THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE: WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR THE PROVISION OF LIFE-JACKETS AT THE SARAWAK RIVER

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses individuals’ willingness to pay (WTP) for the provision of life-jackets at the Sarawak River, in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, as a substitute measure for the value of human life. The study applied the dichotomous choice of Contingent Valuation Method (CVM) to users of express boats at the Kuching Wharf, who were sampled randomly. Results indicate a per person mean value of RM8.58 for the willingness to pay (WTP) for the provision of life-jackets, using the logic modern. This indicates a high level of willingness to accept financial responsibility for individuals’ own safety and life value. Nevertheless, price, age, and income play a moderating role on the amount respondents are willing to pay. The collection of such monetary amount will allow for the provision of life-jackets as well as the promotion of various safety programs in the state.

I. INTRODUCTION

The ever increasing number of boats plying the Sarawak River, due to the ever increasing demand for cheaper transportation (Anonymous, 2001), has created a recipe for disaster (Anonymous, 2001). A number of express boat (passenger carrying fast boats) collisions have occurred, causing loss to life and limb (Anonymous, 1999b) even though there have been numerous warnings by the authorities (Anonymous, 1997). Express boats have been described as ‘floating coffins’ although they are also said to be safe (Yong, 1999).

Nevertheless, to many users, the provision of life-jackets to those who use the Sarawak River as a form of transportation is a must and has recently been passed as law in the state. It is a logical step to be taken in the issue of public safety as by having life-jackets, the loss of life in case of accidents can be limited. On the other hand, the provision of life-jackets costs money and therefore most likely the extra cost will be pushed to the consumer, who is already burdened by the cost of travel. Consumers,