was chosen because of its cost efficiency, ability to ensure rapid nationwide reach, and alignment with the digital nature of the topic. Malaysia's internet penetration had exceeded 89% by 2022 (Nain, 2022), which supports the feasibility of nationwide coverage. Recruitment was conducted via open links distributed through social media, mailing lists, and institutional channels. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and restricted to Malaysians aged 16 and above, consistent with the legal definition of youth under the Youth Societies and Youth Development Act (2007). Although safeguards such as CAPTCHA and IP logging were applied to reduce duplication, the survey was targeted by a coordinated intrusion on 27 November, generating over one thousand automated responses within two hours. The research team immediately terminated data collection and removed false entries during data cleaning. This incident, subsequently reported in Malaysian media (Astro Awani, 2023), illustrates the vulnerability of surveys on sensitive topics intersecting with organised criminal interests.

Data analysis relied on descriptive statistics to capture frequencies and distributions, alongside cross-tabulations to explore patterns across demographic groups. While the non-probability sampling limits representativeness, the descriptive results nonetheless offer valuable insights into public attitudes toward fraud parks. The limitations of this approach include the potential under-representation of rural and less digitally connected populations, the risk of residual contamination despite cleaning procedures, the biases inherent in self-reported awareness and risk perception, and the absence of longitudinal data for tracking changes over time.

Ethical principles guided the research throughout. Respondents gave informed consent, participation was voluntary, and anonymity was assured. Sensitive wording was reviewed to minimise distress for those with direct or indirect scam experiences, and no personally identifiable information was collected. The study followed established ethical standards in criminological research, particularly the importance of confidentiality and minimising harm (Israel & Hay, 2011).

In sum, this methodological framework combined rigour with feasibility by designing a multilingual structured questionnaire, deploying it online nationwide, and operationalising awareness, encounter, risk perception, and policy expectation variables. Although challenges

related to representativeness and data integrity were encountered, the study nonetheless offers one of the first national-level empirical datasets on fraud parks in Southeast Asia, thereby providing both substantive evidence for policymakers and a methodological precedent for future research.

Findings

The survey conducted by the Tun Tan Cheng Lock Centre for Social and Policy Studies (TCLC) represents one of the first nationwide attempts to capture Malaysian perceptions, awareness, and policy expectations concerning fraud parks. The descriptive findings are organised into four broad categories: respondents' demographic profiles, levels of awareness and risk perception, the social impact of scam victimisation, and expectations for government policy responses.

Respondents' Profile

The demographic composition of respondents provides an essential baseline for interpreting subsequent results. In terms of age, the sample encompassed participants from 16 years and above, distributed across ten-year cohorts. Young respondents (16–25) formed a substantial portion of the dataset, reflecting both the online mode of administration and the research team's intention to capture perspectives from those most digitally active. Middle-aged groups (31–45) were also strongly represented, while older cohorts above 55 years were smaller in proportion. This skew is typical of online surveys in Malaysia, where younger populations are more responsive to digital instruments (TCLC, 2023).

Regarding ethnicity, the dataset reflected Malaysia's plural society. Malays constituted the largest group, followed by Chinese, Indians, and Bumiputera communities from Sabah and Sarawak, with smaller representation from "others." While not strictly representative of national census proportions, the ethnic distribution enabled comparative analysis of awareness and risk perception across major groups (TCLC, 2023).

Gender balance was relatively even, with male and female respondents almost equally represented. This parity enhances the reliability of findings when assessing gendered differences in scam awareness and victimisation.

In terms of employment status, the largest share of respondents were employed (33.23%), followed by students (64.37%), and a small percentage were unemployed (2.40%) (TCLC, 2023). This distribution is consistent with the study's emphasis on youth populations, many of whom were still engaged in tertiary or secondary education.

Education levels further confirmed this skew, with over 90% of respondents having at least secondary education, and a considerable proportion pursuing or having attained tertiary education. Only 0.20% reported no formal education (TCLC, 2023). This highly educated sample suggests that awareness levels may be higher than in the general population, yet the persistence of victimisation within this group underscores the sophistication of fraud park tactics.

Awareness and Risk Perception

A central objective of the survey was to assess how far Malaysians had heard about, understood, and internalised the risks associated with fraud parks. Results demonstrate a high baseline of awareness but uneven depth of knowledge and variability in risk perception across age, ethnicity, and gender.

