

SURVEY OF YOUTH'S INTENTION
TO
JOIN THE RECYCLING INDUSTRY



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Prepared for

ZeShan Foundation

Prepared by

A Plastic Ocean Foundation

Researcher
Monica Kwok

Project Manager
Tiffany Cheung

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Introduction

Hong Kong generates 5.39 million tonnes of waste in 2020, with 230,000 tonnes being recyclables, contributing to a recycling rate of 5.8%. Within 230,000 tonnes of recyclables, only 20% collected were processed locally¹. In addition to the low public awareness, we observed that the lack of labour in the recycling industry poses obstacles for scaling up appropriate recycling service offered to the public, which contributed to the potential low recycling rate. The recycling industry has also cited difficulties in recruiting new talent², and in the mid to long term, the labour shortage creates further obstacles for Hong Kong to meet the Government's recycling target to implement various waste reduction and recycling measures outlined in the Waste Blueprint for Hong Kong 2035³.

The labour shortage may be attributed to the negative image and misconception towards the recycling industry. It is therefore theorised that an early intervention during the career planning stages of secondary school students may encourage future talents to consider joining the industry. A focus is given to students in the Northwestern area of Hong Kong as population of age group 15-24 is projected to increase from 98000 in 2019 to 116800 in 2029⁴, which indicates a more imminent career planning need.

To understand the barriers for the recycling industry to attract future talents, a perception survey has been undertaken to measure secondary school students,

¹ Environmental Protection Department, *Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong - Waste Statistics for 2020*, (Hong Kong: Environmental Protection Department, 2021), 2-3.

² Jobmarket, 環保意識抬頭 綠色教育殷切 回收業招新血 助升級轉型, (Hong Kong: Jobmarket, 2018).

³ Environmental Bureau, *Waste Blueprint for Hong Kong 2035*, (Hong Kong: Environmental Bureau, 2021)

⁴ Planning Department, *Projection of Population Distribution 2021- 2029*, (Hong Kong: Planning Department, 2021).

parents, and teachers' impression on and knowledge of the recycling industry. The results may indicate gaps where strategies may be implemented to encourage future talents to join the recycling industry.

Methodology

A survey was conducted between April to June, 2022, amongst 3 target groups: secondary school students, parents and teachers on an anonymous and random basis. Data was collected online and in person by employees of A Plastic Ocean Foundation (APOF). The survey was conducted in Cantonese and a total of 1409, 846 and 30 responses were collected from secondary school students, parents and teachers respectively, yielding a confidence level of 99% with a margin of error of 3.4% in the students survey group and 4.5% in the parents survey group. 30 responses have been received from the teacher group; it is acknowledged that the sample size of the teacher group is significantly smaller than the other two sample groups. The results from the teacher group are therefore used for comparison purposes and supplement the insights gained from the students and parents groups.

Results

The survey focuses on three elements: career planning preparation, impression on the recycling industry, information availability on the recycling industry. Each subset of the respondents (students, parents and teachers) received a survey that centres on the three elements, with several questions changed according to each subgroup to generate appropriate points for analysis.

3.1 Career Planning Preparation

Students: just under one-third of respondents have started career planning.

Regarding the direction and decision-making in the career planning stage, students were being asked to arrange the level of importance of opinions from 5 different

groups including i) teachers; ii) parents; iii) elders of the family; iv) friends and v) celebrities in an ascending order, in which 1 indicates the most important to 5 indicates the least important. The lower the score a group obtained indicates the more important it was in students' career planning. The result showed that respondents have identified parents and teachers as the most important over their career planning (figure 3.1.1).

Figure 3.1.1 Level of importance from opinion given by groups

	Total score
Teachers	2694
Parents	2903
Elders of family	4262
Friends	4945
Celebrities	6088

Score : 1 - the most important
 2 - very important
 3 - important
 4 - slightly important
 5 - not at all important

In terms of career goals, students were being asked to arrange 5 different benefits they may get from a job according to their desirability in an ascending order, in which 1 indicates the most desirable to 5 indicates the least desirable. The 5 benefits include i) money; ii) social status; iii) social network; iv) satisfaction and v) sense of mission. The lower the total score obtained indicates the higher the order of that benefit to be in students' career goal. The result showed that money and social status are the two major benefits that students wanted to get from a job (figure 3.1.2). It is fair to say that respondents are best motivated or attracted by a career that is well-paid and offers high social recognition.

