

**Ministry of Manpower &  
Migrant Workers' Centre**

**Foreign Worker (FW) Study 2011**

**Report on Findings**

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Objective and Scope of Study**

1.1.1 To obtain a better understanding of the employment conditions and well-being of non-domestic foreign workers in Singapore, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Migrant Workers' Centre (MWC) appointed a survey vendor to conduct a **Foreign Worker (FW) Study** in 2011. For the purposes of this study, FWs refer to non-domestic Work Permit holders and S Pass holders.<sup>1</sup>

1.1.2 The scope of the study included:

- FWs' overall satisfaction with working in Singapore;
- FWs' experiences at various stages of the employment process;
- FWs' awareness of their responsibilities and responsibilities of their employers; and
- FWs' awareness of channels for redress and assistance.

## **1.2 Sampling Methodology**

1.2.1 A total of 3,502 FWs were interviewed, comprising 3,029 non-domestic Work Permit (WP) holders and 473 S Pass holders. The respondents were selected randomly and the sampling frame was designed to be generally representative of the FW population profile, for example, the sector in which the worker was employed.

## **1.3 Data Collection Methodology**

1.3.1 The surveys were administered in English through face-to-face interviews. For respondents who had difficulty speaking English, the survey was conducted in the native language of the respondent.

1.3.2 To elicit more truthful responses, individual WP and S Pass holders were assured that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and that only aggregated results would be reported.

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<sup>1</sup> A Work Permit (WP) is generally issued to a semi-skilled or unskilled foreign worker, while a S Pass is issued to a mid-level skilled worker (e.g. technician) who earns a fixed monthly salary of at least \$1,800 (criteria before July 2011) to work in Singapore.

## 2 Overall Satisfaction Levels, Future Intentions & Recommendation of Singapore as a Place for Work

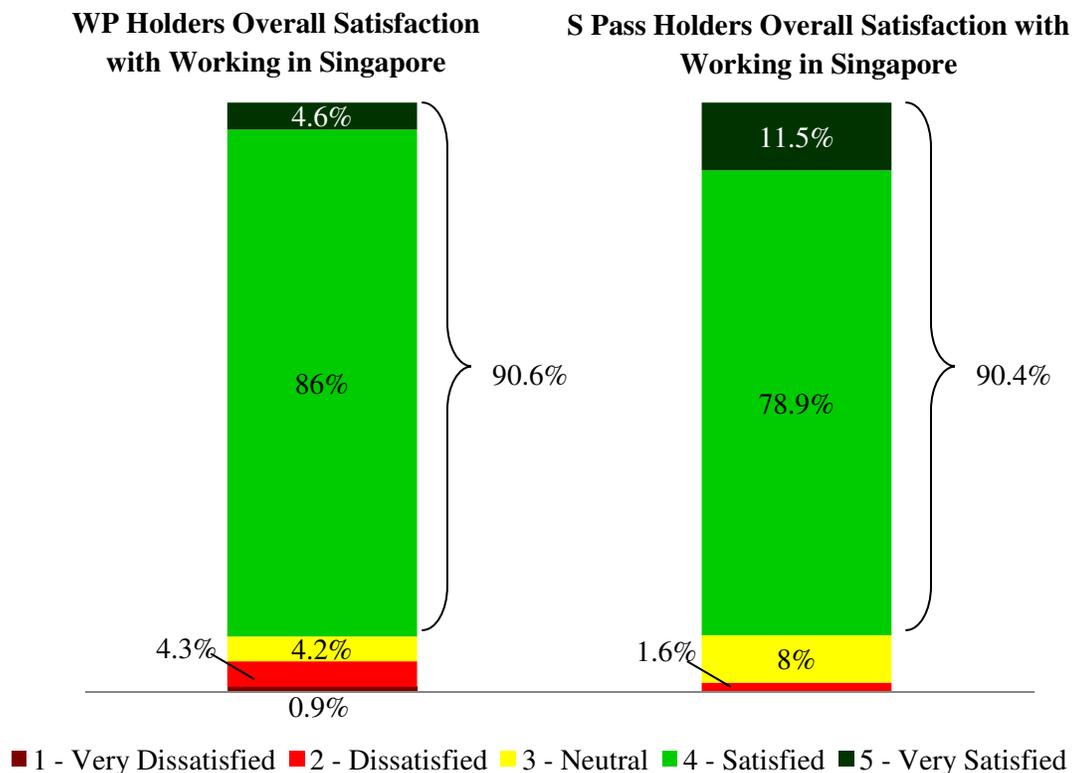
### 2.1 Satisfaction Levels of Foreign Workers

Generally, the foreign workers interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction with working in Singapore.

2.1.1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being “very satisfied”, about 91% of **WP holders** rated their overall satisfaction with working in Singapore as at least a ‘4’ i.e. satisfied. About 5% rated their satisfaction level as “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”.

2.1.2 Similarly, about 90% of **S Pass holders** rated their overall satisfaction with working in Singapore as at least a ‘4’ i.e. satisfied, with a higher percentage of 11.5% rating as ‘very satisfied’.