More than half of respondents reported having heard or read about fraud parks, indicating that the concept has entered mainstream consciousness. This high level of exposure reflects both sustained media coverage and government awareness campaigns. At the same time, significant proportions only "somewhat agreed" when asked if they could identify fraud park tactics, suggesting that surface awareness does not always translate into practical protective knowledge (TCLC, 2023).

Age-based analysis highlighted marked generational differences. Younger cohorts (16–25) displayed weaker recognition of risks associated with fraudulent job offers or online relationships. For instance, a sizeable minority in this group underestimated the dangers of applying for unverified high-paying jobs abroad or engaging in long-distance online relationships, behaviours that international observers consistently identify as entry-points into fraud park trafficking. By contrast, older respondents (>45) more frequently categorised these scenarios as "high risk" or "very high risk," indicating a stronger cautionary orientation (TCLC, 2023).

Ethnic differences also emerged. Respondents from Chinese and Malay backgrounds reported higher rates of exposure to scam attempts compared to other groups (TCLC, 2023). This may reflect both demographic size and targeting patterns of scam syndicates. Bumiputera respondents from Sabah and Sarawak, while less frequently reporting direct encounters, nonetheless expressed strong agreement about the risks associated with fraud parks, suggesting effective diffusion of awareness in these communities.

Gender-based patterns were subtler. Males were slightly more likely than females to state that they could identify fraud tactics, but females expressed higher levels of agreement with statements about the potential dangers of fraud parks (TCLC, 2023). This suggests that while men may overestimate their capacity to recognise scams, women may adopt a more cautious stance toward potential risk.

Overall, while Malaysians are broadly aware of the existence and dangers of fraud parks, gaps remain in terms of practical literacy in scam recognition and protective behaviours. The persistence of risk-prone attitudes among youth in particular underscores the continuing vulnerability of digitally active populations.

Social Impact

Beyond individual awareness, the survey assessed the diffusion of scam victimisation through social networks. Results indicate a substantial social impact, with many respondents reporting that someone in their social circle had fallen victim to fraud-park-related scams. Depending on age and ethnic subgroup, between one-third and nearly half of respondents confirmed such indirect exposure (TCLC, 2023).

This high level of indirect victimisation reveals how fraud parks have penetrated deeply into Malaysian society. Even for those who have not personally encountered scams, knowing friends or relatives who have been targeted fosters an acute perception of risk and reinforces the view that scam activity constitutes a widespread societal threat.

The survey further captured perceptions of fraud parks as a national security concern. Across age, gender, and ethnic lines, majorities agreed that fraud parks pose risks not only to individuals but also to Malaysia's economic and security stability (TCLC, 2023). Such consensus underscores the framing of fraud parks not merely as criminal phenomena but as transnational threats with systemic implications.

These findings align with the narrative widely reported in Malaysian media, where scams are described as a "scamdemic" or a crisis comparable to public health emergencies. The survey data corroborate this perception, highlighting that the social harm extends well beyond individual financial losses to encompass broader anxieties about governance, trust, and national resilience.

Policy Expectations

One of the most distinctive contributions of the survey is its mapping of Malaysians' policy expectations concerning government responses to fraud parks. Results show overwhelming support for proactive, multi-dimensional action.

First, awareness and education measures enjoy near-universal endorsement. Ninety-three per cent of respondents expected the government to provide more awareness programmes and preventive campaigns through media channels (TCLC, 2023). This consensus demonstrates recognition that while scams are technologically sophisticated, basic awareness-raising remains a crucial first line of defence.

Second, respondents prioritised law enforcement resourcing. Ninety-five per cent agreed that the government should allocate more funding and resources to enforcement agencies to investigate and combat fraud parks (TCLC, 2023). This demand reflects public recognition of the cross-border and complex nature of scams, which require specialised investigative capacity. Third, institutional innovation was strongly endorsed. Ninety-two per cent of respondents supported the creation of a new dedicated agency to tackle fraud parks (TCLC, 2023). This reflects perceptions that existing institutions are insufficiently coordinated or resourced to meet the challenge.

Fourth, protection and collaboration emerged as critical themes. Ninety-three per cent favoured stronger protection for whistle-blowers, while 91% called for closer collaboration with NGOs and community groups (TCLC, 2023). This suggests that Malaysians view scam prevention as a shared societal responsibility rather than solely the domain of the state.

