

# THE INTERNAL DETERMINANTS TRIGGERING CORRUPTION IN THE SABAH CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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**Abstract:** *Corruption is like an endemic of problem in the construction industry which has been known for a long time, undeniably this global phenomenon eventually touched on issues of sensitivity to many parties. The construction industry plays an important role towards the country's economic development as this influences investors to place their funds in this industry. It is found by many researchers as one of the most corrupt and riskiest sectors. Malaysian government and anti-corruption institutions have created ways to combat different corruption forms for construction industry. Corruption in the construction industry is not easy to be mitigate. Such of cases in Malaysia's construction industry especially in Sabah for the year 2016-2022 notable the trends cases it is something to worry about. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to identify the most potential internal determinants that trigger corruption in the Sabah construction industry. Extensive literature review covers two independent variables i.e., cost project involvement and level of income as the internal determinants and corruption as the dependent variable. A conceptual framework deliberates the connection between these variables as discussed in the literature review. This paper contributes to the existing research providing knowledge on corruption specifically in Sabah.*

**Keywords:** *Construction Industry, Corruption Forms, Corruption, Cost Project Involvement, Level of Income.*

## Introduction

In Malaysia, construction industry one of the sectors that significantly contribute towards the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which gave the sustainable income to be more prosperity prosperity (Alaloul et al., 2021; Dehdasht et al., 2022a). Generally, the construction industry is differed as compared to the other sectors due to several stages or procedures and huge amounts of money exist (Yap et al., 2020a). It is undeniable fact, construction industry selected as the challenges sector to bring the project successful and prone to corruption (Dehdasht et al., 2022b).

Corruption influence dilemma to the economic growth (Muhamad & A. Gani, 2020). It was revealed that various forms of corruption exist in a construction industry (Enste & Heldman, 2017a; Halil Paino et al., 2016; Jonathan Rose, 2017; Lee Kai Yee, 2019). Yet, this situation not only happens in Malaysia also monitoring several types of criminal cases around the world. Table 1 described clearly the various forms of corruption which consists of bid rigging, bribery, collusion, embezzlement, extortion, fraudulent, kickbacks, negligence and nepotism which unlawful activities intentionally results to hindering the efficiency and effectiveness progress of development goals.

**Table 1: Forms of Corruption in Construction Industry**

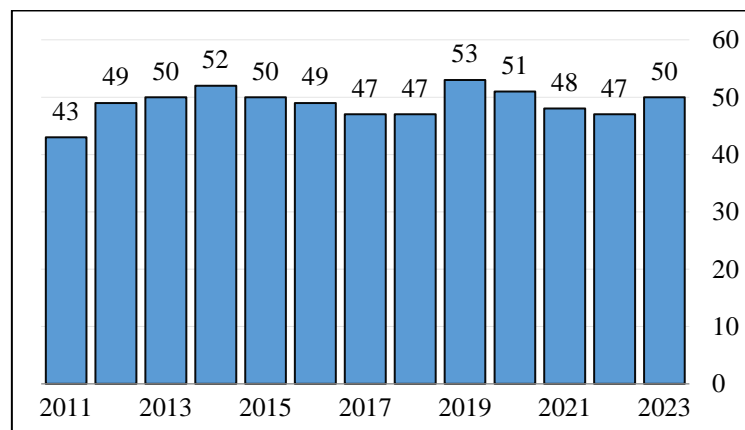
Forms of Corruption	Description	Author's
Bid Rigging	The intrinsic engagement wherein unfairness choose favoured company instead of competing to win the tenderer project i.e., manipulates, rigging bids and cheating favoured tender	(Chan & Owusu, 2017)
Bribery	The briber pays immediate either in terms of money or gifts to the person who awarded the contract for return to get special privileges or personal gains.	(Chan & Owusu, 2017; Durairaja et al., 2019; Lee Kai Yee, 2019)
Collusion	Refers to secretive agreement for mutual benefits. It relates to setting the price or bid rigging to win the project tender.	(Chan & Owusu, 2017; Lee Kai Yee, 2019)
Embezzlement	Refers to misappropriation of funds and unauthorized transferred amount of money or assets company.	(Chan & Owusu, 2017; Lee Kai Yee, 2019)
Extortion	Refers to serious crime which coercion or attacks the individual reveal the confidential data.	(Chan & Owusu, 2017)
Fraudulent	Refers to the individual misrepresentations or fictitious of confidential documentation i.e., modify and alter information usually company cash flows, financial and non-financial company.	(Asmuni et al., 2019; Chan & Owusu, 2017)
Kickbacks	Refers to illegal actions and this often like bribery. Wherein, this situation serves payment after a deal has been made.	(Lee Kai Yee, 2019)

