Resident’s Perception on Foreign Workers Housing in High Rise Residential Building

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Abstract. High rise residential building has become a norm in the urban areas. In Malaysia, more than 30% of the urban population is currently living in stratified buildings, especially where urban land is scarce and expensive. Moreover, despite of landscape change and urbanisation process, there are several high rise properties in urban area that have been converted into foreign workers housing. It may affect the local communities and have a positive and negative impact to the social neighbourhood sustainability. Therefore, this study focuses on the residents’ perceptions of foreign workers housing on social aspects, and qualitatively finds the action taken by building management body in addressing the issues. The study was located at the one of high rise properties in Klang Valley, namely Mandy Villa Apartment. The questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were the techniques employed to collect data, and the findings revealed the problems affecting the comfort and quality of living among strata residents. In this sense, the management has taken several actions to solve the problems, therefore, the stakeholders have to oversee the misuse of strata unit for future sustainable living in the urban area.

1. Introduction

Malaysia’s rapid economic development has led to the increasing demand and supply in the labour force market. Malaysia has to depend on unskilled and inexperienced foreign workers to maintain certain economic sectors [1]. They are mainly engaged in 3D (dirty, demeaning, and dangerous) types of work [2, 3]. Hiring them is necessary due to critical labour shortage especially in construction, manufacturing, and industrial sectors [4]. The employment of foreign workers generates a higher productivity level and significant economic gain towards higher value-added activities [5]. It is therefore essential to recognise the importance of foreign workers’ influx in the Malaysia’s economic development.

Recent data from official report summarised that foreign workers represent around 15% of all employed persons in Malaysia [6] and almost 70% of all foreign workers in urban areas [7]. With many large infrastructure projects planned for Malaysia, it is predicted that the demand for foreign workers will remain high in the next few years. Protection of foreign workers aspects is one of the major issues that demand attention from various stakeholders [8]. In this aspect, employers are mainly responsible to manage the foreign workers’ need in Malaysia, which include providing accommodation for them [9]. Thus, it is necessary to provide adequate housing and better living conditions for foreign workers in all sectors.

However, the present law stipulates that only plantation companies must provide living quarters for foreign workers in Malaysia. Previous study found that the majority of foreign workers live in rented property or quarters in workplace provided by their employers [2]. Some employer unwillingness to provide housing and thus, foreign workers are setting up illegal settlements or became squatters. Therefore, some study reported that foreign workers live in less healthy physical environment and poor housing conditions at their workplace [2]. Employers thus have a challenging duty in protecting the rights and welfare of their employees in many aspects including housing.

Previous research on foreign workers in Malaysia mostly focused on their impacts positively or negatively in urban area or rural area [1], and although there were several studies attempted to examine issues relating to foreign workers [1, 2, 3, 8, 10], no serious efforts have been made to assess the locals perceptions in terms of foreign workers living nearby the residential areas. Therefore, this study focuses on resident’s perceptions of foreign workers housing that have been living in the high rise residential
building, and the management committee responsibilities in addressing the issue confront by them. Hence, this study is important in terms of giving a better understanding of foreign workers housing nearby local communities. This paper is organised as follows. The next section presents the literature review of empirical findings from previous studies, followed by sections presenting research method, result and discussion, and conclusion.

Malaysia is a popular destination for foreign workers from Asian countries, and it is compulsory for them to have working permit or other permission pass. Generally, foreign worker refers to an individual who works outside his or her motherland or origin country. In Malaysia, it solely refers to only semi-skilled or non-skilled labour [10]. Foreign workers are regulated through a series of immigration laws and regulations, supplemented by policies from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) which issues work permit, as well as labour law overseen by the Ministry of Human Resources (MHR). Employing the foreign workers come with bigger responsibilities compared to the locals [8], thus providing sufficient accommodations for them is necessary, especially in prime area like Klang Valley.

Living in apartment is considered as a safer housing trend due to better security control and the ownership concept itself. Strata Management Act 2013 (SMA 2013) and its counterpart, the Strata Management (Maintenance and Management) Regulations 2015 (SMRs 2015), function to regulate the management, control, and administration of a strata scheme development. However, landscape change and urbanisation process have caused much frustration for strata residents. There are many high rise properties in Klang Valley located close to factories and construction sites that have been converted illegally into workers’ hostels. In this case, many residents view the foreign workers as one of the social problems that affect their health, comfort and lifestyle.