Finally, international cooperation was highly prioritised. Majorities across all demographic groups agreed that fraud parks should be targeted more aggressively by international law enforcement agencies, and that Malaysia should engage diplomatically with affected countries to secure cooperation (TCLC, 2023). Such findings reveal widespread public understanding that fraud parks are transnational in character and cannot be effectively addressed through unilateral measures.

The overall pattern is striking: Malaysians are not only aware of the risks posed by fraud parks but also articulate a coherent set of expectations spanning education, enforcement, institutional reform, community engagement, and international collaboration. These results provide a strong mandate for policymakers to pursue integrated, multi-level strategies.

The survey findings demonstrate that while Malaysians display high levels of awareness about fraud parks, vulnerabilities remain, particularly among younger demographics. Social impacts are widespread, with indirect victimisation reinforcing the perception that scams are not isolated incidents but part of a broader societal threat. Policy expectations are both clear and ambitious, calling for expanded awareness campaigns, enhanced enforcement, institutional innovation, grassroots collaboration, and international cooperation. Taken together, the findings reveal a society acutely conscious of the dangers of fraud parks and strongly supportive of comprehensive government action.

Discussion

The findings of this nationwide survey shed important light on how Malaysians perceive fraud parks, how they evaluate risks, and what they expect from their government in response. While the descriptive results demonstrate strong levels of awareness and high expectations for state action, the discussion must probe deeper into several interrelated themes. First, why do Malaysians continue to fall victim to scams despite acknowledging their prevalence and risk? Second, what does the existence of fraud parks reveal about the governance environment both domestically and regionally? Third, how do the survey's findings about public opinion provide legitimacy and direction for policymaking? Finally, how do Malaysia's experiences compare with other societies facing similar threats, such as Taiwan, mainland China, and Thailand?

Impulsiveness And High-Risk Behaviour

Perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of the findings is the coexistence of high awareness with persistent victimisation. Survey respondents overwhelmingly agreed that fraud parks exist, that they host illegal activities, and that they represent a significant threat to financial and personal security. Yet substantial proportions also admitted that they or someone in their social circle had encountered or even fallen victim to scams (TCLC, 2023). This suggests that awareness alone is not a sufficient deterrent.

One explanation lies in impulsiveness and risk-taking behaviour. The survey results show that younger respondents (16–25) were less likely to classify risky behaviours such as accepting unverifiable job offers or engaging in online relationships with strangers as "very high risk" (TCLC, 2023). This discrepancy suggests that while they may intellectually acknowledge the existence of fraud parks, they underestimate their personal vulnerability. The literature on fraud victimisation highlights similar dynamics, where victims "know better" yet succumb due to impulsivity, overconfidence, or emotional vulnerability (Button & Cross, 2017). In the Malaysian context, such tendencies are exacerbated by strong aspirations for upward mobility and the appeal of opportunities abroad.

A second factor is situational desperation. Economic inequality, youth unemployment, and the lure of high-paying overseas jobs provide fertile ground for deception. Respondents themselves frequently reported that job offers "too good to be true" were among the most common tactics they encountered (TCLC, 2023). The persistence of these offers, and their attractiveness to

individuals under economic strain, helps explain why victims proceed despite recognising general risks.

Finally, trust in social ties complicates the risk calculus. The survey revealed that some respondents had received sudden invitations from known acquaintances to travel abroad (TCLC, 2023). Such invitations blur the boundary between legitimate and fraudulent opportunities, lowering suspicion and encouraging acceptance. Fraud parks exploit precisely this dynamic, using manipulated or coerced victims to recruit others from their networks. Thus, impulsiveness and high-risk behaviour are not merely individual shortcomings but structural vulnerabilities embedded in economic aspirations and social trust.

Governance Implications

Fraud parks are not only a matter of individual victimisation but also indicators of deeper governance failures. Survey respondents broadly agreed that these operations pose a national security threat and cannot be addressed by individuals alone (TCLC, 2023). Their expectations that government agencies, NGOs, and international partners must collaborate reflect an intuitive understanding of the governance vacuum that enables fraud parks to thrive.