Figure 2.1



## 2.2 Future Intentions of Foreign Workers

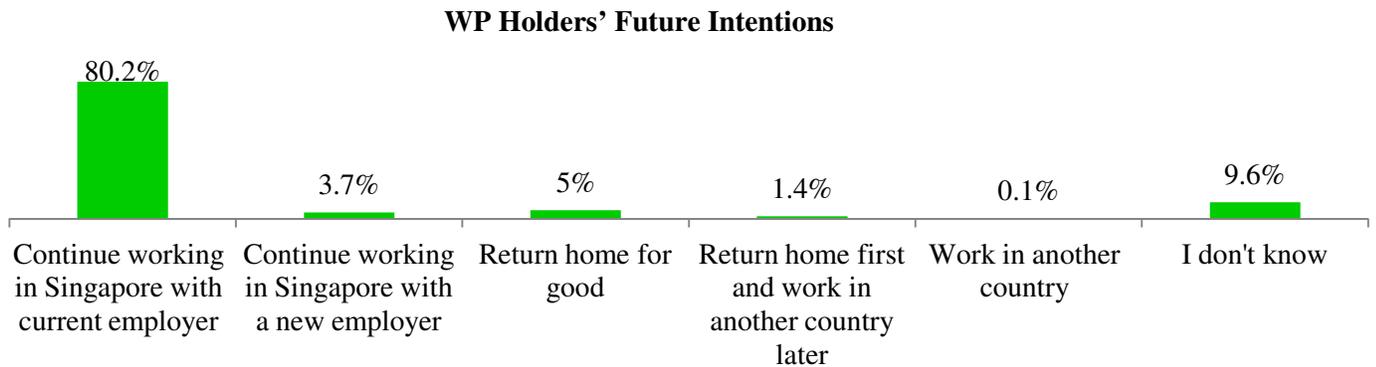
About 80% of foreign workers planned to continue working in Singapore with their current employer

2.2.1 When asked about their plans after their current contract expired, about 80% of WP and S Pass holders said they planned to continue working in Singapore with their current employers.

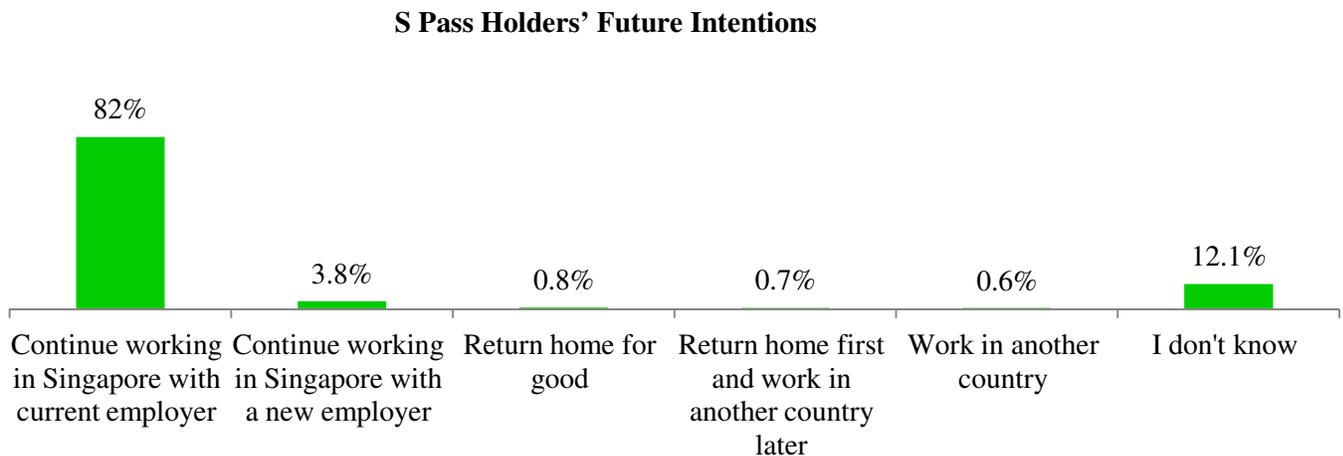
2.2.2 The main reasons cited by **WP holders** for choosing to continue to work in Singapore or another preferred country were higher pay (58%), proximity to home (12%), and similar culture (5%).

2.2.3. For **S Pass holders**, proximity to home (23%), better prospects in terms of being able to achieve long term goals (16%) and higher pay (15%) were among the key factors for choosing to continue to work in Singapore or another preferred country.

**Figure 2.2a**



**Figure 2.2b**



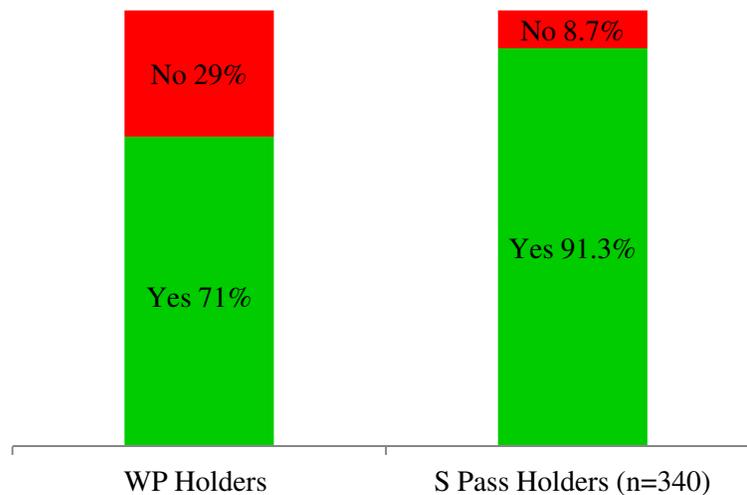
## 2.3 Recommending Singapore as a Place for Work

*The majority of foreign workers said they would recommend Singapore as a place for work*

2.3.1 71% of **WP holders** and 91% of **S Pass holders** said that they would recommend Singapore to their friends and relatives as a place for work.

**Figure 2.3a**

**Would you recommend Singapore to your friends and relatives as a place for work?**



2.3.2 The top three reasons cited by **WP holders** for recommending Singapore as a place to work were good pay (62%), good prospects (53%), and a sense of security (39%). The top three reasons cited by **S Pass holders** for doing so were good pay (69%), sense of security (56%), and good living conditions (46%).