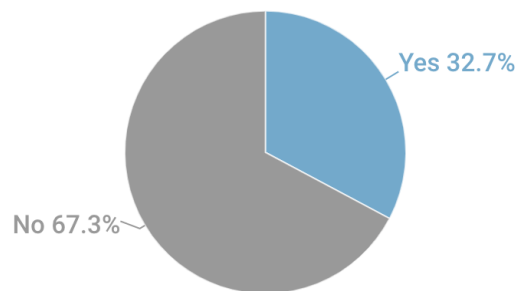
Figure 3.1.2 Level of desirability of 5 benefits in student's career planning

	Total score
Money	2725
Satisfaction	4825
Sense of mission	4439
Social network	3979
Social status	2778

Score : 1 - the most desirable
2 - highly desirable
3 - desirable
4 - slightly desirable
5 - not at all desirable

Parents: just over half of the respondents reported that their children have started career planning. Regardless of the planning progress, only 32.7% of parents have had career planning conversations with their children (figure 3.1.3). Meanwhile, 27.7% of respondents whose children have already started career planning have not had a conversation between parent and children.

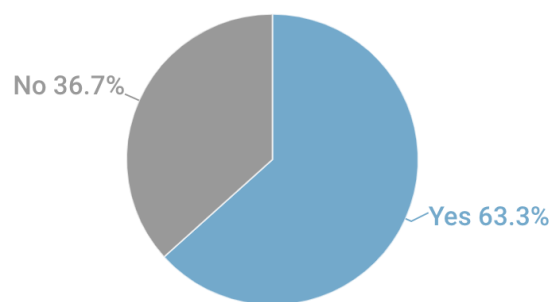
Figure 3.1.3 Career planning conversation with students made by parents



Sample size: 846

Teachers: majority (62.5%) of students they teach have started career planning, and all schools which the respondents teach at have provided career planning assistance to students. Despite the students naming teachers as one of the major influences on career planning, only 63.3% of respondents had a career planning conversation with their students (figure 3.1.4).

Figure 3.1.4 Career planning conversation with students made by teachers



Sample size: 28

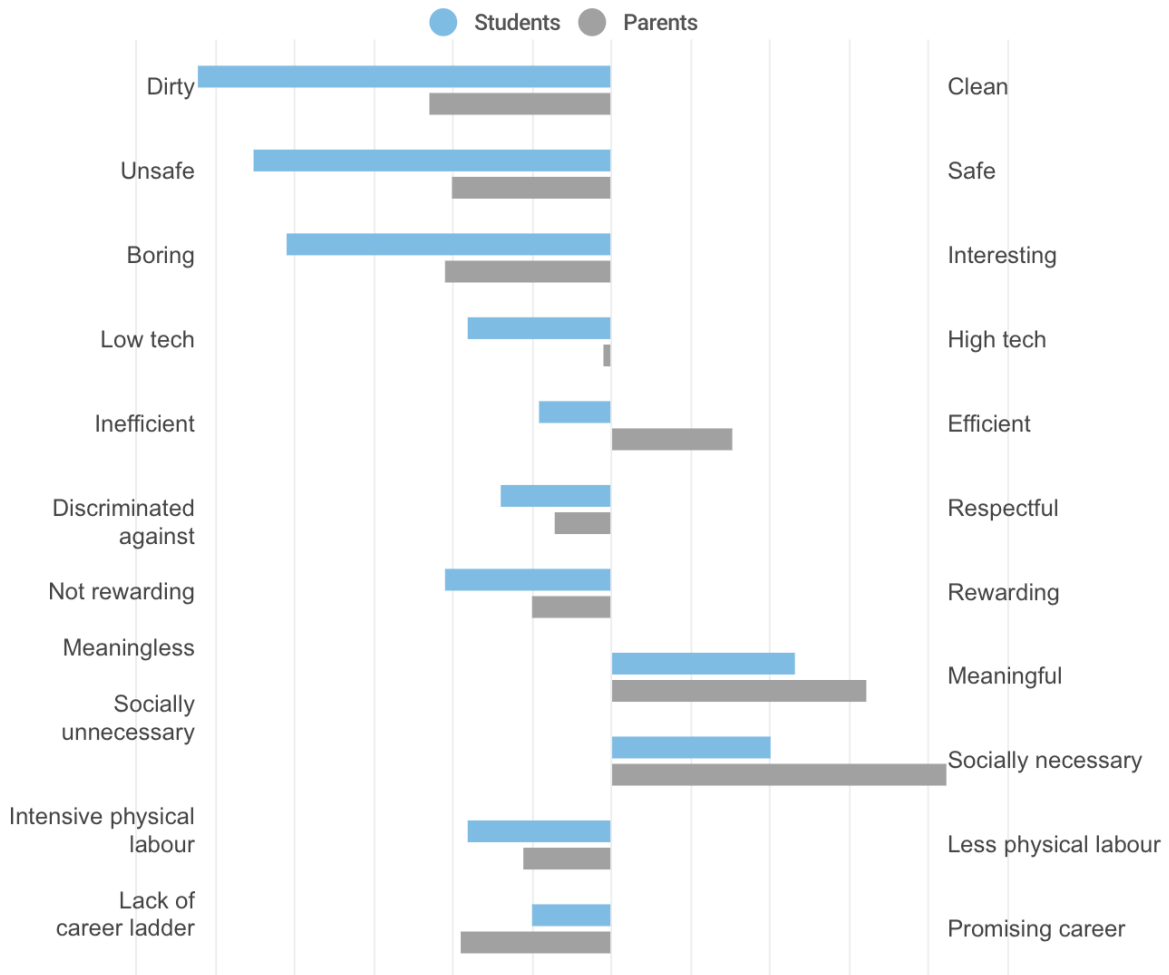
3.2 Impression on the Recycling Industry