The findings reveal strong public demand for increased enforcement capacity (95% support for more resources to law enforcement) and institutional innovation (92% support for a dedicated agency) (TCLC, 2023). These preferences underscore recognition that existing structures are inadequate for confronting transnational organised crime. Fraud parks, located largely in neighbouring states, highlight the limits of sovereignty in crime control: Malaysia cannot unilaterally dismantle them, yet their impacts are felt domestically through both victimised citizens and economic losses.

This context exposes the regional enforcement dilemma. Weak governance, corruption, and contested sovereignty in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar create safe havens for scam syndicates. Malaysians appear aware of this reality: their support for international law enforcement cooperation and diplomatic engagement indicates that they perceive fraud parks as problems beyond the reach of domestic policing alone (TCLC, 2023). The expectation that the government should provide travel advisories and possibly restrict access to high-risk destinations further reflects a public willingness to accept intrusive measures if framed as protective.

From a governance perspective, then, fraud parks function as both symptoms and accelerators of institutional weakness. Their persistence erodes public trust in governments' ability to safeguard citizens, while their transnational nature exposes the inadequacy of unilateral responses. The survey demonstrates that Malaysians grasp this dynamic and demand structural solutions.

Policy–Public Opinion Nexus

A striking feature of the findings is the coherence between public concerns and established policy prescriptions. International organisations such as the UNODC and INTERPOL emphasise multi-level strategies involving enforcement, public education, whistle-blower protection, and international cooperation. The Malaysian survey shows that citizens independently articulate similar priorities, even without exposure to these policy frameworks (TCLC, 2023).

This congruence has important implications for policy legitimacy. Governments often struggle to justify intrusive measures such as travel restrictions, enhanced surveillance, or increased policing. However, the survey results indicate overwhelming public support for precisely such measures. For instance, more than 90% endorsed stronger awareness campaigns, enhanced law enforcement resources, and collaboration with NGOs (TCLC, 2023). These expectations create a political mandate for the government to act decisively, reducing the risk of backlash against interventions that might otherwise be criticised as overreach.

At the same time, the findings highlight areas where policy must address behavioural gaps. While awareness campaigns enjoy strong support, the persistence of impulsive risk-taking indicates that mere information provision is insufficient. Programmes must therefore incorporate behavioural insights, emotional appeals, and community-based interventions that resonate with specific vulnerable groups such as youth. In this respect, public opinion not only legitimises policy action but also points toward the content of interventions.

The survey also suggests that Malaysians expect the government to function as a coordinator among diverse actors rather than as a lone enforcer. High support for NGO collaboration and whistle-blower protection indicates a recognition that effective prevention requires collective action across state and society. This expectation aligns with governance theories that emphasise networked, multi-actor responses to complex threats.

Comparative Perspectives

Situating Malaysia's experience within a broader regional context allows for both validation and differentiation of findings. Other jurisdictions facing fraud parks have adopted diverse strategies, with varying degrees of success.

In Taiwan, government agencies have implemented large-scale awareness campaigns, targeting young job seekers who are often lured to Southeast Asia with promises of employment. Reports indicate that these campaigns, combined with strict border checks, have reduced outbound trafficking cases, though fraudulent offers continue to circulate widely (AIT, 2019). Malaysian respondents' support for travel advisories mirrors Taiwanese practice, suggesting a convergence of public and policy priorities.

Mainland China has also treated fraud parks as a serious national threat, conducting high-profile repatriation operations and pressuring neighbouring states to shut down compounds. Public awareness there is extremely high, fuelled by state-controlled media narratives (Phaicharoen, 2025). While Malaysia lacks comparable coercive leverage over its neighbours, survey results show that Malaysians similarly expect their government to exercise diplomatic pressure and international coordination.

Thailand, by contrast, has experienced both inbound and outbound victimisation, with its own citizens trafficked into compounds while also hosting scam operations in border regions. The Thai government has responded with mixed enforcement and prevention measures, but civil society groups argue that corruption and fragmented authority undermine effectiveness (Wongcha-um & Ghoshal, 2025). Malaysian public opinion, which strongly supports NGO involvement, appears to anticipate precisely the shortcomings observed in Thailand and to call for more systematic collaboration at home.

