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Housing Experiences of Pakistani Immigrant Labors in Malaysia

Zermina Tasleem¹, Mohd Na'eim Ajis², Nor Azizah Zainal Abidin³

¹Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)

²College of Law, Government and International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)

³School of Government (SoG), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)

Correspondence: Zermina Tasleem (zerminatasleem@gmail.com)

Abstract

This research considered housing experiences of Pakistani labors in Malaysia that is a main aspect in successful integration. The main focus was on housing rental market, the housing quality and the unfavourable health influences by insufficient housing. Little study was conducted on the housing experiences of Pakistani labor in Malaysia. A qualitative research with inductive approach was applied. Pakistani immigrant labors from Klang Valley were informants in this research. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews. The results indicated that immigrants have their housing more tough than predicted, mostly due to high costs. Immigrants were split about the quality of rental houses. Those who were satisfied could afford the house in private housing market. However, those immigrants who were not satisfied could not afford more suitable housing. They have issues of over-crowding, pest infiltration, damp properties. This research recommended that services of housing and settlement should deliver more direct support to new immigrants. Immigration settlement policies must ensure the presence of more affordable housing; employment opportunities that offer a satisfactory salary and quality programs and services to integrate new immigrants into the public.

Keywords: immigrant labor, housing quality, employment, immigration settlement

Introduction

The successful integration of immigrants depends on numerous aspects such as settlement services, adequate, suitable, and affordable housing, opportunities for employment with adequate income, the system of education and social networking (Teixeira and Drolet, 2018; Nightingale, 2016; Teixeira and Li, 2015; Yu, 2015; Kilbride, 2014). Among these aspects, housing is the main factor while studying the experiences of immigrants (Wayland, 2010; Francis and Hiebert, 2014). Affordable, suitable, and adequate housing are dominant as main routes for immigrants' economic, cultural, and social integration into the host society (Teixeira, 2017). Expensive housing markets is a challenge for new immigrants (Wayland, 2010). Thus, it is necessary to determine the challenges and barriers related with housing that interconnect with immigration type and how these interconnections influence the settlement experience of newcomers' in the form of labour market integration training, employment, language, social connections and health, at the foreign community level.

Moreover, immigration is a deeply challenging phenomenon in the whole world as it found since the beginning of mankind. Individuals prefer to migrate to other countries whose economies have rising in current periods. Thus, Asian immigrant shifted their destination from the Middle East to those Asian

states (IOM, 2010). Among South East Asian countries, Malaysia is one of the popular destinations for immigrant labors (Ajis et al., 2014). The immigrant workers in Malaysia is prominent in academic research since 1985 when government of Malaysia formulated First Industrial Master Plan (1985-1990). After 1990, Malaysian government encourage the immigrant labor because of the storage of labor (Reza and Subramaniam, 2018). According to Ministry of Human Affairs Malaysia, the number of immigrant labor were 2,135,035 in 2015 and it increase overtime. Immigrants labor from different countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan prefer to migrate to Malaysia because of rapid economic growth. The other magnetic aspects that become the reason for high immigrant flow in Malaysia are stable political situation, higher wages, harmonious community, better working and living environments (Fakhzan, 2011). Malaysia becomes a noticeable choice for immigration because of the close proximity. The immigration can be relatively easy as most of the immigrants are mainly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China and Thailand. Hence, they share the same ancestors, racial roots, cultures with many inhabitants of Malaysia in the form of Indians, Malays and Chinese (Shariff and Ghani, 2016). In the same way, most of Pakistani labor selected Malaysia because of its higher GDP per capita and its Muslim majority population (Sajid, 2010), a pattern that has led the Malaysian government to deliberate how to attract immigrants and presenting them different challenges and opportunities for settlement. In fact, Ministry of Home Affairs showed a continual increase of Pakistani immigrant labor inflow to Malaysia. The number of Pakistani immigrants labor in Malaysia were 26,229 in 2011 and rise to 50,662 in 2013 and 72,931 were found in 2015. Different push and pull factors are associated with the Pakistani immigrants labor in Malaysia. The main reason is better life standards and social economic condition in Malaysia. Poverty, unemployment, inflation, political instability, social insecurity, and religious prejudice is gradually increasing in Pakistan that push number of Pakistani for international migration (Khan, 2012). Within this scenario, it is necessary to study their experiences while living in Malaysia.