All three groups of respondents were asked if they believe they know the recycling industry and whether they know of any personal contacts that work in the industry. Subsequently, respondents were given pairs of opposite adjectives (a positive and a negative adjective in each pair) to describe the recycling industry, and the respondents ranked the adjectives on likert scale based on their impression.

All three subgroups are inclined to associate the recycling industry with the negative adjectives. In particular, the student and parent subgroups shared main impressions of “dirty”, “unsafe” and “boring”. Despite that, all three subgroups acknowledged the

industry is “socially necessary” and believed the industry is “meaningful” (figure 3.2.1).

Figure 3.2.1 Students and parents perceptions of the recycling industry

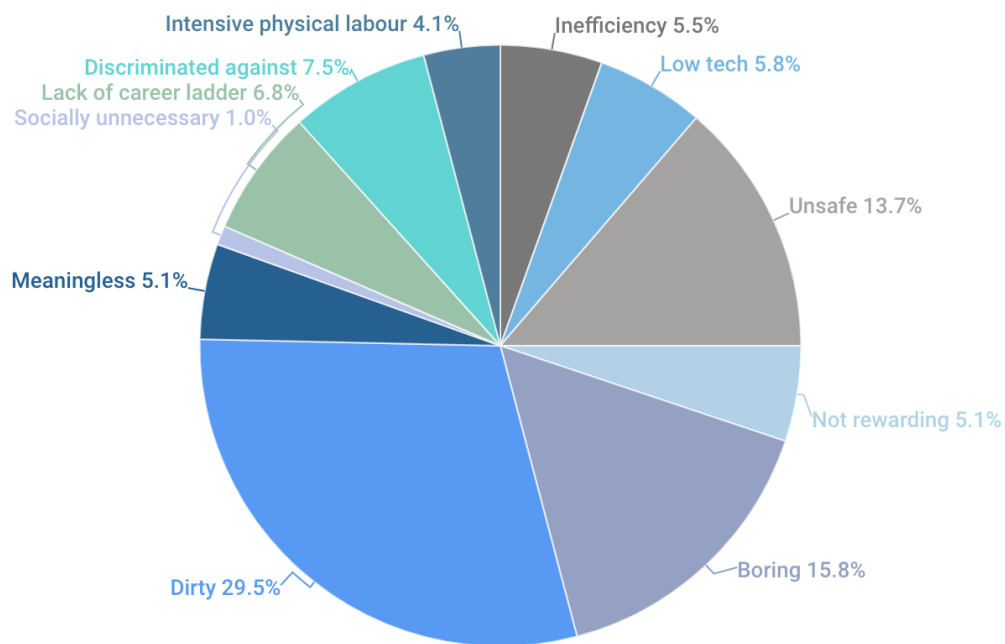


Students: in addition to the above discussed impressions, the student subgroup further associated the recycling industry with other negative adjectives. It is widely believed that the industry is not a lucrative career choice as it is “not well paid” and “lack of career ladder”. It is also seen as “inefficient” and as an industry that involves “intensive physical labour” and often being “discriminated against”. Despite the negative impressions, only 33.1% of respondents reported that they believe they

know the industry well, and only 24.1% of respondents personally know of individuals in the industry.