These comparisons suggest that Malaysians' attitudes are broadly consistent with regional experiences but also tailored to local realities. The emphasis on NGO collaboration, for instance, reflects Malaysia's relatively strong civil society networks. Similarly, the demand for a new dedicated agency indicates awareness that existing institutions may be ill-suited for a problem that crosses borders and bureaucratic jurisdictions.

The discussion of findings reveals that fraud parks are perceived by Malaysians as both an immediate personal risk and a systemic governance challenge. While awareness is high, impulsiveness, economic aspirations, and social trust continue to expose individuals to scams. Public opinion overwhelmingly favours stronger government intervention, including enhanced enforcement, institutional innovation, community collaboration, and international cooperation. These expectations provide both legitimacy and guidance for policymaking, aligning closely with international recommendations while reflecting local socio-political dynamics.

Comparative perspectives confirm that Malaysia's experience is not unique but part of a broader regional struggle against fraud parks. Yet the specificity of Malaysian public opinion—particularly its emphasis on NGO collaboration and the creation of a dedicated agency—offers valuable insight into how societies internalise and respond to transnational threats. Ultimately, the survey underscores that combating fraud parks requires not only dismantling criminal operations abroad but also addressing behavioural vulnerabilities at home, bridging the gap between awareness and action.

Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal not only the extent of public awareness of fraud parks in Malaysia but also a strong consensus regarding the types of interventions the government should prioritise. Respondents expressed near-unanimous support for comprehensive action across multiple levels, from awareness campaigns and enforcement strengthening to institutional reforms, international cooperation, and collaboration with non-governmental organisations. Building on these insights, this section outlines a set of policy recommendations designed to be both immediately actionable and structurally transformative. These recommendations are framed under four interconnected dimensions: immediate actions, institutional reforms, international cooperation, and community engagement.

Immediate Actions Aimed at Reducing Vulnerability

A first layer of recommendations involves immediate actions aimed at reducing vulnerability and enhancing the protective environment for citizens. Survey data show that 93% of respondents supported expanded awareness and education campaigns. This level of consensus reflects an understanding that information dissemination remains a crucial defence against scams. Public communication should therefore be scaled up through multiple media channels, including television, radio, print, and particularly social media platforms, where younger populations—the group most vulnerable to impulsive risk-taking—are most active. Campaigns must move beyond abstract warnings and instead utilise behavioural insights, presenting vivid case studies of real victims, simulated scam conversations, and interactive detection exercises. By doing so, they can counteract the cognitive bias whereby individuals believe themselves to be less vulnerable than others, a dynamic observed in this study among younger respondents (TCLC, 2023).

Alongside mass communication, the government should introduce a social media-based fraud education curriculum, developed in collaboration with digital platforms. This could include algorithmically promoted warnings when users search for overseas job opportunities, or embedded safety prompts when financial transactions are initiated through suspicious channels. Similar "nudge" approaches have been employed in other contexts to encourage safe online behaviour, and Malaysians' support for awareness initiatives provides a mandate for their adoption.

An additional immediate action involves the creation of a reporting reward system. Eighty-three per cent of respondents in the survey favoured incentives for reporting suspicious activities related to fraud parks (TCLC, 2023). Such a mechanism could mirror existing whistle-blower reward schemes in financial regulation, offering modest but meaningful compensation for actionable tips. To ensure sustainability, rewards need not always be monetary; they could include recognition, certificates, or priority access to government services. Coupled with secure and anonymous reporting channels, this would encourage early detection of fraudulent recruitment attempts and expand the intelligence base for enforcement agencies.

Institutional Reforms

The second layer of recommendations concerns institutional reforms. The survey revealed overwhelming support—92% of respondents—for the establishment of a new dedicated agency to address fraud parks (TCLC, 2023). This reflects public recognition that current enforcement structures are fragmented and insufficiently coordinated. A specialised multi-agency task force should therefore be institutionalised, with a permanent mandate, adequate budget, and authority to integrate law enforcement, immigration, financial intelligence, and cybercrime units.

Such an agency would serve as the central hub for information sharing and case coordination, bridging silos that currently hinder enforcement effectiveness. For example, immigration authorities often detect outbound travellers suspected of being recruited for fraudulent jobs, yet their information may not systematically reach cybercrime investigators. Similarly, bank reporting mechanisms for suspicious transactions may not be linked to international cooperation units. A centralised structure could streamline these flows, ensuring that red flags raised in one domain are actionable across the enforcement spectrum.