With this type of research, researcher is able to support policy-makers and other scholars in their valuation of current government initiatives and update policy makers about improvements and changes that are compulsory to ease the settlement of immigrant labors in the host countries. While, the researchers had studied the experiences, issues and challenges of immigrants labor migrated from Indonesia, Bangladesh, Japan and other countries to Malaysia (Balakrishnan, 2013; Killias, 2014; Andreovski and Lyneham, 2014; Stapa et al., 2013; Dannecker, 2013; Reza and Subramaniam, 2018) but very little are studying Pakistani immigrant labor and their housing barriers or challenges in Malaysia. Moreover, the researches made on immigrants labor in Malaysia were discussing the issue of high salary/wages, major workforce (Ajis et al., 2014), better job opportunities (Baum, 2012), labor shortages (Mei, 2006), reduce transaction costs and encourage foreign direct investment (Enderwick, Tung, and Chung, 2011), gain occupational skills (Ruhanen, 2009), imparting different lifestyles and culture, increase the volume of imports of host-countries (Fakhzan, 2011), problems in human resource management (Janta, 2010; Connell and Burgess, 2009), Lower wages/low skilled (Sadi, 2015) and other issues and Challenges of immigrant Labors in Malaysia (Shariff and Ghani, 2016).

Thus, doing research on the experience of Pakistani immigrant labor in Malaysia will provide an evidence-based knowledge about the topmost countries in the field of immigration that is related to public administration. It attempts to recommend a partial solution for the settlement of Pakistani immigrant labour in Malaysia that will indicate strategies for the Malaysian policies planners.

Literature Review

Literature review identified many common issues related with immigrant settlement and housing, also issues associated with the entrance of immigrants in the housing market, the housing quality and the unfavourable health influences by insufficient housing also immigrant preferences about housing location (Teariki, 2017; Hanley et al., 2019; Fanjoy et al., 2005; Texeira, 2007, 2017; Robinson et al., 2007, 2010; Murdie, 2008; Netto 2011; Fozdar, & Hartley, 2014; Flatau et al., 2015; Vargas-Silva, 2013; Asselin et al., 2006; Mustapa, 2014; Krieger, 2010; Baker et al., 2013; Howden-Chapman et al., 2012, 2013; Bierre et al., 2013; Beckhusen et al., 2012).

While immigrants are migrated to the host country, they are expected to arrange different measures to safe their housing. This issue is mostly faced by the non-skilled labour as they have fewer financial resources. Thus, one of the serious factors that involve in the entrance of immigrants in the housing market is affordability. (Robinson et al., 2007; Netto 2011; Fozdar, & Hartley, 2014; Howden-Chapman, 2013; Bierre et al., 2013). Most of the scholars who do research specially on housing such as Baker et al. (2013), Howden-Chapman (2013), Bierre et al. (2013), Murdie (2008) and Flatau et al. (2015) have claimed in favour of programmes and policies to rise the proportion of affordable and social houses. Bierre et al (2013) and Howden-Chapman (2013) also viewed that council and state tenants have a significant influence in community renewal.

In United Kingdom, researches related with immigrant's settlement and housing reveals that some economic issues mainly affordability and many other factors effects on the immigrant tendency to cover spaces in the housing of stock that is left behind by local people (Robinson et al., 2007). Furthermore, Robinson et al., (2010) determined that the immigrant unwillingness to go to search housing in other place showed their concerns about how they are treated in places with few stories of differences and diversity. Regardless of these limitations, Robinson et al., (2007) have claimed that these immigrants could and did workout greater options about house location as they protected funds through their settlement. Study from Canada also showed how discernment in the housing market influences some immigrant more than others. Teariki (2017) studied the settlement and housing experiences of immigrants in Canada. By collecting the data from 80 immigrants from Kamloops and Kelowna, Teariki (2017) explored that immigrants had housing problem such as unfamiliarity with the Canadian housing system, unexpectedly high costs. Some of immigrants depend on government-sponsored ones or local community organizations to search the job and accommodation.

In general, the housing quality has been determined to be a significant factor in the well-being and health of households. This result has vital suggestions for new immigrants who frequently go at the economical end in the rental housing market and those who have to tolerate insufficient housing situations. While most of the immigrants may make the change because of housing, those families with less earnings may determine themselves stuck in unfavourable housing quality for long duration, with over generations (Robinson et al., 2007; Teariki, 2017; Haller et al., 2011). Although household salary has been found as a significant factor in defining the real routine living standards of immigrant families.