**Table 2.3b (multiple options allowed)**

**What are the reasons you would recommend Singapore as a place for work?**

WP Holders

Reasons most commonly cited	% of WP responses
Good Pay	62%
Good Prospects	53%
Sense of Security (protection against abuse etc.)	39%
Good Living Conditions	36%
Good Working Conditions	33%
Large Community of Fellow Home Country Workers	27%

S Pass Holders

Reasons most commonly cited	% of S Pass responses
Good Pay	69%
Sense of Security (protection against abuse etc.)	56%
Good Living Conditions	46%
Good Prospects	33%
Good Working Conditions	32%
Good Stepping Stone to Work in Other Countries	18%

2.3.3 Of the **WP holders** and **S Pass holders** who indicated that they would not recommend Singapore as a place to work, the key reasons cited included pay levels, agency fees and poor prospects.

**Table 2.3c (multiple options allowed)**

**What are the reasons you would not recommend Singapore as a place for work?**

WP Holders

<b>Reasons most commonly cited</b>	<b>% of WP responses</b>
Low Pay	38%
Expensive Employment Agency Fees	24%
Poor Prospects	13%
Poor Living Conditions	7%
Poor Working Conditions	7%
Small Community of Fellow Home Country Workers	2%

S Pass Holders

<b>Reasons most commonly cited</b>	<b>% of S Pass responses</b>
Expensive Employment Agency Fees	24%
Low Pay	22%
Poor Prospects	9%
Small Community of Fellow Home Country Workers	6%
Poor Working Conditions	1%

### 3 Pre-Employment Experiences

#### 3.1 Source of Information for Job in Singapore

*Excluding Malaysians<sup>2</sup>, most foreign workers found out about their current jobs through employment agencies in their home countries*

3.1.1 Excluding Malaysians, 83% of **WP holders** and 32% of **S Pass holders** indicated finding out about their job in Singapore through an employment agency (EA) in their home country.

**Table 3.1a (multiple options allowed)**

**How did you find out about this job in Singapore?**

Party	Proportion	
	WP holders (Excluding Malaysian)	S Pass holders (Excluding Malaysians)
EA in home country	82.9%	32.1%
Others (E.g. employed directly, internet, etc.)	5.5%	6.3%
Employer in Singapore	3.3%	5.9%
EA in Singapore	2.4%	9.1%
Friend/ relative in home country	1.8%	3.2%
Friend/ relative in Singapore	1.6%	2.9%
Middleman in Singapore	0.5%	0%
Middleman in home country	0.4%	1.2%

<sup>2</sup> Malaysians have been excluded from the analyses as they are usually directly hired without intermediaries.

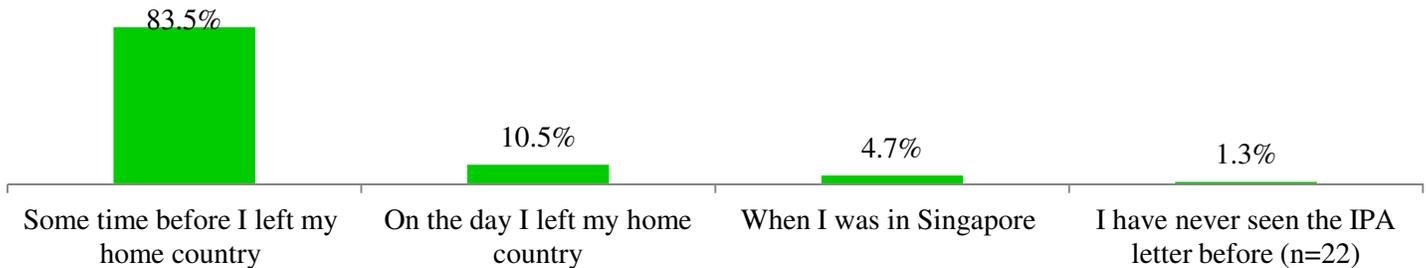
### 3.2 Receiving the In-Principle Approval (IPA) Letter<sup>3</sup>

*Excluding Malaysians, 8 in 10 WP holders received their IPA letter before they left their home country*

3.2.1 About 84% of the **WP holders** interviewed indicated that they had received the IPA letter sometime before they left their home country. Less than 5% had received the IPA letter only after they came to Singapore.

**Figure 3.2a**

**Time of Receipt of In-Principle Approval (IPA) Letter for WP Holders**



<sup>3</sup> An IPA letter is issued by the Ministry of Manpower's Work Pass Division upon a successful application of a Work Permit.

### 3.3 Provision of Training

*For foreign workers who underwent training in their home country or Singapore, the main areas of training were job-related skills and safety at work*

3.3.1 38% and 27% of WP and S Pass holders respectively had undergone training in their home country **before coming to work in Singapore**. Of the WP and S Pass holders who had undergone training in their home country, the main areas of training were job-related skills (98% for **WP holders**, 80% for **S Pass holders**), and safety at work (85% for **WP holders**, 53% for **S Pass holders**).

**Figure 3.3a (multiple options allowed)**

**For the training which you were provided with in your home country, specify the areas of training**

#### WP Holders

Areas of training	% of WP responses
Job-Related Skills	98%
Safety at Work	85%
Laws and Regulations in Singapore	64%
Others (e.g. IT)	1%

#### S Pass Holders

Areas of training	% of S Pass responses
Job-Related Skills	80%
Safety at Work	53%
Laws and Regulations in Singapore	30%
Others (e.g. public relations, orientation, etc)	4%

3.3.2 82% and 63% of WP and S Pass holders respectively had undergone training **in Singapore**. Of the WP and S Pass holders who had undergone training in Singapore, the main areas of training were job-related skills (82% for **WP holders**, 88% for **S Pass holders**), and safety at work (93% for **WP holders**, 74% for **S Pass holders**).