Previous studies reported various effect of foreign workers to the locals, especially in developed countries and developing countries. Numerous complaints were made by the local urban residents regarding their “fear of invasion” of the foreigners with alien cultures in their neighbourhood [10]. Foreign workers living nearby residential areas affect the locals in terms of family and community relations, sense of belonging, safety, rental, and housing price [11]. It relates with social aspects towards enabling neighbourhood sustainability.

Social effect is defined as the results of community activities and the well-being of individuals and family life [12] related to changes in the value system, individual behaviour, family structure, relationship, collective lifestyle, security level, moral behaviour, creative expression, traditional ceremony, community organisation, economic benefit, opportunity in life, employment, education, health, social welfare, exposure to violence, traumatic symptoms, community issues, among others [13]. Meanwhile, social aspect is clustered into three elements, namely safety, health, and comfort that mainly affect an individual’s level of happiness [14].

Safety means free from threats [15]. Generally, the influx of foreign workers may impacts to the community and housing area either positive or negative. Some reported, foreign workers are often associated with unhealthy activities [11], while crimes that are typically committed by them include burglary, homicide, and snatch theft [15]. Burglary cases involving foreigners show the highest percentage compared to other crimes. Consequently, more locals have a negative perception towards foreign workers [11], and the residents within Klang Valley area are currently heavily experiencing such cases [15].

Health risk is one of the issues associated with illegal foreign workers. Legal immigrants are subject to medical examination, but illegal immigrants do not undertake health screening [16]. In 2016, Foreign Workers Medical Monitoring and Examination Agency (FOMEMA) reported that 10 out of 100 foreign workers have serious illnesses like tuberculosis, hepatitis B, and AIDS [17]. Illegal foreign workers who do not necessarily use legal procedures to enter Malaysia may potentially spread the diseases [18]. Therefore, as for the reason to ensure that only legal workers are allowed to live in the rented property.

Residents have to share facilities such as elevator, swimming pool, and cafeteria as common property. This situation tends to inflict the feelings of anxiety and fear for unsafe environment among the residents when there are foreign workers living in the same building [14]. There are some cases
reported they often disturbed the public orders by being drunk, fighting, making noise, and littering, hence causing discomfort among the locals residents [6].

2. Methods
This study was conducted in Klang Valley area, specifically at Mandy Villa Apartment. It is a middle-cost apartment nestled along Jalan Segambut in Segambut built on a leasehold land. It consists of four blocks with a total of 288 units. Mandy Villa Apartment is conveniently surrounded by various amenities such as school, shop, shopping complex, and mosque. In terms of accessibility, Mandy Villa Apartment is connected to Jalan Kuching, Middle Ring Road 2 (MRR2), North-Klang Valley Expressway (NKVE), Duta-Ulu Kelang Expressway (DUKE), and Sprint Highway. Facilities available include swimming pool, launderette, cafeteria, mini market, gymnasium, children playroom, and security system. It is equipped with 24-hour security with smart card access system and intercom system to guardhouse. Based on record, around 45 houses in the study area are currently occupied by foreign workers.

| Table 1. Background of Respondents |
|-----------------------------------|
| Variables | Number | Percentage |
|-----------|--------|------------|
| Gender    |        |            |
| Male      | 46     | 58%        |
| Female    | 34     | 42%        |
| Ethnic    |        |            |
| Malay     | 59     | 74%        |
| Chinese   | 14     | 18%        |
| Indian    | 7      | 8%         |
| Age       |        |            |
| 30 and below | 34   | 11%        |
| 31 - 50   | 33     | 56%        |
| More than 50 | 13   | 36%        |
| Occupation|        |            |
| Government| 31     | 39%        |
| Private   | 19     | 24%        |
| Others    | 30     | 38%        |

This study applied quantitative and qualitative research methods. First, quantitatively, in order to address the problem of foreign workers settlement on strata communities, face-to-face questionnaire survey were distributed to the local residents in the study area. A total of 80 respondents were selected from the total population using simple random sampling method. Table 1 shows the background of respondents. The data were analysed using Likert scale method, which is commonly used to capture respondents’ opinions and a suitable method to rank the analysed factors. In this study, it measured the “level of influence” to know the priority of social issues faced by the local residents.