In distinction to the high proportion of harmony among scholars on the relation among damaging health effects and insufficient housing, the issue related with immigrant's decision about their living was considered by significant discussion. Although there was wide-ranging contract among scholars (Robinson et al., 2007; Hanley et al., 2019; Texeira, 2007, 2017) that a numerous key features impact on immigrant decision about their living (such as closeness to family, discernment in the rental housing market and employment), there was comprehensive discussion on the influence of ethnically focussed housing on integration and socially connectivity.

Overall, the literature review on the settlement emphasised that housing has a significant role in manipulating the settlement outcomes and experiences of immigrants. Although the literature review of the settlement emphasised an increasing knowledge base on the relation among the housing quality and settlement satisfaction, little research was made in Malaysia specifically related with Pakistani immigrants and internationally on the trail of immigrants housing and, in specific, the features that are manipulating the immigrants housing locations.

Methodology

An interpretivist approach is used in this research as it involves social phenomena. This approach includes wide variation of intellectual suggestion that is applying qualitative method to examine social phenomena. Among the different interpretivist approaches, phenomenology approach was appropriate for this study. Qualitative research methodology was selected for determining the settlement experiences of Pakistani immigrant labors in Malaysia. The objective of this research is to know the

experiences of Pakistani labor about housing rental market, the housing quality and the unfavourable health influences by insufficient housing. The data was collected between June to October 2018 through semi-structured interview and snowball sampling technique was applied. This research covered Pakistani immigrant labors working in Klang valley of Malaysia as the main focus area. Klang valley is serving as a major destination for immigrants and has appeared as the industrial, commercial, educational and administrative hub in Malaysia. Klang Valley covering Kuala Lumpur and the four adjacent regions in Selangor (Tey, 2017). It is demonstrated to be the most vulnerable zone. Researcher develop semi-structured interview from the literature review. The interviews were related with what housing services are found for the settlement of immigrants; different issues that immigrants faced while settling; the situation of house; through which channel they find house; with the passage of time either the situation of house improve; what would be suitable for supporting their settlement. The items of interview were revised with the help of experts. Also, informants have full authority to discuss and comment on any item which they felt ambiguous or unclear. Research stop to collect the data at point of saturation. This point came after twenty third interview.

Results and Discussion

Data is analysed by thematic analysis and it was found that immigrants have their housing more tough than predicted, mostly due to high costs. All the informant raised a theme that is cost of renting in Malaysia. Mostly informants mentioned that the cost of renting act as ‘shock’ as it tough for them to pay the rent and fulfil their basic necessities within a minimum cost. As the view of one of the participants was

“.... When I first time talk about the rent that how much I have to pay? They replied and I get shocked. Eight hundred something to One thousand. Oh brother... how would I pay this? In your home country, \$300 to 400 rent is common... then as I started my work and job, I met many Pakistani. We decided to live together and share the rent. In this way, we manage the rent of house...” (interview 4).

On the other hand, when researcher questions about the search of housing rental market than ten informants told a significant assistance and support, they got from the other Pakistani who already work in Malaysia. Informants told how they used word-of-mouth and able to find rental house for them. In this way, they help them in finding the rental market. Informant told that these Pakistani used their own social links with locals to find the availability of rented houses. The main considerations that informants have in their mind were affordability and distance from job place.

“My cousin... he arranged my accommodation in his home.” (interview 5)

“My agent... arranged a house where I live with other Pakistani labor” (interview 7)

“In the start I lived in agent rented house. But it was overcrowded and dusty. With the passage of time, I make contact with other Pakistani immigrants. I asked him about a rented house... one of them help me. We met many landlords but they were demanding high rent almost five hundred to seven hundred. My salary was low as compare to rent. I have to fulfil basic necessities, send money to my home.... I was worried than he asked me why you worried? I told him my problem.... In his house, there was a free room... thus, he rented that room for me.” (interview 2)

Informants experienced “culture shock” in housing. Regarding housing, informants described a gap among their expectations and reality. They thought that the housing in Malaysia would be easy and affordable but it proved insufficient. Informants raised a voiced

“I expected cheap housing in Malaysia but here the costs of housing are very high. Here it is not easy to have a house or apartment also it is not easy to pay the rent of an apartment” (interview 14).

Moreover, all the informants voiced their satisfaction with housing. Nevertheless this, informants were split about the quality of rental houses. Informants who had highest satisfaction level regarding the rental houses were two informants who had relatives there in Malaysia. Four informants who had practiced rising labour market mobility could arrange a good condition rental housing. No one were in a government-sponsored or local community administrations houses. All the participants were rented their houses in private rental market.