Beyond organisational integration, capacity building must be prioritised. Survey respondents' call for increased enforcement resources (95% agreement) underscores awareness that combating fraud parks requires specialised expertise (TCLC, 2023). Training programmes should focus on advanced digital forensics, cryptocurrency tracing, and victim identification in online contexts. The agency should also establish a research and analysis division, tasked with continuously updating typologies of fraud park tactics based on both domestic cases and international intelligence. By doing so, it can remain agile in the face of the adaptive strategies employed by scam syndicates.

Furthermore, legal reforms should complement institutional changes. Malaysia's current legislative framework covers fraud, trafficking, and cybercrime, but it does not specifically criminalise participation in, or facilitation of, fraud parks abroad. Introducing extraterritorial provisions would allow Malaysian courts to prosecute recruiters and accomplices who operate within Malaysia but connect victims to compounds overseas. Such reforms would send a clear

deterrent signal while aligning with international conventions against transnational organised crime.

International Cooperation

The third dimension is international cooperation, which survey respondents strongly endorsed. Ninety-five per cent supported greater resourcing for enforcement, but nearly as many emphasised the need for collaboration with international counterparts (TCLC, 2023). This reflects recognition that fraud parks are transnational by nature, thriving in jurisdictions where governance is weak but targeting victims worldwide.

At the bilateral level, Malaysia should intensify diplomatic engagement with Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, where many fraud parks are located. While these states may lack the capacity or political will to dismantle operations fully, cooperative frameworks could focus on intelligence sharing, victim repatriation, and the joint investigation of recruitment networks.

At the regional level, Malaysia should use its position within ASEAN to push for a regional anti-fraud initiative under the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC). Such an initiative could include the development of a shared database of scam tactics, blacklists of fraudulent recruitment agencies, and coordinated awareness campaigns. ASEAN's consensus-based approach often limits decisive action, but the survey's evidence of strong domestic support for international engagement provides Malaysian policymakers with political legitimacy to advocate for such measures.

Globally, Malaysia should align itself with United Nations initiatives, particularly those spearheaded by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which have both highlighted the scale of trafficking for forced criminality. Participation in UN reporting mechanisms and technical assistance programmes would enhance Malaysia's capacity while signalling international commitment.

Malaysia should also pursue operational cooperation with INTERPOL, which has issued global warnings about fraud-park trafficking, and with partners in financial intelligence networks to disrupt illicit financial flows. Given that fraud park profits are laundered through international banking and cryptocurrency systems, such financial cooperation is essential. The survey demonstrates that Malaysians understand the need for such measures, with majorities supporting both diplomatic efforts and aggressive targeting of fraud parks by international law enforcement (TCLC, 2023).

Community Engagement

The fourth dimension involves community engagement. Public opinion in this study revealed strong support (91%) for government collaboration with NGOs and community groups (TCLC, 2023). This finding underscore recognition that fraud prevention is not solely a state responsibility but requires mobilisation across society.

Educational initiatives should therefore be co-produced with schools, universities, and community organisations. For youth, integration of fraud awareness into school curricula could normalise protective behaviours from an early age. Universities could incorporate fraud-park awareness into student orientation programmes, particularly for those considering overseas study or work opportunities. Given the survey's finding that younger respondents were less

likely to perceive risky behaviours as high-risk (TCLC, 2023), these targeted interventions are essential.

Community-based organisations can also function as trusted intermediaries. In contexts where citizens may distrust formal enforcement or hesitate to report suspicious activity, NGOs can provide safe spaces for disclosure. Government partnerships with NGOs could include capacity-building grants, shared access to awareness materials, and mechanisms for community groups to channel intelligence securely to enforcement agencies.

At the grassroots level, local leaders and religious organisations should be engaged in anti-scam campaigns. Given their influence, they can reinforce protective norms and counteract the stigma sometimes associated with victimisation. The survey indicated that many Malaysians knew someone in their social circle who had been victimised (TCLC, 2023), suggesting that destigmatising conversations about scams could foster more open reporting and learning.

