

Evaluation of Residential Satisfaction in Dwelling Unit Features of Public Low-Cost Housing

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v12-i8/14278>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v12-i8/14278

Published Date: 29 July 2022

Abstract

A dwelling is one of man's most basic needs. In Malaysia's case, the National Housing Policy has made housing one of the main strategic mechanisms in eradicating poverty. This policy is seen to have a significant influence in dealing with the problems of excessive population growth and in-demand community development. For these reasons, a study on the status of one housing programme for the poor and those of the low-income bracket, namely the Low-Cost Housing Programme (LCHP), in influencing the quality of life of its target group was carried out. A field study was done to evaluate the consistency of the internal physical characteristics of the LCHP with the housing needs of the target group. A structured questionnaire was the main instrument utilised in the primary data collection of this study. Around 325 household heads of six flat-type LCHPs in Kuala Terengganu were involved in this study. The study's findings are able to give positive implications in improving the planning and the policy of the LCHP as well as increasing the quality of life of the target groups.

Introduction

The Malaysian National Housing Policy was designed to provide adequate, quality, and affordable houses for all income groups to increase public well-being. This policy was also introduced to tackle the issues of poverty. The poverty line in Malaysia is RM2,208 per month (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Individuals earning below the poverty line are classified as poor and highly at risk of not being able to own a house.

One social intervention undertaken by the government to tackle the housing issue has been the Low-Cost Housing Programme (LCHP) formed specifically for the poor or the low-income group. This strategy of using housing as one poverty eradication mechanism has been

practised since the Second Malaysia Plan through the National Housing Policy. The main objective of this policy is to help the poor or the low-income groups through the provision of cheap and affordable housing.

The Performance of Low-Cost Housing Programme (LCHP) in Fulfilling Target Group Housing Needs in Malaysia

The LCHP is one poverty eradication programme for the low-income group. The government's main objective in providing the LCHP is to supply comfortable housing to the low-income group through the provision of basic and social facilities to increase their quality of life. The LCHP also aligns with the Twelfth Malaysia Plan to alleviate poverty and develop conducive infrastructures for the nation.

In order to implement the LCHP, the government has allocated great funds for this programme. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, unstable economic conditions persist and the government's inability to provide sufficient low-cost housing to the people, especially the low-income group, might pose problems. The shortage of housing in the developing world is evidenced by the 880 million people living in slums as recorded in the 2015 UN-Habitat study, compared with the 792 million people in 2000 (Jaiyeoba & Asojo, 2020). This finding might have led to the inclusion of the 'housing for all' target towards 2030 in the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, among other targets (Jaiyeoba & Asojo, 2020).

However, the LCHP in Malaysia has been criticised for its implementation of providing comfortable and quality housing. Most individuals occupying low-cost housing claimed to be unsatisfied with the physical amenities provided (Noorah, 2019). The design and quality of LCHP houses have also been criticised for contributing to social problems and implications among occupants. The size of the houses is too small in relation to the high number of occupants. There are only two small-sized bedrooms, without taking into account the number and gender of children in the households (Hezzrin et al., 2017). The problem of crowding arises during bedtime due to the lack of bedrooms. In order to measure the congestion index, the UN considers three per room as the lowest limit to indicate crowding. Considering this indicator, it could be surmised that low-cost housing is not comfortable for its occupants. The children would not be able to focus on their studies due to the cramped house size and parents would not be able to provide a designated study space. The situation is getting worse during COVID-19 as children or teenagers would not be allowed to go to school and would have to study at home, but unfortunately, they would be uncomfortable with the LCHP's narrow space designs.

A number of accusations have been issued by the community, especially the LCHP target group to the authorities that plan, implement, and monitor the LCHP construction. Among the main accusations closely linked to the focus of this study is the LCHP being said to have not fulfilled the National Social Policy (NSP) that prioritises public well-being. This policy was formed to fulfil the needs and tackle the social problems of the nation. The NSP sees the National Housing Policy as having significant social importance in ensuring each segment of society has equal opportunities in enjoying housing facilities. Constructed houses should consider social structure and needs, especially the structure of families. These changes should

be the main component in the planning and implementation of community housing programmes. Unfortunately, the LCHP's planning and construction have failed to take the NSP's suggestion into account.