“I am happy with the condition of house. My cousin’s family is there. We clean the house on regularly basis.” (interview 5)

“The weather is very hot but we are lucky our agent arranged airy house”. (interview 7)

On the other hand, four informants had minimum salary level. They had not enough money to arrange more adequate housing and shifted to higher rental properties house. They viewed the poor housing condition. The common issues were over-crowding, pest infiltration and hot and damp properties.

“oh the house is too small and we eight are living together in one house with two room, one living and one bathroom”. (interview 3)

“The issue inside there is the condition of house that is too bad... the flow of water in washrooms and kitchen is very slow. Many times, we asked landlord to resolve this. But till yet, he didn’t arrange a plumber. this is the reason I always search for a house”. (interview 1)

“I am planning to shifted to another house... this house is too hot” (interview 6)

“There are mosquitos and small worms in my home.” (interview 12)

In general, informants from different areas raised almost same problems and challenges, however there were some changes. Mostly informants were living in big apartment, few of them raised their concerns about crowded houses. More of informants were satisfied with the help of already living Pakistani immigrants. Researcher noted that more of informants told about the condition of house that had to be improved with the passage of time. The results cannot illuminate whether these differences in views are linked with the relatively low housing cost or any other factor. However, they recommend some instructions for future researches.

Regardless of high cost of housing, current immigrants are engrossed to Malaysia for better quality of life, peaceful and Islamic environment. Although there may not be engrained ethnic groups of nationals to assistance them settle, mostly immigrants have link with someone (friends, relatives, agents or employers) before coming. These social networks played influential part in helping the new immigrants in searching a place to live. This pattern of settlement is corresponding with the results of different researches made in many countries which determines that new immigrants depend profoundly on their informal social networks while adjusting to economic, cultural, and social environment of host country (Pendakur, 2017; Preston et al. 2014; Wayland, 2010; Teixeira 2014).

Moreover, most of the informants give the idea to have faced a culture shock when reach in Malaysia regarding the search of affordable jobs or housing that harmonised with their qualifications and skills. They explained a gap between their expectation and reality as they expected adequate and cheap housing, more employment opportunities, good salary, support of government on arrival. Thus, they

suggested that more information should be presented to interested immigrants in Malaysia, along with linking to particular housing and settlement services.

It is recognised that Malaysia can get advantage from immigration. Thus, different immigration policies must amend accordingly in attracting and retaining immigrants. Policies should base on the accessibility of more affordable and sponsored housing; opportunities for job that is related to qualifications of immigrants which offer a suitable income; and quality programs and services to assimilate new immigrants into the public.

Conclusion

In general, the search process of housing for informants in Malaysia was not satisfactory because of their low salary with respect to housing costs, insufficient housing information, the shortage of cheap housing with adequate rooms, and lack of access to administrations specific to housing assistance. Though settlement agencies for immigrants exist in Malaysia which provide different employment and language services, very few of them give knowledge about rental housing market and offer housing services. Recommendations are mostly given to local conventional community administrations that have little knowledge about the challenges and issues of settlement that are tackled by new immigrants. It is also found that immigrants who are living from several years are oblivious of these administrations and their services. It is needed to better broadcasting of information about administrations agencies and their services. Past researches determined that few conventional administrations proposed particular housing services that deliver assistance and information to new immigrants related with real estate market (Teixeira 2014; Preston et al. 2014; Firang, 2018). This gap of service is a main hurdle in fulfilling the accommodation requirements of a gradually rising and culturally miscellaneous immigrant people. Mainstream administrations should develop more interest in fostering a convivial and broad community for new immigrants.

Regardless of several efforts of local community organizations and government to assist in settlement and integration of new immigrants in Malaysia, more work is needed to accommodate new immigrants. More effort is needed to give access to housing programs and information (Teixeira 2009). A research is needed to determine why most of the new immigrants do not generally depend on service administrations in the start on their settlement mainly in the search for their housing. Researchers such as Preston et al. 2009; Teixeira 2014; Hiebert and Sherrel 2009 noted the absence of housing labors in settlement agencies in different countries. Government should play its role while delivering information about the challenges of providing further affordable housing in Malaysia, whether by subsidy reasonably priced housing construction, empowering discussion among renters and landlords, collaborating with designers, or by supporting public organizations. Policy-makers in conjunction with the local community organizations and private sector should develop different strategies to enhance housing affordability and options and to improve immigrant integration and settlement in Malaysia.

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