

## URBAN HIGH-RISE PUBLIC HOUSING FOR SQUATTER RESETTLEMENT: DESA MENTARI AS A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract.** Squatter settlements have long been negatively stigmatised in Malaysia, where their image is politically and morally unacceptable against an urban backdrop. In the 1980s, 90s and the early Noughts, Kuala Lumpur sent through rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, resulting in the extensive demolition of squatter settlements for new mega-developments. With the launching of the Zero Squatters 2005 program, former squatter dwellers were relocated into low-cost high-rise public housing, with no concerns about the impacts. This paper will discuss the characteristics of these public housing for former squatter dwellers. Due to its characteristics as low-cost high-rise residential complexes for relocated former squatter dwellers, Desa Mentari was selected as a case study. The data was analysed against the five domains of the Infrastructure of Everyday Life: home and neighbourhood, enjoyment, sources of support, having a say and making ends meet. It was found that the development of Desa Mentari only meets the minimum requirements, bad design, a poor physical environment and inadequate facilities and services, which lead to frustrations and ultimately contribute to other social problems in the neighbourhood. The work conclusively argues that planning and housing policy should be informed by the daily life needs and activities of specific groups within society.

**Keywords:** *Urban public housing, low-cost, squatter resettlement.*

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### 1. Introduction

Squatter settlements in Malaysia or *squatter settlement* as they were locally known to have long been negatively stigmatised. These shanty-like dwellings were originally built in squalid environments, with some provided with paved roads and other facilities such as community halls, prayer halls (surau) and temples, mainly out of necessity, on humanitarian grounds, and to prevent the outbreak of diseases (Yeoh, 2001). Despite lacking physical structures and facilities, the environment resembles that of villages in rural areas and is usually homogenous as they are segregated according to ethnicity, with the majority belonging to the lowest income groups. Consisting mostly of kin and friends from rural areas, it creates a place that is "familiar and supportive at times of difficulties" (Nadarajah, 2007b) and a sense of belonging among dwellers. Nevertheless, this way of living is politically and morally unacceptable against an urban backdrop and is considered backward (Bunnell, 2002). These slum areas are seen as problematic, associated with being breeding grounds for crimes, social ills such as drug abuse and alcoholism, and even prostitution (Nadarajah, 2007a; b; 2007; Bunnell, 2002). This perception has been the basis for the 'problematising' behind the major eradication of these settlements in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, and its shanty-like appearance does not fit the modern image of the major cities (Abdul Aziz, 2020).

Selangor then introduced the Squatter Zero 2005 program that aimed to improve the lives of squatter settlement's dwellers and ensure that every state resident owns a house. It also aimed to be a developed state by 2006, which meant that no squatter settlement existed within the state.

With no concerns about the impacts, former squatter dwellers were relocated into low-cost high-rise housing, and their customs and habits entrenched in the squatter settlement were found unsuitable for their new home. This issue was further highlighted in 1997 after the tragic accident of a technical assistant killed by a brick thrown out from one of the blocks, leading to an awareness campaign to educate flat-dwellers on appropriate means of disposing of garbage (Bunnell, 2002). Despite similar cases reported in Petaling Jaya and Penang, these dwellers' inability to adapt to this type of dwelling further drew attention. As more relocation programs were developed and implemented, the rationale behind relocating former squatters' dwellers into high-rise flats remained uncontested. These incidents did little to create awareness among stakeholders, and the behaviour was entirely blamed on the 'kampung' values and mentality that they brought with them (ibid). Although there is some truth to the claims, the developers and local authorities are partly accountable. The housing was developed to minimal requirements, comparatively smaller than their former dwelling, and was described as 'pigeon holes' and 'chicken coops' due to the size and structure of the buildings (Sufian & Mohamad, 2009; Bunnell, 2002; Yeoh, 2001). The demolition of these squatters was under the impression that they were breeding grounds for criminal activities and social ills, in addition to their uninhabitable conditions. For that reason, this program was regarded as an effort to improve and elevate the quality of life of former squatter dwellers. Nonetheless, a relocation program that was developed for all could not resolve varied issues and concerns faced by different communities. For Desa Mentari, racial tension between the Malays and Indians was the primary concern (Abdul Aziz, 2020). Thus, this program is found incompatible with this community and does not provide them with the quality of life they were promised.

### ***1.1 Research Aim***

This paper aims to fill in the gap regarding the physical, social, and cultural characteristics of urban high-rise public housing for squatter resettlement in Malaysia. It attempts to describe the conditions of the dwellings based on a study of the Desa Mentari Development in Selangor. The research would like to address the gap in knowledge of the living conditions of the public housing resettlement. The research will explore the sizes and densities of spaces in the public housing resettlement, to assess the dweller's safety, health and well-being, including the basic infrastructure (living spaces, utilities, rubbish disposal, and others) provided to make the dwelling environment liveable.