In addition to the main impressions, respondents feel that the recycling industry does not pay well and has little room in career progression. Indeed, nearly four-third of respondents replied they have not considered the recycling industry, with 29.5% 15.8% and 13.7% of respondents cited “dirtiness” and “boring” and “dangerous” respectively as the main barriers (figure 3.2.2).

Figure 3.2.2 Student response for not considering a career in the recycling industry

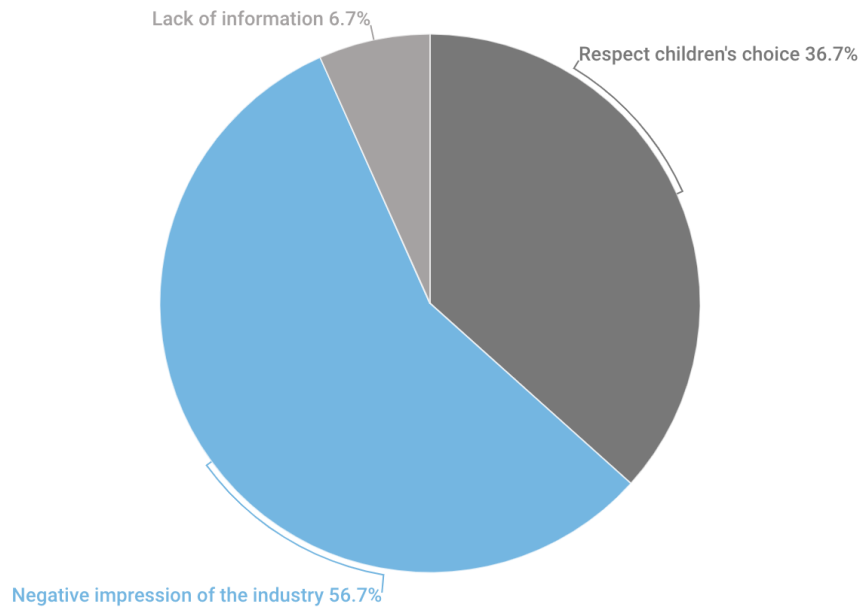


Parents: the parents subgroup has an overall negative impression on the recycling industry as well, with the exception of the industry being “efficient”. In general the parent subgroup viewed the recycling industry more positively than the students (refer to figure 3.2.1). Similar to the student subgroup, only 37.2% of respondents in

the parent subgroup believe they know the industry well, and only 25.1% of respondents personally know of individuals in the industry.

The recycling industry is not seen as an ideal career choice for the parents. Only 27.9% of respondents will recommend the industry to their children and only 22.1% of respondents have suggested their children join the industry. The majority of parents reflected that the reason for not recommending children to the industry is due to the negative impression associated with it (figure 3.2.3)

Figure 3.2.3 Parents' reason for not recommending the recycling industry to their children



Teachers: the teacher subgroup has the most favourable impression on the recycling industry. In line with the other two groups, the respondents acknowledged that the recycling industry is “socially necessary” and “meaningful”. In addition, the respondents believe that the industry involves “less physical labour” and is considered “safe”. Half of the respondents in the teacher subgroup believed they are

familiar with the recycling industry, however, only 14.3% of respondents personally know of individuals in the industry.

Despite the overall neutral impression, the percentages of respondents who had recommended and will recommend the industry to their students remain low. None of the respondents had recommended the recycling industry to their students before. And 8 out of 29 respondents stated that they will recommend it in the future. For the 21 respondents who would not recommend students to the recycling industry, they were asked to give reason for their choice (figure 3.2.4).