## 4 FWs' Working Conditions and Experiences during Employment

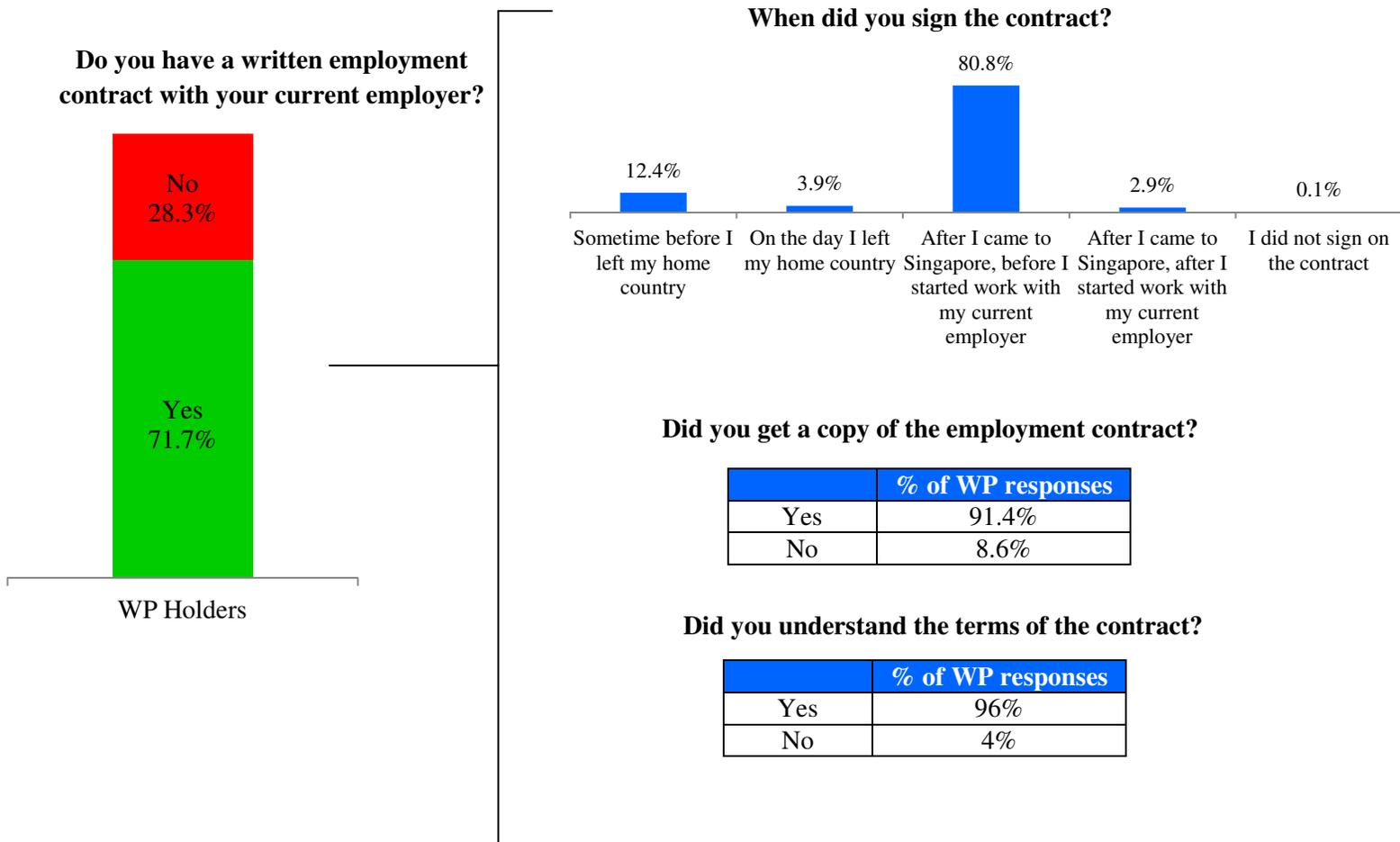
### 4.1 Written Employment Contract

*The majority of foreign workers had a written employment contract and were given a copy of it*

4.1.1 72% of **WP holders** indicated having a written employment contract with their current employer. Among those who had a written contract: (i) 81% had signed the contract after they had come to Singapore and before they had started work with their current employer; (ii) 91% were given a copy of the contract; and (iii) 96% understood the contract terms.