Negligence	Refers to professional bodies' breach of duty which is carelessness to act the standard duty which action could cause to harm i.e., contractor does not meet the criteria of workplace or safe environment.	(Yap et al., 2020)
Nepotism	Refers to closer relationships or special relative person stakeholders' company such as family and friends which able to select as a tender project in the construction industry.	(Lee Kai Yee, 2019)

Meanwhile, from an Islamic context the meaning of corruption refers to the individual giving and receiving bribe either in terms of goods, gifts and money (Ahmed, 2018; Kasim, 2021). In addition, (Ahmed, 2018) explained from the main sources *Quran* and *Sunnah* clearly stated several types of corruption forms consists of bribery, fraudulent, extortion and exploitation other property. Furthermore, (Ab Rahman et al., 2022) indicated corruption based on *Maqasid Shariah* any forms method to earned money i.e., exploitation, gambling, fraud, bribery, theft and dealing with any harms or illegal ways are strictly prohibited.

More specifically, Muslims do not teach to consume and taking property from others through exploitation or manipulation. Another previous studies, (Alazzabi et al., 2020; Bougatef, 2015; Kasim, 2021) argued Islam highlight that corruption is forbidden (*haram*). Further supporting evidence from hadith of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "... In the body, if it is good, the whole healthy body but if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. It is heart" according to (Alazzabi et al., 2020). As evidenced, with *Qur'an* in the *Surah An-Nas*, verse (29-31) explained that do not eat up a portion by false means and source of income do not clear come from is impermissible whether through breach of trust, bribery, interest and cheating.

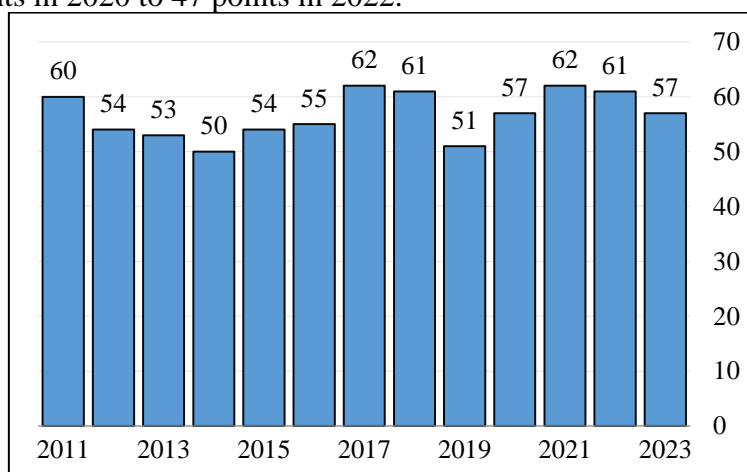
Based on the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) arrested statistics from various cases against corruption. Figure 1 showed the statistics reported of Malaysia's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) scores and Figure 2 showed the Malaysia's corruption rank out of 180 countries around the world which retrieved from Malaysia Transparency International from 2011 to 2023. Both figures should be concerned about the widespread of corruption in Malaysia as it influenced many impacts and linked with performance on economic growth.



**Figure 1: Malaysia's Corruption Perception Index Scores (2011-2023)**

Source: Data from Malaysia's Transparency International

CPI used scores to shows level cleanest of the country against corruption. In other words, the lower scores perceived to be highly corrupted and vice versa. As illustrated, the bar graph above summarized the scores trends that Malaysia facing over the years. Based on the statistics, the number of scores level as it minor fluctuates for every fifth years. However, this scenario should be taken serious for combatting against corruption in Malaysia. The scores to fight against corruption highlight the declining year by year from 50 points in 2015 to 47 points in 2018 and 51 points in 2020 to 47 points in 2022.