Next qualitatively, the target respondents were property manager, assistant property manager, technician, security guard, cleaner, and selected residents in the study area using an interview form conducted in 2018. The interview form covers aspects related to the roles and functions of MC towards the social issues caused by foreign workers in the Mandy Villa Apartment. The collected data were analysed and interpreted in line with the research objectives. Data from interviews were analysed using content analysis to identify the actions taken by residents especially MC in managing the issues caused by foreign workers in their neighbourhood.

3. Results and Discussion
This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings from residents and MC on foreign workers settlement in strata housing development to better understand the current scenario of foreign workers who live in the nearby residential areas. The findings discuss the overall residents’ perceptions, problems faced by the locals on foreign workers housing and actions taken by MC towards this issue.

3.1 Overall Residents’ Perceptions on Foreign Workers Housing
Residents were gauged on their perceptions of foreign workers living at the Mandy Villa Apartment. Most respondents (94%) reported that foreign workers living in the same neighbourhood bring negative perceptions on various aspects, while only 6% of them agreed on the positive perceptions of foreign workers settlement in the study area. Accordingly, foreign workers are mostly active in the prayer room.

![Figure 1. Residents’s Perceptions of Foreign Workers at the Mandy Villa Apartment](image)

### 3.2 Resident’s Perceptions on Social Issues Caused by Foreign Workers

Social issues caused by foreign workers in this study are divided into three, namely safety, health and comfort. Table 2 shows the findings of survey on social problems raised by residents of the foreign workers housing the neighbourhood area, depicting that most respondents seldom raised the issues on comfortability and safety rather than health. Accordingly, respondents strongly agreed that the presence of foreign workers in the study area make them feel uncomfortable due to noise, drunkenness habit, and the fact that they have to share using elevator and swimming pool.

| Scale        | Index Range  | Social Cluster | Problem                     | Min Score |
|--------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Strongly Agree | 4.25-4.88  | Comfort        | Make noise                  | 4.84      |
|              |             | Comfort        | Sharing of elevator         | 4.76      |
|              |             | Comfort        | Discomfort                  | 4.71      |
|              |             | Safety         | Fighting                    | 4.63      |
|              |             | Safety         | Drinking                    | 4.51      |
|              |             | Comfort        | Sharing of swimming pool    | 4.41      |
| Agree        | 3.61-4.24   | Comfort        | Sharing of grocery shop     | 3.76      |
|              |             | Safety         | Burglary                    | 3.74      |
|              |             | Safety         | Theft                       | 3.71      |
|              |             | Comfort        | Sharing of cafeteria        | 3.66      |
|              |             | Comfort        | Less of cleanliness         | 3.61      |
| Slightly Agree | 2.97-3.60  | Safety         | Snatch theft                | 3.20      |
| Less Agree   | 2.33-2.96   | Comfort        | Sharing of prayer room      | 2.96      |
|              |             | Safety         | Promiscuity                 | 2.95      |
|              |             | Health         | Tuberculosis (TB) disease   | 2.90      |
|              |             | Health         | Influenza (H1N1 or H5N1) disease | 2.65 |
| Disagree     | 1.69-2.32   | Health         | Malaria disease             | 1.73      |
|              |             | Health         | Hepatitis disease           | 1.69      |
Additionally, respondents also expressed discomfort to share facilities in the common area such as grocery shop and cafeteria and pointed out the foreign workers’ tendency to be involved in crime cases such as burglary and theft. Residents also raised the issue on foreign workers’ habit to litter the environment, making the apartment less clean compared to previous years. Foreign workers simply litter and spit everywhere such as near the swimming pool, stairs, corridors and in the elevators.

On the other hand, results showed that respondents do not face any problems in sharing prayer room with the foreign workers as they are committed in taking care of the area and join the community during Islamic celebrations. Additionally, residents stated they are not worried about contagious diseases like Tuberculosis (TB), Influenza (H1N1 or H5N1), Malaria, and Hepatitis, thus demonstrating that health problems are insignificant to the local residents. Foreign workers in this apartment are registered and have undertaken health screening before entering Malaysia, therefore, health problems are not seen as highly serious and alarming as safety and comfortability problems.