**Figure 4.1a**

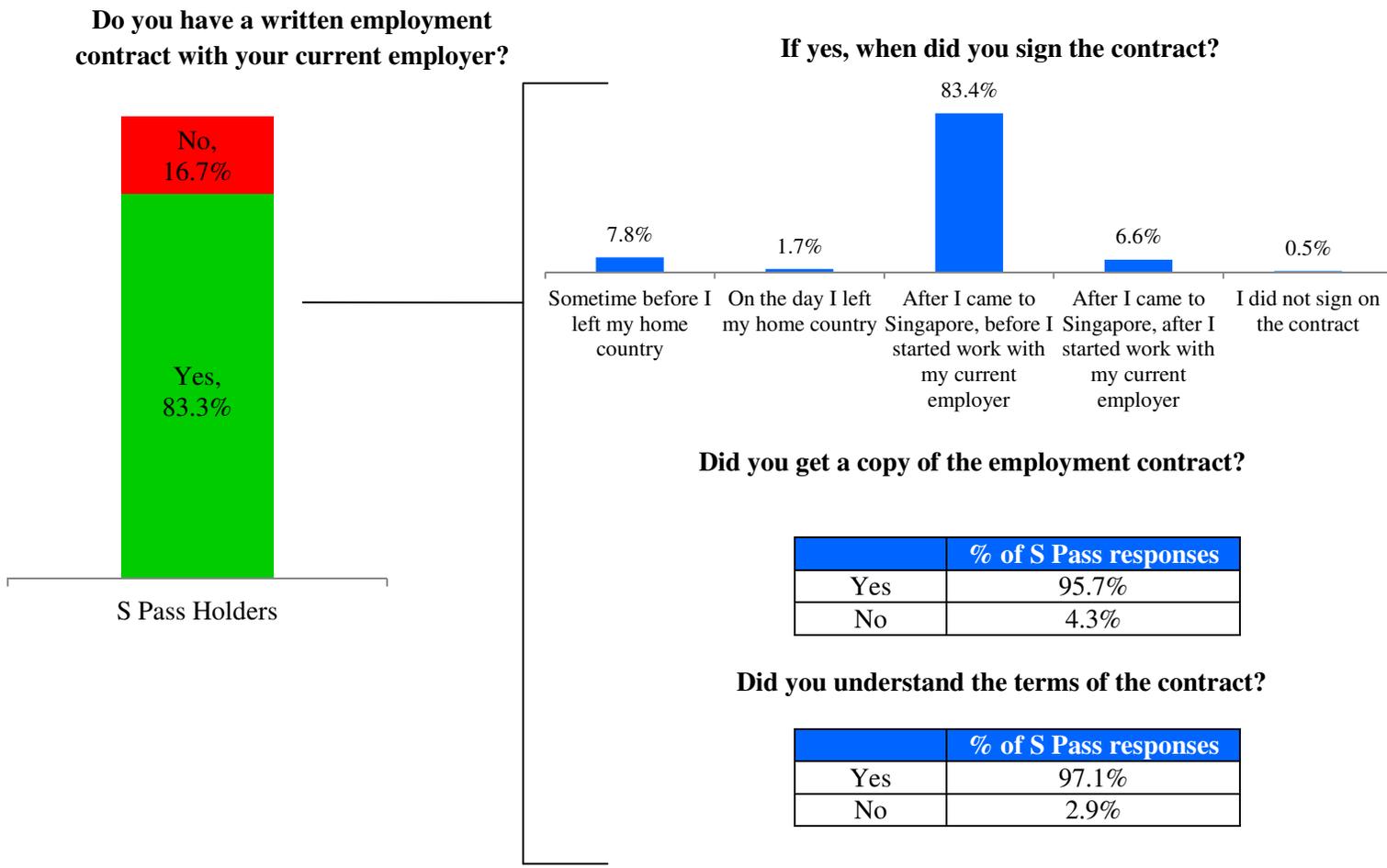
#### Written Employment Contract for WP Pass Holders



4.1.2 83% of **S Pass holders** indicated having a written employment contract with their current employer. Among those who had a written contract: (i) 83% had signed the contract after they had come to Singapore and before they had started work with their current employer; (ii) 96% were given a copy of the contract; and (iii) 97% understood the contract terms.

**Figure 4.1b**

**Written Employment Contract for S Pass Holders**



## 4.2 Work & Rest Hours

*WP holders indicated a higher median number of hours worked per day compared to S Pass holders. Most foreign workers had a meal break of a fixed duration during working hours*

4.2.1 Amongst **WP holders** surveyed, the median average number of hours worked in a day, including overtime and excluding rest and meal times, was 10 hours. 79% of the WP holders worked an average of more than 8 hours a day. The median number of days worked per week was 6 days.

4.2.2 For the **S Pass holders** surveyed, the median average amount of hours worked in a day, including overtime and excluding rest and meal times, was 8 hours. 43% of the S Pass holders worked an average of more than 8 hours a day. The median number of days worked per week, excluding a weekly rest day was 6 days.

4.2.3 Most **WP holders** (93%) and almost all **S Pass holders** (99%) indicated that they had a meal break of a fixed duration during working hours. The median period of time given for each meal break was 60 minutes.

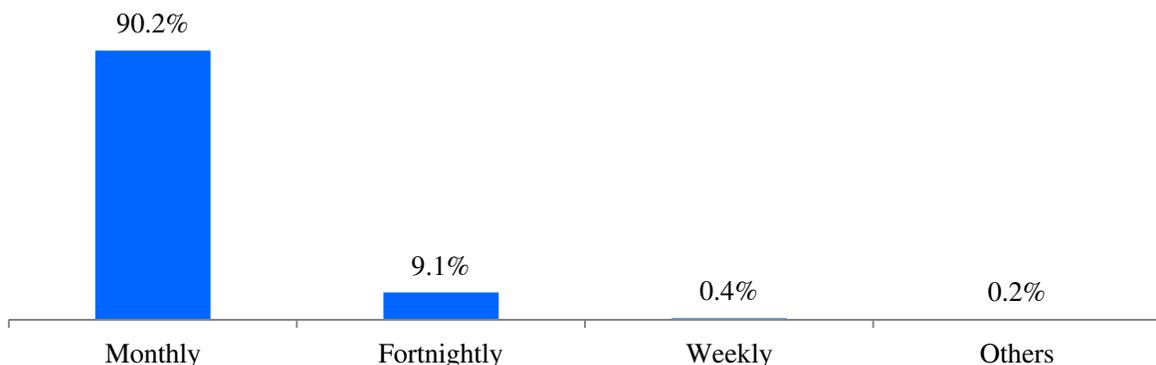
## 4.3 Frequency of Salary Payment

*Almost all foreign workers were paid their salary on a monthly basis*

4.3.1 90% of **WP holders** were paid their salary on a monthly basis, with some being paid fortnightly or even weekly.