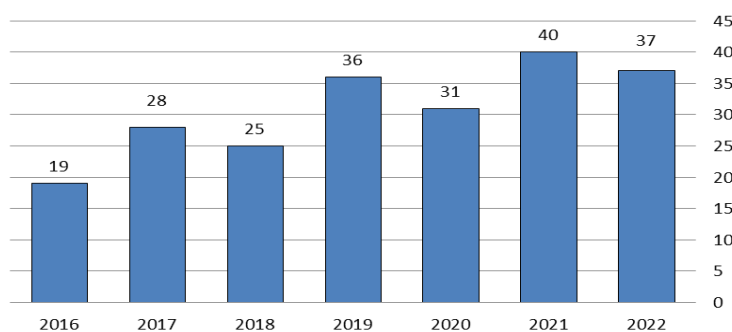


**Figure 2: Malaysia's Corruption Perception Index Rank Countries (2011-2023)**

Source: Data from Malaysia's Transparency International

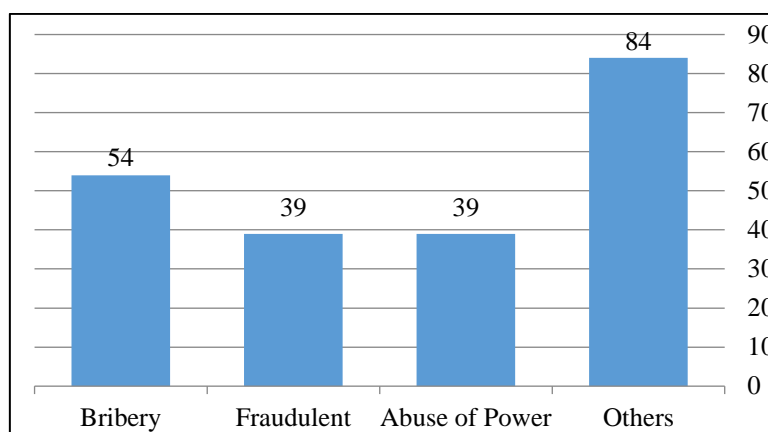
As illustrated, the bar graph above showed the statistics level in Malaysia for the span of ten years trend that is necessary to be cautious, wherein it is obvious that Malaysia's CPI repeatedly rank at 62<sup>nd</sup> place out of 180 countries in the year 2017 and 2021. A study affirmed that, high level of corruption rank as it imposes to riskiest country. Thus, it is contributing to destruction and economic crisis in Malaysia. As resulted, scores influenced the cleanest level of Malaysia's to fight against corruption.

On other hands, the most debated issue that contributing to the crime of corruption in Sabah is construction industry. This is proven wherein poor road condition i.e., Pan Borneo Highway projects and road damages still not resolved especially Kalabakan – Tawau route. Regarding to these problems, Figure 3 showed the statistics trends of cases corruption in Sabah construction industry from MACC for the year 2016-2022. Also, Figure 4 shows the number of faults for construction cases in Sabah.



**Figure 3: Trends of Corruption in Sabah Construction (2016-2022)**

Source: Data from MACC's Statistics



**Figure 4: Statistical of Various Cases in Sabah Construction (2016-2022)**

Source: Data from MACC's Statistics

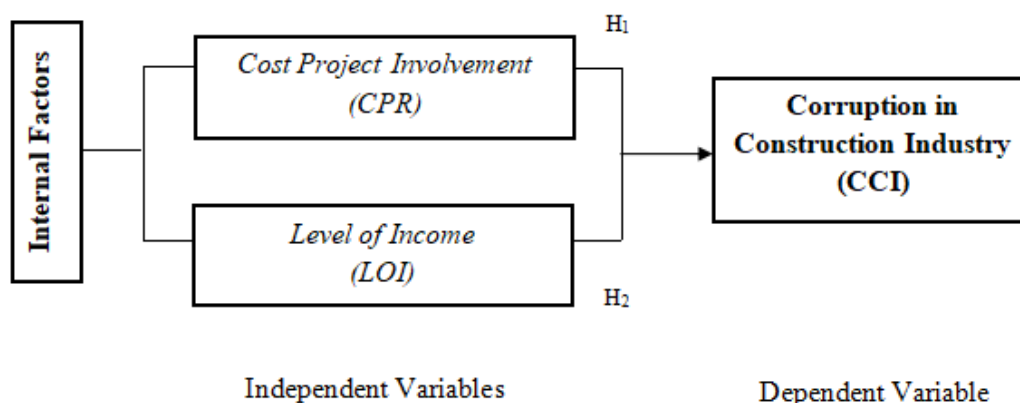
In addition to the above statistics, the bar graph in Figure 3 highlights the level of corruption from 2019 to 2022 necessary to be cautious. Wherein, it can be seen the fluctuations number of cases approaching half are reported year by year as it imposes income inequality social and disruption on the economy system. To sum up, the number of faults that occurred in Sabah refers to bribery as major form of corruption that contributed to the corruption rate in Sabah construction industry from 2016 to 2022. Thus, this is vital to figure out appropriate determinants of contributing against corruption, especially in Sabah construction.