In relation to that aspect, the LCHP is not consistent with the strategic social planning procedure. One strategic social planning procedure used to construct a social programme is evaluation planning. Evaluation planning is the most important stage in any social programme planning. At this stage, each agency involved in the social programme planning has been briefed on the strategies and activities needed to be carried out to achieve certain objectives. One of the main aspects of evaluation planning is the participation of target groups in determining the programme design meant for them. This procedure involving the views or suggestions of target groups in this programme planning is called the needs assessment. Needs assessment identifies the needs or deficit problem faced by the target group requiring a social intervention and later suggests a solution to the identified needs deficit. Therefore, the objective of this study is to:

- Evaluate the implementation of the LCHP in terms of the low-cost housing's internal physical criteria

Methodology

This study is based on positivist philosophy as it seeks to the view that only factual knowledge gained through observation. In this philosophy, the research conducted is limited to data collection and interpretation in an objective way. Therefore, the type of study undertaken for this research is of the descriptive type, which is one of the quantitative methods.

For this quantitative study, the descriptive survey approach was used to collect the needed information to achieve the research objective. Descriptive surveys are used to describe the current situation of the subject matter. Self-report technique is used to allow respondents to freely express their views and experiences about the house they live in.

The population in this study comprised all housing areas under the LCHP category built for the low-income group managed by either the federal or the state governments. Location selection is done by convenience sampling which is based on the comfort of the researcher. This technique allows the researcher to select items that are already available or ready to work with. In this study, Kuala Terengganu is the closest location to the researcher and the study was only carried out in Kuala Terengganu. Only the flat-type housing under the LCHP was chosen as the study sample. There were only six flat-type LCHPs around the Kuala Terengganu area. These six LCHP buildings were Flat Ladang Gemilang 2, Rumah Pangsa Mampu Milik (RPMM) Pulau Duyong, Perumahan Awam Kos Rendah (PAKR) Bukit Kecil 2, Perumahan Kondo Rakyat (PKR) Kuala Ibai, Rumah Pangsa Kampung Kolam, and Flat Gelong Bilal. According to the Housing Division, Terengganu State Secretary Office, most flat-type LCHPs have received criticism from the occupants due to the problematic internal physical qualities of the houses, compared to single-type or terrace LCHPs.

In this study, random sampling was employed to select the samples for the questionnaire survey. As a result, a sample of 325 households ($n=325$) was selected from a total of 1,745 housing units ($N=1,745$) based on Yamane's (1967) sample size formula. Of the

325 households, 88.4% were represented by Malays, followed by 8.8% Chinese and 1.2% Indians.

A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of questions about the dwelling unit features of the respondents' LCHP. Specifically, the questionnaire was distributed to the respondents to identify the consistency of dwelling unit features with the target group's needs. The elements of the dwelling unit features in the questionnaire were the number and size of rooms (namely, the master room, other rooms, living room, kitchen, and restroom/bathroom), building material quality, water supply, electrical power supply, and indoor airflow.

Research Findings

(1) *Number and size of rooms that fulfil the basic needs of families*

According to the Department of National Housing Malaysia (2020), one prioritised aspect of the LCHP construction is the size of the house. Generally, the floor width for a low-cost house should not be less than 60 square metres (covering three bedrooms, one living room, a kitchen, and separate bathrooms/restrooms).