**Figure 4.3a**

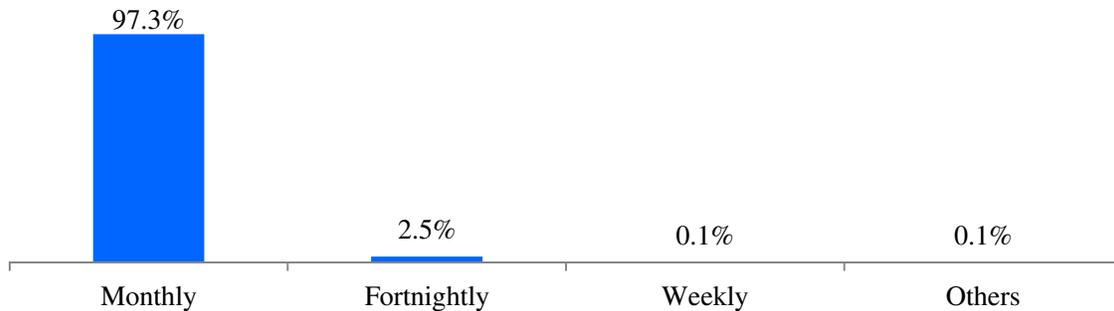
**Frequency of Salary Payment for WP Holders**



4.3.2 Similarly, almost all **S Pass holders** were paid their salary on a monthly basis.

**Figure 4.3b**

**Frequency of Salary Payment for S Pass Holders**



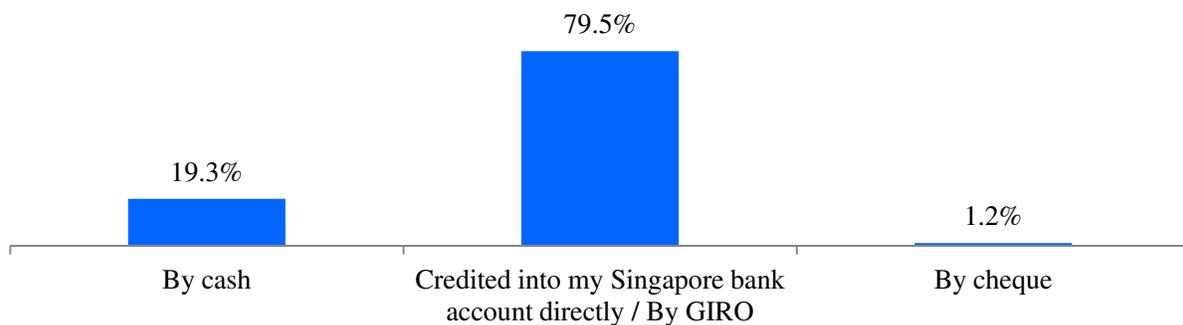
**4.4 Mode of Salary Payment**

*The majority of foreign workers had their salaries credited into their Singapore bank account directly or via GIRO*

4.4.1 80% of **WP holders** indicated that their salaries were credited directly into their Singapore bank account or via GIRO.

**Figure 4.4a**

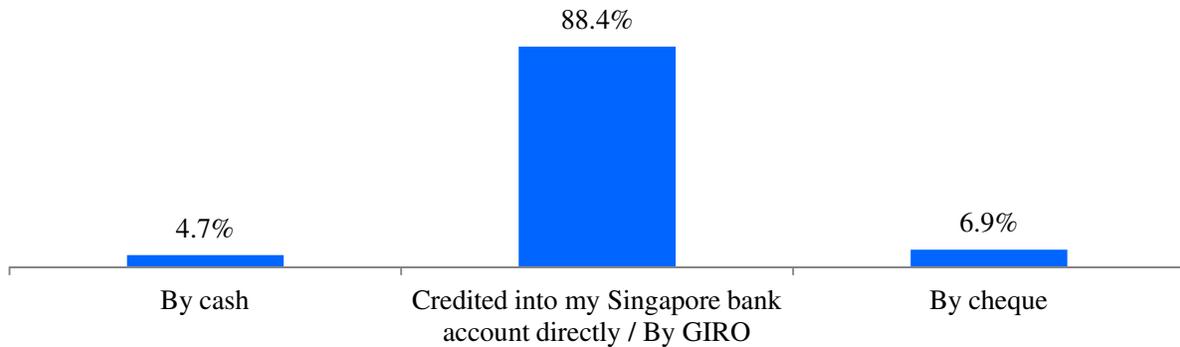
**Mode of Salary Payment for WP Holders**



4.4.2 About 88% of **S Pass holders** indicated that their salaries were credited directly into their Singapore bank account, or via GIRO.

**Figure 4.4b**

**Mode of Salary Payment for S Pass Holders**



**4.5 Payslips**

*Most foreign workers were allowed to retain a physical record of their salary payments*

4.5.1 91% of WP holders and 92% of S Pass holders saw a record of their salary payments and kept a physical record of their salary payments.