## **2. Research Background**

### ***2.1 Squatter relocation to high-rise mass public housing as a strategy***

The Malaysian government has been relocating evictees into low-cost houses and apartments since the 1980s. They were placed in temporary transit shelters known as *rumah panjang* (longhouses) for six months to two years whilst the government develop new low-cost housing. As these shelters are transient, their make and structure were poorly constructed using poor and hazardous building materials such as asbestos,

plywood and zinc (Ismail, 2005). Apart from that, basic facilities and infrastructure such as proper roads, proper sanitary and drainage systems, communal spaces and utilities, were not provided. However, due to the government's failure to meet demands, these shelters eventually became permanent residences, some residing for more than 20 years (Ali, 1998; Bunnell, 2002). This failure led to the appointment of the private sector to develop these low-cost developments. Unfortunately, these developments too fell short of the target of providing low-cost housing according to what was required. Furthermore, there was a rise in medium and high-cost housing development, more than demanded (Ali, 1998). As the built environment is a profit-driven industry, the private sector and the government were not interested in this type of development as it earned little financial returns. Inevitably, the poor communities were affected by the situation, and they had no choice but to remain in the shabby longhouses as they could not afford to rent elsewhere. These temporary settlements would later become slums resembling where the squatter dwellers had formerly resided.

With the launch of the Selangor Zero Squatter 2005 Program, a succession of major evacuations were enforced and Former squatter dwellers were relocated into transit flats while waiting for their new settlements. After the permanent housing is completed and evictees moved in, these transit flats are rented to other lower-income groups that were not part of the program, with a monthly rate of RM124. The relocation was in phases and, by 2004, most of the evictees had been relocated successfully to their new homes. These low-cost housing projects, named *Program Perumahan Rakyat (PPR) Bersepadu (Integrated People Housing Program)*, were developed to relocate mainly former squatter dwellers throughout Kuala Lumpur and major cities in Selangor. PPR was also established in other states such as Pulau Pinang, Perak, Sabah and Sarawak. These projects consisted of one-storey and double-storey low-cost terrace houses, or 11- to 12-storey and 16- to 18-storey low-cost high-rise flats (Sufian & Mohamad, 2009). However, the former is located on the outskirts of major cities, making it harder for dwellers who work in the city centre to travel. Meanwhile, the multi-storey flats were located in the areas where their former squatter settlements were previously situated. All types of housing have the same standard size of 60-meter square. These consist of three bedrooms, a living area, a kitchen, a bathroom and a toilet (National Housing Council, 2011).

## **2.2 *Integrated People Housing Program (Program Perumahan Rakyat Bersepadu (PPR))***

This program was enforced by the Selangor Government primarily to relocate former squatter dwellers due to the demolition of squatter settlements, an action taken to achieve the Zero Squatters 2005 program in Selangor (Sufian & Mohamad, 2009). According to Ismail (2005), the PPR is a fast-track project under the Seventh Malaysian Plan regarding the decision made by the National Economic Action Council in December 1998 to speed up development to stimulate economic growth through the construction sector, specifically in low-cost housing developments. In an attempt to solve the squatter issue, the government provided houses to be sold and rented out to former squatter dwellers, in which the Federal Government bore the construction cost, and the houses were developed by the State Government. Since this was a fast-track project, some regulations and conditions of the land development process were waived to ensure timely completion. Former squatter dwellers earning less than RM1500 per month were the primary target group (Sufian & Mohamad, 2009), and the housing units

are in the form of 11- to 12- storey and 16- to 18- storey high-rise flats in major cities and five-storey flats in suburban areas. The housing unit can be rented for RM214 per month or purchased for RM42, 000 per unit. Nevertheless, the government subsidised RM7000 out of the total unit price, allowing the qualified recipient to purchase the housing unit for RM35, 000.

### **3. Methodology**

Based on the background and existing issues, this research employs the qualitative method with Desa Mentari as the study site due to its characteristic as a squatter relocation settlement, and its community as the unit of analysis. Interviews were the main method of primary data collection, combining structured and semi-structured questionnaires, utilising open-ended and focused style questions that guide respondents to their personal or expert knowledge, and allow them to express their opinions. A semi-structured format allows a wide range of subject to be covered by the interviewer. The questions are in a more general form but the interviewer also is able to vary the sequence of the questions (Bryman, 2008). One of the advantages of this format is that it allows the interviewer to ask further impromptu questions in response to the replies given by the respondents. On the other hand, a structured format poses questions that are usually specific and the respondents are offered a fixed range of answers. This process took over six months to conduct, ranging from formal one-on-one interviews to focus groups involving selected respondents applicable to the research. The interview questions were pre-designed to gather findings concerning the physical living conditions, safety and crime, infrastructure and amenities, the contribution or lack of from authorities or other agencies, and management and maintenance.