Four of the six LCHPs involved in this study have three bedrooms, with only Flat Gelong Bilal and Rumah Pangsa Kampung Kolam providing two bedrooms for the occupants. Based on information from the Housing Division, Terengganu State Secretary Office, Flat Gelong Bilal was built in 1986 while Rumah Pangsa Kampung Kolam was built in 1988. In the year of the LCHP construction, the LCHP decided that the minimum design standard for each low-cost housing unit should have a floor width of no less than 550 to 600 square feet, at least two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a restroom/bathroom (Nor'aini, 2007). According to the Malaysian government in the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996–2000), the low-cost housing design has undergone changes in terms of the provision of two to three bedrooms with the addition of a dining room and laundry area (for washing and hang-drying clothes) in each housing unit. In this study, PKR Kuala Ibai, RPMM Pulau Duyong, PAKR Bukit Kecil 2, and Flat Ladang Gemilang 2 implemented the new Housing Design Policy with three bedrooms per housing unit.

Table 1

Consistency of number of rooms with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF NUMBER OF ROOMS WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Number of rooms strongly fulfils family's basic needs	5	1.5
Number of rooms fulfils family's basic needs	151	46.5
Number of rooms averagely fulfils family's basic needs	147	45.2
Number of rooms does not fulfil family's basic needs	19	5.8
Number of rooms strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	3	0.9
TOTAL	325	100.0

The results in Table 1 show that 46.5% of respondents agreed that the rooms in their houses are suitable and fulfil the basic needs of their families. Meanwhile, 5.8% and 0.9% of

respondents reported that the number of rooms in their dwelling do not fulfil their basic needs. Almost all the respondents expressing discomfort with the number of rooms are from Flat Gelong Bilal and Rumah Pangsa Kampung Kolam designed with two bedrooms. The respondents stated that the two bedrooms provided are not suited for a large household. Most respondents have three to five children. Taking into account the husband and wife, each household has at least five to seven occupants. Therefore, the two bedrooms provided by developers would not be able to house five to seven people. This lack of space is exacerbated when the household has parents (grandparents) living together with the nuclear family in the house.

Table 2

Consistency of master room size with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF MASTER ROOM SIZE WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Master room size strongly fulfils family's basic needs	7	2.2
Master room size fulfils family's basic needs	152	46.8
Master room size averagely fulfils family's basic needs	149	45.8
Master room size does not fulfil family's basic needs	17	5.2
Master room size strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	0	0
TOTAL	325	100.0

The width of each room also affects the quality of life of households and families. The study shows that respondent satisfaction with room size is dependent on the room type. The findings in Table 2 reveal that 46.8% of respondents agreed that their master room is comfortable and fulfils their basic needs. Normally, the master room is occupied by the husband and wife. Thus, they are satisfied with the main room and face no crowding. However, 5.2% of respondents were not satisfied with their room size as they consider their current master room small and cramped.

Table 3

Size consistency of Rooms 2 and 3 with family's basic needs

SIZE CONSISTENCY OF ROOMS 2 AND 3 WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Size of Rooms 2 and 3 strongly fulfils family's basic needs	5	1.5
Size of Rooms 2 and 3 fulfils family's basic needs	116	35.7
Size of Rooms 2 and 3 averagely fulfils family's basic needs	165	50.8
Size of Rooms 2 and 3 does not fulfil family's basic needs	36	11.1
Size of Rooms 2 and 3 strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	3	0.9
TOTAL	325	100.0

For the size of Rooms 2 and 3, approximately half of the respondents (50.8%) answered 'average' for whether the size of the rooms is appropriate and fulfils their basic needs (see Table 3). However, 11.1% and 0.9% did not agree with the statement. Most of

them who disagreed have large households. They are not comfortable with the cramped rooms that cause the feeling of constriction.

(2) Size of living room that fulfils family's basic needs

The living room is one important social element in a house. The living room functions as a space for individuals or families to rest for household members to have interactive development between themselves, and for them to conduct social gatherings (Fatimah, 2009). Zakiyah et al., (2004) also reported that the living room plays an important role for the host in preparing to welcome guests.