Finally, community engagement should not be limited to prevention but should extend to victim support services. Fraud-park victims, including those trafficked into compounds abroad, often face stigma, financial hardship, and psychological trauma. Comprehensive support packages—including counselling, legal aid, and reintegration assistance—should therefore be developed in collaboration with NGOs. This would align Malaysia with international human rights standards while responding to public perceptions of fraud parks as a major social harm. In sum, the survey's findings provide a clear roadmap for policy. Malaysians are not only aware of fraud parks but also articulate coherent expectations across immediate actions, institutional reforms, international cooperation, and community engagement. Implementing these recommendations would respond directly to public opinion while addressing structural weaknesses that allow fraud parks to flourish.

The recommendations also demonstrate how empirical survey data can bridge the gap between public sentiment and policy design. In areas where government legitimacy and capacity are challenged, alignment with citizen expectations becomes especially critical. By acting decisively on these recommendations, Malaysia can position itself as a regional leader in combating fraud parks, protecting its citizens, and contributing to broader international efforts against trafficking for forced criminality.

Conclusion
The nationwide survey undertaken by the Tun Tan Cheng Lock Centre for Social and Policy Studies represents a pioneering empirical contribution to the understanding of fraud parks in Malaysia. While the concept of fraud parks has gained salience in media and policy discourse, systematic evidence on how citizens perceive these phenomena, assess associated risks, and evaluate governmental responses has been scarce. This study fills that gap by documenting awareness, experiences, and expectations across a multilingual and multi-ethnic respondent base. The findings, as analysed in preceding sections, yield several important insights with theoretical, methodological, and policy significance.

First, the survey demonstrates a high baseline of awareness. Most respondents indicated that they had heard of fraud parks, recognised them as hubs of illegal activity, and acknowledged their risks to personal and societal well-being. However, awareness was uneven: while older cohorts tended to perceive fraudulent job offers and long-distance online relationships as high-

risk, younger respondents were more likely to underestimate such dangers (TCLC, 2023). This discrepancy is concerning given that youth constitute the demographic most frequently targeted through digital recruitment channels.

Second, the findings highlight the pervasive social impact of scam victimisation. Many respondents reported that someone in their social circle had been victimised, revealing how fraud parks have penetrated beyond isolated cases into community-level experiences (TCLC, 2023). This indirect victimisation amplifies perceptions of insecurity and underscores the need for collective preventive strategies.

Third, public opinion reveals clear and ambitious policy expectations. Over 90% of respondents supported enhanced awareness campaigns, increased enforcement resourcing, the establishment of a dedicated agency, stronger whistle-blower protections, and collaboration with NGOs (TCLC, 2023). Similarly, respondents endorsed travel advisories, diplomatic engagement, and international enforcement cooperation. Such coherence across policy domains is unusual in public opinion research, reflecting the salience and urgency of the threat. Fourth, despite this strong consensus, the persistence of victimisation points to behavioural vulnerabilities rooted in impulsiveness, overconfidence, and economic aspiration (TCLC, 2023). Awareness does not automatically translate into protective behaviour, particularly among younger demographics. Bridging this gap requires interventions that combine information provision with behavioural and emotional strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, the study reinforces the utility of combining routine activity theory and risk society theory in explaining fraud victimisation. Routine activity theory suggests that crime arises when motivated offenders, suitable targets, and a lack of capable guardians converge. Fraud parks exemplify the industrialisation of offender motivation, while Malaysians' online routines—job searches, digital relationships, and e-commerce—provide abundant targets. The survey findings that younger cohorts engage more frequently in these behaviours yet underestimate their risks highlight precisely this convergence (TCLC, 2023).

Risk society theory, meanwhile, emphasises that modern risks are global, manufactured, and often imperceptible. Fraud parks epitomise such risks: geographically distant but digitally proximate, operating under conditions of weak governance yet affecting individuals thousands of kilometres away. Malaysians' broad agreement that fraud parks pose systemic threats suggests that citizens are internalising these dynamics, even without formal theoretical framing. The results also contribute to theories of governance and legitimacy. Public support for enforcement, institutional reform, and international cooperation illustrates how legitimacy for state action is constructed in response to transnational threats. Citizens are not only victims or passive observers but also active constituents whose expectations provide political cover for policy choices. In contexts where sovereignty is constrained by cross-border crime, such legitimacy is essential for sustaining ambitious interventions.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of victimology perspectives that recognise indirect victimisation. Even if individuals do not personally experience fraud, awareness that friends or relatives have been targeted shapes perceptions of risk and trust in institutions. This dynamic, evident in the Malaysian survey, suggests that measuring indirect exposure should become standard practice in cybercrime victimisation research.