Generally, samples for qualitative researches are much smaller as compared to quantitative researches. According to Ritchie et al. (2003), there is a point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample, as the study goes on more data does not necessarily lead to more information. This is because one occurrence of a piece of data is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. In addition, qualitative research is very labour intensive, thus, analysing a large sample is often impractical and time consuming. Therefore, qualitative samples often “lie under 50” respondents (ibid), or between 30 and 50 (Morse, 1994). With that said, for the purpose of this research, forty-three (43 nos) respondents from the community took part in the interviews, and an additional 13 professionals respondents. The professionals' selection is based on their field of expertise relevant to the research, such as the federal and local authorities handling the squatter resettlement, NGOs working with the community, academicians who have researched these communities, and the District Police Chief. The gatekeeper, a social worker from the Social Strategic Foundation - an NGO that works closely with the Indian community, introduced the first 13 Indian respondents from Desa Mentari. The selected respondents have previously volunteered on a research conducted by the foundation. They were former squatter dwellers from Kampung Ghandi and Kampung Muniandy, and temporary long houses in Kampung Lindungan.

The second gatekeeper, the Indian community representative who was among the 13 interviewed, later introduced some of the remaining respondents. The author also personally approached other respondents from the community while conducting the field work. The community respondents range from the family's head, family members,

and leaders of the residents' associations. Following the first leg of the fieldwork, it emerged that some community members unapproachable and unwilling to be interviewed due to their lack of trust in outsiders. Accordingly, the author organised focus groups for individuals more comfortable in group settings. Therefore, two focus groups were arranged, one with teenagers (both Malays and Indians) and another with the Malay community, consisting of 12 respondents per group.

The transcribed data were then coded by sentence or paragraph where the significant phenomena are pulled out from a sentence and later revisited for a more detailed analysis. They were reviewed after the coding process, and related data were systemised and grouped according to themes. For example, all recurring themes were arranged under two main groups: The Community and The Professionals. Overlapped data from the main groups were accumulated into four major themes: community issues, physical attributes, racial issues and authority's attitudes. These were then cross-referenced and validated with data from journal articles. This process is known as thematic coding.

### 3.1 The Infrastructure of Everyday Life

The data from two main groups of community and professional were analysed based on the five domains of the Infrastructure of Everyday Life: (i) home and neighbourhood, (ii) enjoyment, (iii) having a say, (iv) sources of support and (v) making ends meet. It was first developed as a concept focusing on women's everyday conduct and routines, and committed "to create material and socio-cultural support structures – the infrastructure of everyday life" (Gilroy & Booth, 1999). The concept centres on the functional spatial arrangements in which work and childcare options are structured and composed within the residential development. It also criticised the traditional methods of urban planning policies, the lack of participation, the gap in finding solutions that centralised on issues of everyday life issues, and the depreciation of voluntary work such as caring by society (Horelli *et al.*, 1998). Formerly, the fundamental components of housing, work and care in a community were separated, whereas it should be incorporated into the neighbourhoods by merging the management of space and time of the dwellers' everyday routine with working, caring and relaxing feasibly (Abdul Aziz, 2020). To accomplish this, it is essential to understand the nature of daily life and its establish means to respond to people's needs. The Infrastructure of Everyday Life features five domains that apply to all, which are as follow:

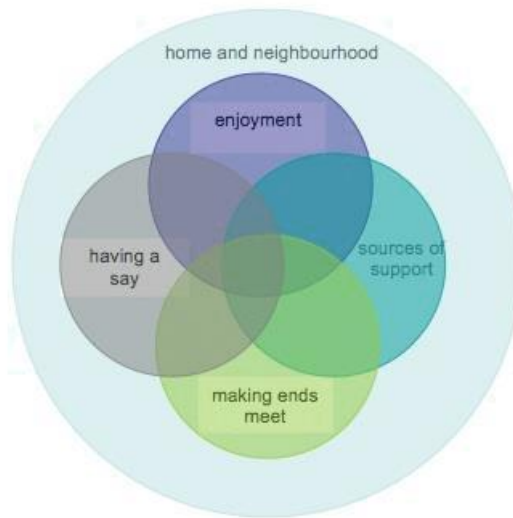
**Table 1.** The domains of the Infrastructure of Everyday Life

Domains	Descriptions
Home and Neighbourhood	Services and facilities, the neighbourhood's living conditions, and its surrounding environment.
Having a Say	Rights to be heard, participation in any decision making concerning the community.
Sources of Support	Religious and emotional support, friends and family, community network
Enjoyment	Infrastructure for socialising, religion and culture
Making Ends Meet	Affordable services and goods, employment

However, Gilroy (2008) reiterated that the four domains (sources of support, having a say, enjoyment and making ends meet) are embedded in the home and neighbourhood domain, the center of the framework, therefore should not be separately evaluated. Any



issues regarding home and neighbourhood were analysed accordingly within the four domains.