Table 4

Consistency of living room size with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF LIVING ROOM SIZE WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Living room size strongly fulfils family's basic needs	6	1.8
Living room size fulfils family's basic needs	106	32.6
Living room size averagely fulfils family's basic needs	170	52.3
Living room size does not fulfil family's basic needs	42	12.9
Living room size strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	1	0.3
TOTAL	325	100.0

Referring to Table 4, the study found that 52.3% of respondents 'averagely' agreed with the statement that their living room size is comfortable and fulfils family needs. They consider the size of the living room adequate as it is reasonable with the low cost of the house. On the other hand, 12.9% of respondents did not find the living room size of their dwelling agreeable. The typical LCHP living room size evidently does not satisfy the needs of inhabitants with a large family.

(3) Size of the kitchen that fulfils family's basic needs

The size of the kitchen is important as part of the family activity centres around the kitchen. The kitchen is not only used as a place for food preparation, but some members of the household also use the kitchen for family matters such as family discussions or interactions. Therefore, the kitchen assumes a crucial role in maintaining family well-being.

Table 5

Consistency of kitchen size with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF KITCHEN SIZE WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Kitchen size strongly fulfils family's basic needs	2	0.6
Kitchen size fulfils family's basic needs	75	23.1
Kitchen size averagely fulfils family's basic needs	145	44.6
Kitchen size does not fulfil family's basic needs	100	30.8
Kitchen size strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	3	0.9
TOTAL	325	100.0

Based on the LCHP's floor plan provided by the state government, the minimum width size of a kitchen is 5.5 square metres. According to Table 5, 44.6% of respondents 'averagely' agreed that the size of the kitchen in their homes is comfortable and fulfils family needs. Meanwhile, 30.8% and 0.9% of respondents were not satisfied with the kitchen size in their homes due to the unavoidable discomfort and its inability to fulfil family needs. The study found RPMM Pulau Duyong and PAKR Bukit Kecil 2 have no separate space for a kitchen. Hence, most of the respondents who did not agree with the kitchen size are living in those two LCHPs. Previous studies have also reported that the problem of a small kitchen size recorded a high number of unsatisfied occupants of LCHPs.

The problem of size or space of the kitchen should be attended to by LCHP developers. This is because the kitchen is an important social space for family development and well-being. One problem arising from the size of a kitchen is the difficulty in hosting celebrations or festivities. A cramped kitchen would cause congestion, thus dampening the spirit of celebration. It is not surprising, then, that celebrations are commonly held in halls.

(4) *Size of restroom/bathroom that fulfils family's basic needs*

The restroom is one internal physical characteristic that should be considered in the construction of a house. The restroom/bathroom for a low-cost house should be built inside the house. The toilet and sink can be placed either separately from or in the same location as the shower/bathtub.

Table 6

Consistency of restroom/bathroom size with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF RESTROOM/BATHROOM SIZE WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Size of restroom/bathroom strongly fulfils family's basic needs	4	1.2
Size of restroom/bathroom fulfils family's basic needs	93	28.6
Size of restroom/bathroom averagely fulfils family's basic needs	125	38.5
Size of restroom/bathroom does not fulfil family's basic needs	96	29.5
Size of restroom/bathroom strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	7	2.2
TOTAL	325	100.0

As presented in Table 6, the highest number of respondents (38.5%) 'averagely' agreed that their restroom/bathroom size fulfils their basic needs. However, 29.5% and 2.2% of respondents respectively did not and strongly did not agree with the statement. They remarked that their restroom/bathrooms are uncomfortable, too small, and cramped. The situation would become more unpleasant and chaotic especially in the morning when the inhabitants or the children would rush to bathe in preparation for work or school. They would also prefer a separate shower/bath area and toilet in their dwelling units.