The corruption in construction industry can occur at every sub-stage from beginning until whole project completed i.e., planning stage, pre-construction stage, construction stage, project close-out stage (Yap et al., 2020b). At this point, the primary issue corruption arises in the construction industry activities highlight the pre-construction stage, wherein at this stage clarity of quotation price to making sure cost budgeted and deliver good quality of construction project. The specification price includes raw materials will be compares and cost estimation as this client easy to choose within another company.

Unfortunately, this study has come out to the several limitations which may limit the researcher obtaining from previous research studies regarding on this topic and limited access due to confidential for official data needed especially in Sabah region. Owing to limited and incomplete disclose the official data needed, it could be challenging to identify and navigating this study (Syuaib Samsir et al., 2023). In other words, this will give an opportunity to promote the transparency, integrity and accountability within the construction industry.

## Literature Review

The conceptual framework below shows the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. The independent variables represent internal determinants i.e., cost project involvement (CPR) and level of income (LOI), meanwhile, corruption in the construction industry (CCI) is the dependent variable. As illustrated, the internal determinants trigger the corruption in construction industry. In other words, both internal determinants indicate that money or funds are a mechanism that contributes to corruption in the construction industry. This paper discusses the findings and connection between these variables.



**Figure 5: Conceptual Framework**

### **Corruption in Construction Industry (CCI)**

As mentioned, construction industry differs from other sectors because the process requires more complex and challenging procedures (Noreen, 2020a). According to (Durairaja et al., 2019; and Yap et al., 2020), affirmed that corruption may exist from the beginning project until completed. Undeniably, there are many opportunities for corruption forms can occur in the construction stage (Nordin et al., 2013; Yap et al., 2020c). Despite, this issue has been always debated but still necessary to be cautious as this sector riskiest and could cause long-term problems either towards the construction industry or economic development. According to, (Lee Kai Yee, 2019) further declared corruption in construction industry adversely give dilemma, as can be seen this sector are prone to corruption crimes for every stage of project (Mohd Nordin et al., 2023; Uroos et al., 2022).

Typically, corruption in construction industry may affect the quality project wherein the individual's unfairness by choose favoured tenderer instead of competing with another company. In other words, cheat tender as to able conduct project meanwhile the company fails to act the criteria of construction project (Yap et al., 2020d). Likewise, construction companies plan to minimize the construction cost by manipulate and lowest price bidders fraudulently to gain high return. As this, it may create dangerous to the users i.e., deaths or collapse if materials did not meet the quality standards of infrastructure.

In another context, the performance in a country i.e., transparency and security eventually would bring the investor as an investment destination (Mohd Nordin et al., 2023). On this matter, corruption is rampant where investment decision effect towards the investors might to be more circumspect as well as prevent losses and regret. As a result, corruption in construction industry impacts the economy system and project life cycle. So, it is quite related that construction industry strongly linked with many types of different economic sector.

### **Cost Project Involvement (CPR)**

The construction industry often involves many parties including stakeholders i.e., clients, contractors, suppliers, etc. (Nawaz et al., 2013). The networking between these parties is crucial and required to ensure budgetary management is aligned with the complete project, as well as avoid cost overruns (Shehu et al., 2014). Additionally, financial planning is vital to allocate large scale of funds to projects to meet the best quality results given that construction



sector is prone to delays due to several external factors such as economic conditions, labour market and environment (Lee Kai Yee, 2019; Shehu et al., 2014). Similarly, the price range of residential tends to increase wherein, the cost of materials, equipment and wages of workers is affected due to economic conditions. So, it is proven that the construction sector strongly linked to economic conditions.

Typically, these situations reveal overstated cash flow and overstated cost amount than initially estimated, either for personal gains or reduced loss by taking higher profits for the company's growth (Alaloul et al., 2021b; Lee Kai Yee, 2019). On this matter, the challenges with many layers phase of construction project given to pressure conducting or tendering project successful. In other words, setting the price or rigging bids instead of competing with other companies (Chan & Owusu, 2017). In another study, (Mahmud et al., 2022) argued that large amounts of project finances increase the chance of individuals to carrying out the forms of corruption owing to the various stages of the project. Moreover, it is vague for expenses claims in the construction industry, especially the contingency cost that may arise during the project. Thus, it is difficult to determine the fees associated precisely whenever individuals tend to misappropriate funds.