**4.6 Salaries Owed by Employer**

*A small proportion of foreign workers indicated having salaries owed by their employers at the time of the survey*

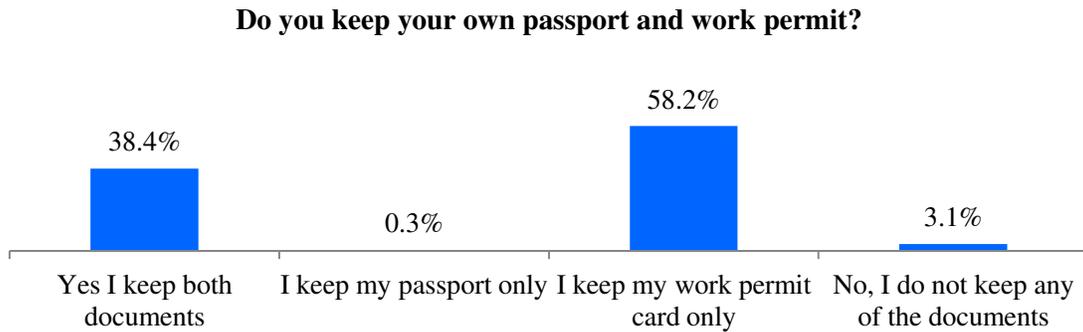
4.6.1 1% of **WP holders** had employers who owed them salaries at the point of the survey. Only 1 S Pass holder was owed salary by his employer at the point of the survey.

**4.7 Keeping of Personal Documents**

*More than 95% of foreign workers kept at least their WP card or S Pass*

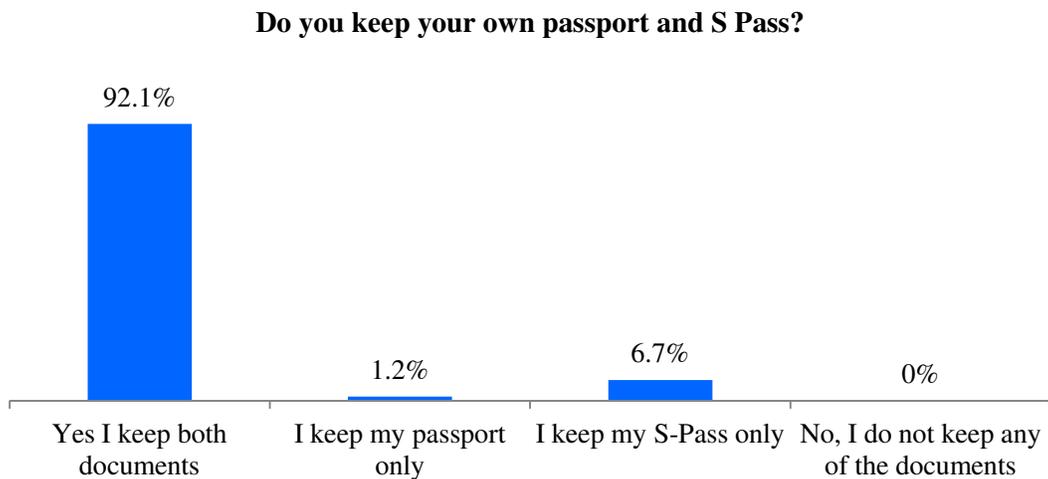
4.7.1 While almost all (97%) **WP holders** kept their WP card, about 39% of WP holders kept their passport. Of the WP holders who indicated that they did not keep at least one of the documents (i.e. either their WP card or passport), 73% got their document(s) back when they asked for them.

**Figure 4.7a**



4.7.2 Among S Pass holders, 92% kept both their S Pass and their passports. Almost all (99%) kept at least their S Pass. Of the S Pass holders who indicated that they did not keep at least one of the documents (i.e. either their S Pass or passport), 48% got their document(s) back they asked for them.

**Figure 4.7b**



## 5 Awareness of Employment Responsibilities and Channels of Assistance

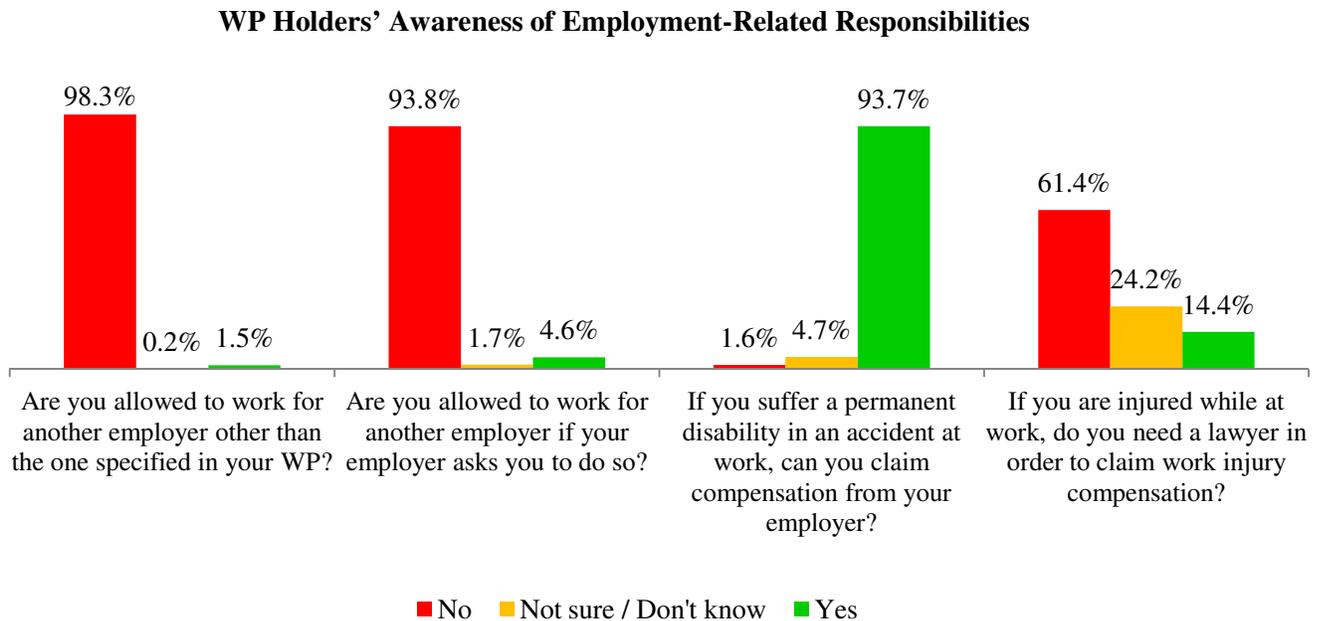
### 5.1 Awareness of Employment-Related Responsibilities

