

# Nothing to wear for job interview? Anis will help you

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**KUALA LUMPUR** — As soon as she graduated from Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM), Anis Mohamed Khalid was ready to find her dream job and nail that interview.

But coming from a working class background meant she had one extra hurdle to overcome before she could even think about carefully curating her words to woo the people who may become her future employers!

“At that point I realised that I didn’t have the right clothes,” the 27-year-old told Malay Mail Online when recalling her preparation for her first proper job interview.

“When I wanted to buy them I also realised that I couldn’t afford to. Work clothes are not cheap for graduates like me. Most of us don’t have money to buy them for our first interview,” she added.

This anxious moment later gave birth to a newfound vocation for volunteerism and charity, which this year translated into an idea to collect usable but unwanted office attire and redistribute them to first-time or poor job seekers who can’t afford to dress up for that very first crucial interview.

Imbued with a completely non-pretentious and simple “I just want to help” spirit, the bubbly Anis and a friend and partner initiated a social media campaign to collect unwanted shirts, pants, ties and blazers.

“I just want to help because I can empathise with them really. I’ve been in that situation so I know what it feels like,” Anis, who was raised in Keramat, a predominantly working class neighbourhood, said when explaining why she started the campaign.

As a matter of fact it was a hunch that hit the bullseye.

Judging from the response to the campaign on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, it won’t be far off the mark to say that not being able to afford work clothes is a serious problem among graduates who come from the lower income group.

Anis believes it all ties up to a deeper structural problem; stagnating wages for graduates and soaring living costs have made it almost impossible for virgin job seekers to buy decent clothes for a job interview.

“This is especially so for those who come from kampung. For us who are raised in the city, we’re privileged enough to be able to stay with our parents so that extra money can go to buying work clothes.

“But those from outside (of KL)? Most will be settling down for the first time in the city, most of the money will have to go to rent and transportation. And it’s so

expensive they usually don’t even have enough to buy new work clothes,” she said.

The debate about whether or not income has really grown has been the subject of ongoing debate that spans almost a decade now.

More independent economists believe salaries for graduates have not changed since the early 2000 but those closer to the establishment believe otherwise.

Regardless, rent in Kuala Lumpur is still considered expensive even as household income is said to have increased, according to an article on rent published in October by iMoney, a financial comparison website.

While starting salaries for graduates were reported to have been the same for the past 10 years — RM2,500 for degree holders — cost of living in the city has more than doubled since then.

But Anis said often complaints about graduates not being able to afford a shirt, tie or a blouse for their first job interview — or even for those with jobs who still can’t afford to look decent — will likely be dismissed as a “privilege issue” that doesn’t merit attention.

“I’ve heard people say now you can buy work shirts for RM40 (at high street fashion outlets) but they don’t understand that for poor people, RM40 is a lot of money,” she said.

Some critics have even suggested that graduates be “grateful to have clothes” and tell them it’s okay to wear the same clothes to work every day, but Anis believes these naysayers have overlooked the mental health issue that may arise from it.

“They don’t realise that it’s also about confidence. Can you imagine what that person feels if he or she has to wear the same shirt every day to work? Or if they show up for an interview dressed in worn-out clothes,” she explained.

“Imagine their confidence level and how that would affect their performance at their interviews.”

Headhunters and job prospectors would likely corroborate her view about how one dresses influences how well one performs at a job interview.

Countless articles have been written about it and most of them agree on one thing: interviews can be stressful so showing up in the right clothing can

hugely influence how one performs — you don’t have to look like a million ringgit, but you can’t look like a pauper either.

Thankfully for Anis and her project, those who understand the problem far outnumber those who don’t.

Just two days after she advertised her campaign on her personal social media pages, more than a dozen people, some from Sabah and Johor, have responded by giving away huge bags of perfectly usable clothes.

Anis on a mission to help new graduates who can't afford to buy office wear for their first job interview.  
— Picture by Syed Jaymal Zahiid