Figure 3.2.4 Teachers' reason for not recommending students to the recycling industry

The industry is not promising	3
Respect student's choice	4
Did not give reason	6
Do not know the industry well	7

3.3 Information availability on the recycling industry

Each of the subgroups was asked prompt questions about the source and accessibility of information on the recycling industry. The question is to understand where and how the respondents receive the information.

Students: About 30% of the respondents actively sought information on the recycling industry. Respondents reported gaining information, in order of significance, through friends, housing estates, schools, recycling stations, field trips,

and social media. Other information respondents wished to find out was remuneration schemes of the industry, career path and advancement opportunities.

Interestingly, regardless of whether the respondents seek out information actively, they have an overall impression of the industry being “dirty”, “smelly” and “low-paid”, and that it is a career choice for the less educated and elderly, and that their family members do not support such career choice. A number of respondents also showed the lack of trust in the industry, citing past incidents in which the recyclables were landfilled.

However, a small number of respondents showed favourable replies. These respondents cited support from the government and interest in the business sector. There are considerations of joining the industry, more specifically as non front-line personnel.

Parents: the parent subgroup were asked the reasons for not having recommended or not planning to recommend the industry to their children. The answers fall into three main categories: the negative impression of the industry, the lack of information, and respecting their children’s choice. Some parents stated that they have not yet been active in their children’s career planning.

Nearly half of the respondents cited “negative impression” of the industry as the main barrier, while 15.7% cited lack of information on the industry; the other 37.3% claimed that their children are still pursuing education, or that they have not interfered with the children’s career planning as a way of respecting their children.

Teachers: the teacher subgroup were asked if the schools have provided information on the industry to the students. Only 14.3% of schools have provided

information to students. This lack of information corresponds with the student subgroup's relatively small number of respondents cited receiving information from schools.

Highlights

Summarising the replies from all respondents, several trends can be observed:

1. Most of the respondents have little knowledge about the recycling industry, and even fewer respondents personally know of individuals working in the industry. The overall impression on the recycling industry, from work environment, job content, remuneration to career progression, is not positive. This is especially true for the student subgroup which is the focus of this study.
2. None of the respondent subgroups viewed a career in the recycling industry as lucrative. Majority of the student subgroup respondents are not interested in working in the industry, and the majority of the parents and teacher subgroups have not and will not recommend their children or students a career in recycling.
3. There is a lack of easily accessible information on the recycling industry. The lack of structured and credible information may contribute to misunderstanding of the industry. It is suggested that structured information from credible sources is needed to rectify the misconception of the recycling industry.
4. While some respondents in the student subgroup cited school as a source of information, it is noted from the respondents in the teacher subgroup that a low percentage of schools offered information on the recycling industry. It is believed that the schools are a good channel to disperse information as it would allow both teachers and students to familiarise with the industry.
5. A trend of the student subgroup respondents look to parents and teachers for career planning advice has been observed. However the parent subgroup

respondents who have engaged in such conversation with their children is low.

6. Student subgroup respondents aspired to gain money and social status from work, while citing “dirty”, “unsafe” and “boring” as the main barriers to enter the recycling industry. Information sessions focused on attracting talents to the industry may consider highlighting these aspects.

Recommendations

Secondary schools:

1. Secondary schools can strengthen communication with the industry to provide students and parents with reliable industry information and career planning guidance.
2. Secondary schools can collaborate with the industry and professional organisations to organise field trips, so that teachers and students can understand the operation, actual work environment and future development of the recycling industry.
3. For junior students, secondary schools can establish online learning resources to introduce industry-related STEM knowledge and other environmental elements, as a way to build correct understanding about the recycling industry.

Institutions for higher education:

1. Institutions can take an active role in building communication channels with the industry and strengthen dissemination of relevant information to graduates.
2. Institutions can also collaborate with the industry to organise field visits for students, and set up internship programs for graduates, while structuring the programs based on the needs of the industry.

The recycling industry:

1. The industry should reach out and strengthen public communication by disseminating correct information, and explaining the varieties of industry-related career options, nature and overall structure, as a way to change public misconception on recycling and the environmental industry.

Policy:

1. The Green Employment Scheme: Graduates Subsidy Programme(GSP) should be regularised to strengthen the incentives for private companies and organisations to hire graduates who are passionate about the industry.
2. More recycling-related courses can be included in the Continuing Education Fund as an incentive to attract young people to gear up themselves to join the recycling industry.

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