(5) *Quality of building material that fulfils family's basic needs*

An important element in house construction is the building material. For the construction of quality housing, the house building material should consist of cement. However, the low-cost

housing building material is claimed to be of low quality as the mixture of sand is higher than cement (Zakiyah et al., 2004). Developers or contractors are more inclined to use cheap building materials to save costs in order to gain profit. The use of low-quality building materials would in turn cause the finished product to be defective. Sheelah et al. (2019) found that most low-cost housing inhabitants complained about the cracks in the wall; the leaking and cracking ceiling; and toilet water seeping into the bathroom due to the low-quality building materials used.

Table 7

Consistency of building material quality with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF BUILDING MATERIAL WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
The quality of building material strongly fulfils family's basic needs	5	1.5
The quality of building material fulfils family's basic needs	84	25.8
The quality of building material averagely fulfils family's basic needs	175	53.8
The quality of building material does not fulfil family's basic needs	58	17.8
The quality of building material strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	3	0.9
TOTAL	325	100.0

Table 7 reveals that 53.8% of respondents 'averagely' agreed with the quality of the building material. They stated that the building material quality meets their basic needs. Only 17.8% and 0.9% of respondents opined that the quality of building material strongly does not fulfil their family's basic needs. The building material is quite fragile to the respondents who disapproved of its quality.

(6) Water and electrical power supply that fulfils family's basic needs

Water supply is important for the daily schedule of an individual. Water is needed for cleaning, cooking, and drinking. The quality of the water supply also contributes to ensuring the health of individuals and families. In Terengganu, the water supply channelled to every house including the LCHP areas is provided by the Water Supply Department of Terengganu.

Table 8

Consistency of water supply with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF WATER SUPPLY WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Water supply strongly fulfils family's basic needs	12	3.7
Water supply fulfils family's basic needs	151	46.5
Water supply averagely fulfils family's basic needs	143	44.0
Water supply does not fulfil family's basic needs	17	5.2
Water supply strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	2	0.6
TOTAL	325	100.0

As recorded in Table 8, 46.5% of respondents reported that their dwellings do not face water supply problems. In other words, for almost half of the sample, water supply is

sufficient for daily use. Only 5.2% and 0.6% of respondents expressed that they face a water supply problem in their homes. They stated that the water supplied to their houses is inadequate and the slow water flow necessitates them to store water in barrels.

Table 9

Consistency of electrical power supply with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF ELECTRICAL POWER SUPPLY WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Electrical power supply strongly fulfils family's basic needs	12	3.7
Electrical power supply fulfils family's basic needs	159	48.9
Electrical power supply averagely fulfils family's basic needs	140	43.1
Electrical power supply does not fulfil family's basic needs	13	4.0
Electrical power supply strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	1	0.3
TOTAL	325	100.0

Other than water supply, the electrical power supply is also one social service needed in every home. Electrical power supply facilitates daily activities such as cooking, artificial lighting, and laundry processes. The electrical power supply is provided by Tenaga Nasional Berhad Malaysia (TNB) to all the LCHPs. Based on the findings in Table 9, the majority of respondents (48.9% and 43.1%) agreed that the electrical power supply they receive fulfils their family's basic needs. Only 4.0% and 0.3% of respondents reported facing electrical power supply problems at home. According to these disagreeing respondents, their electrical power supply is often interrupted.

(7) Indoor airflow that fulfils family's basic needs

The problem of indoor airflow is also reported by respondents as one problem they face. The comfort of air circulation in the house is linked to its building materials and house design. Normally, the temperature in a house, especially in low-cost housing in Malaysia, is higher than the temperature outside. This observation proves that the discomfort in relation to poor indoor airflow is not caused by the weather, but due to the weakness in the house design.

Table 10

Consistency of indoor airflow with family's basic needs

CONSISTENCY OF INDOOR AIRFLOW WITH FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS	RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED	(%)
Indoor airflow strongly fulfils family's basic needs	6	1.8
Indoor airflow fulfils family's basic needs	133	40.9
Indoor airflow averagely fulfils family's basic needs	165	50.8
Indoor airflow does not fulfil family's basic needs	20	6.2
Indoor airflow strongly does not fulfil family's basic needs	1	0.3
TOTAL	325	100.0

Table 10 highlights that 50.8% of respondents 'averagely' agreed with the statement that their indoor airflow is satisfactory. On the other hand, 6.2% and 0.3% of respondents reported their disagreement with the statement. The high number of housing units in one

place would cause the airflow in the house to be stifling. Daytime weather would make this problem worse. As a result, the inhabitants feel thermal discomfort.