The policy implications of the study are multi-layered. At the most immediate level, the results provide a clear mandate for awareness campaigns. With 93% of respondents supporting such initiatives (TCLC, 2023), the government can expand public communication efforts with confidence that citizens view them as legitimate and necessary. Importantly, these campaigns must be tailored to vulnerable groups, particularly young people, and employ behavioural techniques that counteract impulsiveness and overconfidence.

Second, the findings provide strong justification for institutional reforms. The overwhelming support for a new dedicated agency (92%) and increased enforcement resources (95%) (TCLC, 2023) indicates that Malaysians perceive current structures as insufficient. Policymakers should therefore move beyond ad hoc task forces and institutionalise a permanent body with cross-sectoral authority and advanced technical capacity.

Third, the survey highlights the necessity of international cooperation. Citizens understand that fraud parks cannot be dismantled unilaterally and expect their government to pursue both diplomatic and enforcement partnerships. Malaysia should therefore leverage ASEAN mechanisms, deepen bilateral engagements, and align with global initiatives under the UN and INTERPOL. The findings provide domestic political legitimacy for such outward-looking strategies, countering nationalist critiques that international cooperation undermines sovereignty.

Fourth, the results underscore the role of community engagement. The 91% support for NGO collaboration (TCLC, 2023) demonstrates recognition that fraud prevention is not solely the state's responsibility. This opens space for partnerships with schools, universities, religious organisations, and civil society groups to provide grassroots education, victim support, and reporting mechanisms. Policymakers should design inclusive frameworks that channel these capacities rather than monopolising control within state institutions.

Finally, the persistence of victimisation despite high awareness calls for innovative behavioural interventions. These might include reporting incentives, peer-led education campaigns, and integration of fraud detection into digital platforms. Public support for whistle-blower protection and reporting incentives indicates readiness to embrace such innovations (TCLC, 2023).

This study contributes to academic and policy debates by providing rare empirical data on fraud park awareness at the population level. Its multilingual design allowed for analysis across Malaysia's diverse communities, and its findings highlight both strengths and vulnerabilities in public responses to scams. Methodologically, the survey demonstrates the feasibility of conducting large-scale public opinion research on sensitive topics, despite challenges such as malicious interference during data collection (TCLC, 2023).

Future research should extend these insights through longitudinal designs that track changes in awareness and policy expectations over time. Comparative surveys across Southeast Asian countries would also enrich understanding of how public opinion varies depending on proximity to fraud parks and differences in governance capacity. Moreover, integrating survey data with qualitative interviews of victims and enforcement officials could provide deeper insight into the mechanisms that link awareness, behaviour, and institutional trust.

In conclusion, this study shows that Malaysians are acutely aware of fraud parks, view them as systemic threats, and strongly support comprehensive government intervention. Awareness, however, does not fully inoculate against victimisation; behavioural vulnerabilities remain, particularly among youth. Public opinion aligns with international recommendations, providing policymakers with both legitimacy and guidance to pursue ambitious reforms.

Theoretically, the findings validate the application of routine activity theory and risk society theory to cyber-fraud, while also contributing to victimology and governance studies. Practically, they underscore the need for multi-level interventions spanning awareness, enforcement, institutional reform, international cooperation, and community engagement.

Ultimately, the Malaysian case illustrates both the challenges and opportunities of confronting transnational organised crime in the digital age. Fraud parks thrive on governance gaps and individual vulnerabilities, but societies that combine informed citizens with responsive institutions can begin to close those gaps. By heeding the voices of its citizens, Malaysia can move from being a victim of fraud parks to becoming a regional leader in combating them.

In direct response to the study's research objectives, the findings demonstrate that (1) public awareness of fraud parks in Malaysia is high but differentiated across demographic groups; (2) youth and digitally active populations exhibit comparatively lower protective awareness and higher behavioural risk, confirming uneven vulnerability; and (3) Malaysians articulate coherent, multidimensional policy preferences encompassing education, enforcement, institutional reform, NGO collaboration, and international cooperation. Collectively, these results not only fulfil the study's objectives but also establish an empirical foundation for policy design grounded in public opinion and behavioural insight.

Acknowledgement

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