Apart from that, Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) caused the delay in completing the Pan Borneo Highway project. The unexpected risks simultaneously affected the high pressure on the construction firms to those involved. In parallel, the price disparity and fluctuations in the price of raw materials and the cost of delivering to Sabah are considerably high if compared to other regions (Noreen, 2020b). In other words, the unexpected risks arise it is likely to give opportunities towards the construction industry for corruption to occur. Additionally, (Lee Kai Yee, 2019) discovered a significant between the misappropriation of funds and cost project involvement in the construction industry. Substantial funds are required for construction firms to create a strategy to allocate budget carefully to overcome and mitigate risk to meet quality (Shehu et al., 2014).

### **Level of Income (LOI)**

Money simply refers to payment or instrument of exchanging goods and using services for daily needs. By looking at the relationship, money is significant to an individual's life and measuring the social class (Anh Quoc, 2021). Conceptually, economic condition influences financial well-being. Wherein, economic stability plays a vital role towards development as this stimulates financial pressure of income level for individuals. Apart from that, inflation indirectly tends to increase the costs of living, reduce the purchasing power of individuals and wage adjustment, meaning financial constraints lead to forms of corruption.

In accordance with (Enste & Heldman, 2017; and Nordin et al., 2013) argued high-income levels tend to be wealthier in a country as this affects performance governance structures (level of income ↑ increasing, corruption ↓ decreasing). Conversely, the lower income levels (level of income ↓ decreasing, corruption ↑ increasing), meaning corruption prone to be more pervasive due to low salaries. However, this research lacks empirical evidence which does not possibly indicate that the level of income enables the individual to take corrupt. Moreover, the causality problem of corruption suffers in developing countries compared to developed countries.

According to, (Eric M. Uslander, 2015) believed financial constraints lead to corruption. Unstable finances due to economic downturn can be more pervasive of corruption associated with construction projects. Wherein, appropriate of funds stimulates the individual to survive (Lee Kai Yee, 2019). Thus, the level of income encouraged individuals to participate in the forms of corruption which generate funds shortly for additional income and daily needs. Meaning, that corruption hinders the wealth of the economy, and it is difficult to curb.

It is undeniable that the impact of pandemic COVID-19 can be seen in the number of cases illustrated in Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3 showing the statistics for the years 2020 to 2021 tend to rise consecutively. In addition, Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2020) reported the outbreak of COVID-19 severely affected income loss and unemployment whereas some employers had to lay off and grant special unpaid leave to the workers (Shafiq Harun et al., n.d.). As illustrated, Table 2 showed the data mean household consumption expenditure by State published by Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) as of 2016, 2019 and 2022.

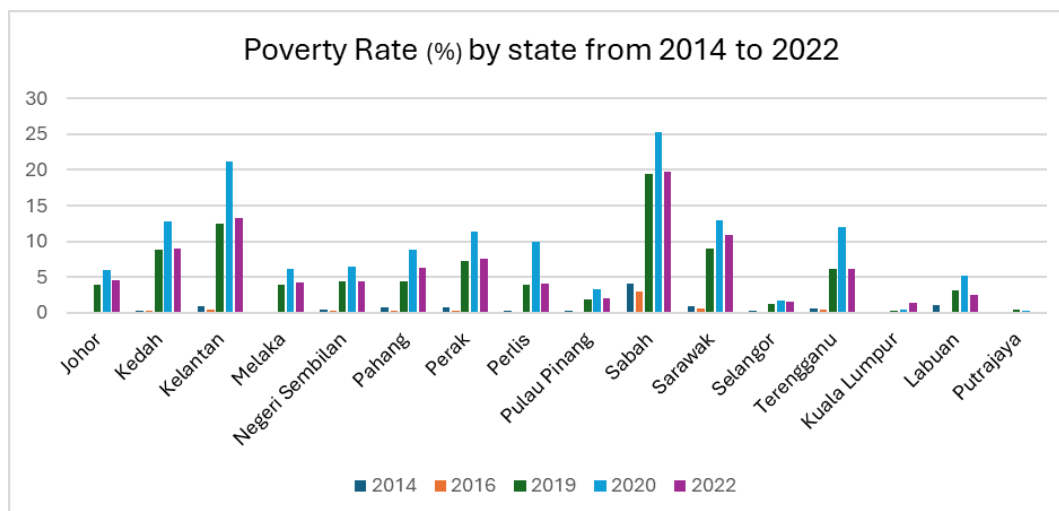
Meanwhile, Figure 7 and Figure 8 presented the poverty rates by state in Malaysia for the year 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020 and 2022. In similar vein, it can be seen from 2016 to 2020 Sabah as a higher numerous of poverty rates among all states, which significantly Sabah as lower monthly household income consumption expenditure to survive and probable influence the action of a person towards corruption. Thus, Malaysian government and other responsible authorities could more concern and committed to figure out solution towards these issues.