Discussion

The study showed that the house design is an important criterion to fulfil the housing needs of the target group. The occupants' satisfaction in their homes' physical characteristics is at best average. This problem is seen as a problem of needs planning or needs assessment procedure, which contrary to its name, does not follow the needs of the target group. The findings indicated that the designer had paid less attention to a few critical design criteria, such as the building quality and thermal comfort. These defects are not in line with the National Housing Policy which emphasises good quality housing construction standards, low-cost or not.

Taking the Housing Policy in the United Kingdom (UK) as an example, the government has made the housing sector the main agent in national development and the main mechanism in the eradication of national poverty. The UK government added a number of quality internal physical characteristics of housing, as suggested in the 1946 *Report of Sub-Committee on Standards of Fitness of Habitation*, such as high-quality building materials, rooms built with good lighting (electrical power supply), restrooms/bathrooms that fulfil the household's basic needs, sinks with waste disposal, drainage that adheres to household needs, a storage room, and sufficient electricity and water supply.

The design aspect of a dwelling should also be seen as influencing the social development of a family. A practical, well-planned house interior that fulfils basic family needs should stimulate positive outcomes in life. For example, comfortable living conditions lead to harmony in a family. Inversely, a dwelling with a low-quality interior design causes negative stimulation among inhabitants. For instance, a cramped house causes stifling situations, congestion, and noisy environments. These environments then cause agitation, anger, unrest, and confusion among inhabitants. Nooriah (2019) and Sheelah et al., (2019) have also shown that one of the contributing factors to occupant stress in terms of quality of life is thermal discomfort, such as extreme temperatures, poor air circulation, and low-quality building materials.

Social disorganisation states that social problems occur due to a disorganised system and/or institution; a disorganised system can be characterised by bad and low-quality housing conditions that often cause social crimes to occur. Abd Hadi (2004) suggested that one preventive measure of social problems is through efforts to identify the social and physical surrounding that stimulates or encourages behavioural problems. A design inappropriate for family needs could lead to social crimes. In LCHP studies, one social problem often highlighted in low-cost housing areas is break-ins. Improper architecture with many corners out of sight facilitates break-ins by criminals.

One more issue highlighted in this study related to the findings concerns the role of a house and/or housing in family development. The National Housing Department Malaysia and other housing agencies involved in low-cost housing construction for the poor and the low-income group bracket should be committed to this role, which is not only limited to providing houses to fulfil individuals' basic needs but also to take into account the sociological and family development effects.

Closely related to issues of family development, one improvement action that could be undertaken by LCHP development and implementation agencies is to carry out the housing needs assessment procedure on target groups to build LCHP houses suitable for family needs. The houses' internal physical characteristics needed by the families could be identified by providing target groups with the opportunity to share their views or suggestions during the needs assessment process. The needs, problems, and improvement suggestions voiced out could be used as guides in developing and building an LCHP of higher quality. It is clear that the needs assessment procedure, considered a social programme planning instrument, could help developers in designing future national housing programmes that fulfil target groups' basic needs.

Conclusion

The government and housing developers should be more sensitive to the target group's housing needs. The internal physical characteristics of the houses should be in line with the basic needs of the target group. Efforts should be carried out to ensure the target group's housing needs are met; such efforts can be in the form of proper planning and evaluation involving the use of the needs assessment procedure. Social planners should conduct site visits to approach and enquire about the housing problems and needs of the target group from time to time to better formulate future housing programmes. With this effort, it is hoped the LCHP could improve the life quality and social development of deserving families.

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