*Most foreign workers were aware of their employment responsibilities. They were less certain about the process to make a work injury compensation claim*

5.1.1 Most **WP holders** were aware of their employment responsibilities with regard to not being allowed to work for another employer other than the one stated in their work permit (98%), and not being allowed to work for another employer even if their employer asked them to do so (94%).

5.1.2 While about 94% of WP holders were aware of their entitlement to compensation from their employer in the event of a workplace injury, they were less certain about the process to make a work injury compensation claim – about 39% of WP holders had the misconception that they needed to engage a lawyer in order to make a claim.

**Figure 5.1a**

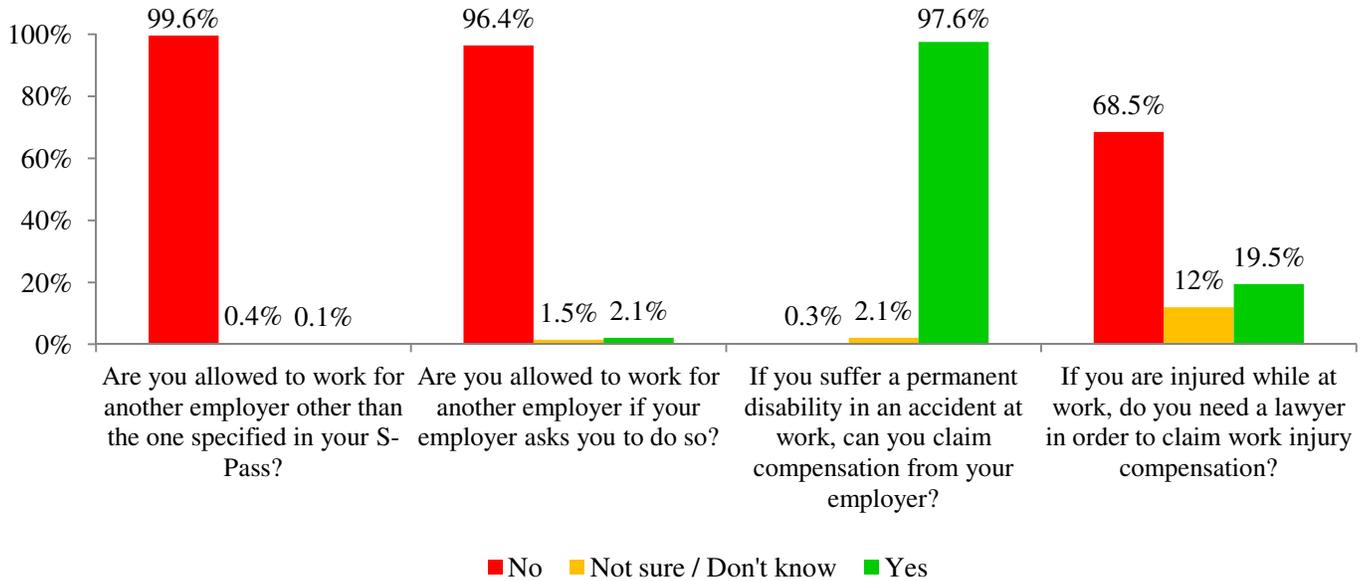


5.1.3 Most **S Pass holders** were also aware of their employment responsibilities with regard to not being allowed to work for another employer other than the one stated in their S Pass (99.6%), and not being allowed to work for another employer even if their employer asked them to do so (96%).

5.1.4 Similar to WP holders, while the vast majority of **S Pass holders** (98%) were aware of their entitlement to compensation from their employer in the event of a workplace injury, they were less certain about the process to make a work injury compensation claim – 32% had the misconception that they needed to engage a lawyer in order to make a claim.

Figure 5.1b

**S Pass Holders' Awareness of Employment-Related Responsibilities**



**5.2 Channels of Assistance**

*Foreign workers would usually approach their supervisors or employers if they encountered problems*

5.2.1 For **employment-related problems**, the top persons/organisations that **WP holders** indicated they would approach were firstly their supervisors (43%), followed by employers (27%), and MOM (8%). Similarly, **S Pass holders** indicated they would first approach their supervisors (45%) followed by their employers (20%). Some 10% of S Pass holders also indicated they would approach their co-workers or friends in Singapore.

5.2.2 For information on **work-injury compensation claims**, the top persons/organisations that both WP and S Pass holders approached were firstly their supervisors (46% for **WP holders**, 48% for **S Pass holders**), followed by their employers (32% for **WP holders**, 27% for **S Pass holders**), and co-workers or friends in Singapore (5% for **WP holders**, 12% for **S Pass holders**).

### 5.3. Usage of Guide from MOM<sup>4</sup>

5.3.1 87% of **WP holders** said they had received the MOM guidebook on working and living in Singapore, which included information on their employment rights under the law (e.g. payment of salary, hours of work, rest days, sick leave, etc). Amongst the WP holders who had received the guide: (i) about 89% of them still had it; and (ii) almost all (99.5%) found the guide useful.

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<sup>4</sup> This section is only applicable to WP holders.