**Table 2: Mean monthly household income consumption expenditure by state for the year 2016, 2019 and 2022**

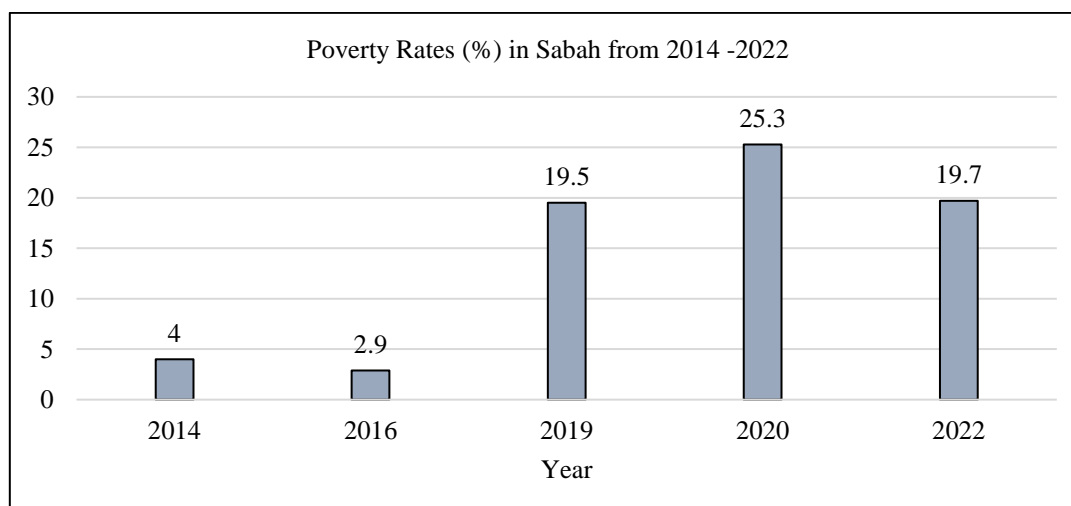
State	Year/ Household Income (RM)		
	2016	2019	2022
Johor	4,167	4,826	5,342
Kedah	3,071	3,373	3,765
Kelantan	2,884	3,231	3,505
Melaka	4,394	4,983	5,707
Negeri Sembilan	3,700	4,362	4,678
Pahang	3,332	3,661	4,107
Perak	3,251	3,582	3,903
Perlis	3,090	3,475	3,834
Pulau Pinang	4,219	4,651	5,322
Sabah	2,601	2,799	3,342
Sarawak	3,130	3,469	3,915
Selangor	5,342	6,099	6,770
Terengganu	3,813	4,345	4,796
Wilayah Persekutuan	Kuala Lumpur	6,234	6,947
	Labuan	4,076	4,102
	Putrajaya	6,984	8,010

Source: Data from DOSM Statistics





**Figure 7: Poverty rates by State, Malaysia for the year (2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2022)**  
Source: Data from DOSM Statistics



**Figure 8: Poverty rates in Sabah, Malaysia for the year (2014, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2022)**  
Source: Data from DOSM Statistics

## Conclusion

Government and other anti-corruption institutions still not to be tackled yet against these issues of corruption in Malaysian construction industry, which it always been questioned until today. Undeniable, there are several different forms of corruption arise in construction industry. The critically varies forms of corruption creates consequences towards Malaysia's performance that is necessary should be reviewed to reduce the existence of corruption issues especially in Sabah. In this light, these consequences need to be figured out because it could cause relations within other sector also long-term problems towards the construction industry and economic development. However, the author identified from all the previous literature studies there are no other researcher in Malaysian study especially in Sabah region which might be like appoint the findings in terms of finance. Conversely, most of the publications focus on unethical behaviour concept. Hence, thorough this empirical review may influence to a better transparency, integrity and accountability to address the corruption challenges within the construction industry. Also, encourage the industry players and construction companies to figure out the possible strategies against potential risks. As this, Malaysia's rank does not mean

in the comfort zone, meaning the higher number of corruptions will affect to the next generation.

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