3.3 Management Committee Responsibilities on Foreign Workers Issues
Management Corporation (MC) is established under the Strata Titles Act 1985 and conducted its duties similar as per the Strata Management Act (SMA) 2013 [20]. Accordingly, MC only consists of the strata owners. MC is mainly responsible in maintaining and managing the building, common property, and facilities of strata properties. In order to cater residential issues caused by the influx of foreign workers at the Mandy Villa Apartment, the management committee has considered several actions to be taken during the meeting. The MC enforces on security system, registration, inspection, and makes additional by-laws, under Section 32 and Section 70 of the SMA to handle problems related to foreign workers.

3.3.1 Enforce By-laws and Additional By-laws
In order to carry out the provisions laid as per the SMA (2013) efficiently, in the Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2017, the management committee has decided to enforce additional by-laws to cater specific situations on foreign workers issues. According to the agreement, owners can rent out their properties as foreign workers’ accommodation to the maximum number of six occupants per unit. Property owners and employers must practise due diligence to ensure this requirement is met. Due to this, only six access cards are issued by MC for them to enter the main lobby. However, a few residents found that the employers have breached the rule by way of illegally accommodating more than six occupants per unit. In this case, MC highlights that employers will be noticed about this rule once they come for tenant registration. They do not have the right on tenant agreement between owners and foreign workers’ employers. However, owners and residents have already been informed about this matter after AGM, in which the strata owners must comply and perform all of the by-laws’ and additional by-laws’ provisions. It also binds the tenants or occupiers to the same context, hence it is important to create an effective way to disseminate updated information to residents.

3.3.2 Proper Information System
Management committee relies on the appropriate data management. In the case of foreign workers, MC has decided to make the registration of foreign workers’ information compulsory. Owners are required to declare clearly if their units are rented out as foreign workers’ accommodation. Furthermore, employers also must register the details of employees accommodating the house. The MC has a proper system that keeps foreign workers’ information including passport, e-card, work permit, picture, and access card number; both original and photocopied documents. This enables the MC and security guards to monitor the foreign workers’ activities. It is also important for the purpose of further investigation on any issues logged by residents and who is in breach of any rules. On record, a total of 270 foreign workers are currently registered with MC, however, the number could be more because not all employers perform the registration. In this case, MC sends out reminder to owners to ensure the employers declare the status of their employees to avoid any unfortunate circumstances.
3.3.3 Improve Security System and Guard Services
Safety is another major concern and has always been the top priority among residents. For security services, the MC provides security patrol, intercom, and close circuit TV (CCTV) to monitor the activities within the strata property. There are seven security guards who work under a strict and systematic schedule, and entry security access is used to enhance the safety. For foreign workers, they are given only access card to reach the lobby area, and only six access cards are given to the unit that are occupied by foreign workers. Each level where foreign workers live are monitored frequently by security guards. Guard tour patrols are also there to monitor the apartment, and at the same time, MC holds a monthly meeting with the security company to review the security operations and any issues arising. Overall, majority residents are satisfied with the actions taken by MC on security system and guard services. MC, according to them, actively attends any reports by residents or security guards on any incidents on the breach of security.

3.3.4 Conduct Property Inspection
Inspection is regularly conducted at Mandy Villa Apartment according to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the properties rented out as foreign workers’ accommodation. According to MC, there are more than 200 foreign workers currently living in the apartment. In order to prevent the issue of illegal immigrants residing there, MC, with the cooperation from Immigrant Department and police also conduct investigations and perform operations and arrests. Foreign workers who do not appear in the record will be handed over to immigration department and their employers will be charged. This is to ensure the employers are in compliance with the rules set by the management on occupant limit, compulsory registration, among others. As stated in SMA (2013), the MC has the right to take actions against any individuals who breach the by-laws.

4. Conclusion
Foreign workers has the right to an appropriate accommodation; hence rules and regulations should be reasonable and non-discriminatory. The recruitment of foreign workers to cater the 3D works, which is dirty, difficult, and dangerous in Malaysia requires a proper accommodation provided by their employers. However, to a certain extent, their presence in urban housing area has led to discomfort among residents and caused other related social problems. This study concludes that the locals have negative perception by the presence of foreign workers. Residents fear on various social aspects, particularly on safety and comfortability. Although MC has performed its duties and responsibilities, the locals still feel uncomfortable to share facilities and common area, and fear on safety risk. Overall, the presence of foreign workers in the strata neighbourhood is not the best way to accommodate them. Employers should provide a proper accommodation suitable with the existing requirement to enhance the liveability of local residents. Considerations should also be made to create a more sustainable community in the high rise residential development.

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