**Fig. 1.** The four domains are ingrained within the home and neighbourhood's domain (Speak, 2012).

The Infrastructure for Everyday Life concept was chosen for analysis because of its holistic approach to neighbourhood and community planning. It is invaluable as it is adaptable to the contexts of different areas and types of communities. It does not employ a fixed guideline as this could sometimes be restrictive. Alternatively, it provides a 'manual for good practice' (Horelli *et al.*, 1998) using projects from EuroFem as examples. Foremost, although initially it was developed with women in mind, all the community members will benefit from the concept's approach to spatial development.

The negative effect on the dwellers upon relocation to Desa Murni has been a source of concern in this study. This includes racial conflicts and the breakdown of the community structure. At its core, this approach focuses on diplomatic planning methods that consider the diverse natures of religion and culture of a multiracial community. It offers solutions for neighbourhood developments that employ supportive infrastructure for everyday life in an environmentally friendly neighbourhood, with employment and services for communities regardless of age and gender. Apart from that, it allows and encourages community participation in voicing out their concerns, issues, and needs regarding their neighbourhood. A multiracial community consists of people from various religious backgrounds and cultures and therefore have different ways of living their daily lives and activities. As a result, it is vital to understand the nature of these communities before developing strategies for them to coexist and survive together by integrating religions and cultures with homes, work and care. The followings explain each domain of this concept:

### *3.1.1 Enjoyment*

This domain comprises all active and enjoyable social activities, including spiritual, religious and cultural activities. It could be accomplished by providing residents with facilities that allow them to openly practise their beliefs and hold religious classes and sermons (mosques and temples). Public spaces, such as recreational areas, open squares and community halls; should also be provided within the vicinity for

social activities, festive celebrations and weddings. Basic and adequate facilities were allegedly provided for Desa Mentari. However, during the interviews with the community, it was found that it was not the case. These facilities and spaces are essential in promoting healthy lifestyles by encouraging residents to be active and relax if such spaces are provided. In addition, this domain acknowledges the residents' right to practice their religious beliefs, enabling the community to respect and learn each other's cultures and faiths and celebrate the diversity.

### *3.1.2 Having a say*

Having a say consists of participation during the decision-making process that could affect the community. Both community and professionals were asked regarding the community's involvement in the decision-making of their new homes prior to the relocation. This includes data on the relocation process and why they were relocated. When developing new settlements for relocated low-income groups, they need to be included during the design process as only they understand the issues and needs of their community.

### *3.1.3 Sources of support*

Sources of support include both formal and informal support offered and provided for the community, such as health facilities, policing, neighbourhood watch, and transportation, while informal support from family members, acquaintances, and social networks. Respondents were asked about insufficient facilities and services, living conditions, needs, and relationships with the authorities, including the police. Regarding informal support, questions were asked about issues faced by the community as well as why and how they occurred. For example, teenagers were accused of antisocial behaviours and other social issues in the neighbourhood, which was blamed on the lack of control and monitoring from their parents as well as the physical design of their flats that makes it difficult to monitor children's activities.

### *3.1.4 Making ends meet*

This domain analyses how the residents' incomes can be increased. It can be realised by assisting eligible community members in developing home-based businesses. For instance, attempts have been made to set up food stalls in and around the neighbourhood in order for them to earn extra money. However, fines were given out to them instead by the local authority as it is illegal. In some cases, the local authority should be lenient and offer assistance in obtaining permits or developing plans and programs to help residents start small part-time businesses.

## **3.2 The case study area**

Desa Mentari, Petaling Jaya Selatan (PJS) was chosen as the case study for this research. It consists of ten apartment complexes, two in Taman Medan, PJS 2, and eight in Taman Desaria, PJS 5. The complexes were developed in four phases between 2004 to 2006, with Taman Medan being the last phase. The eight blocks in PJS 5 are 11 storeys high, while the two blocks in PJS 2 are 17 storeys. Both settlements are surrounded by one- and two-storey terrace houses, low-cost apartments, and commercial developments. The Taman Medan complexes are located directly along the New Pantai Expressway (NPE). Data collection was focused on Desa Mentari in Taman Medan for this research. Both 17-storey blocks consist of 697 housing units per block and an

average of five to seven people per household. The Malays and Indians make up the majority of the community, followed by a small number of Chinese and foreigners, mainly Bangladeshis and Indonesians.



**Fig. 2.** The two 17-storey Desa Mentari high-rise residential blocks (Photo taken by author).

#### **4. Results and Discussions**

The analysed data produces some description of Desa Mentari's physical characteristics as below:

##### ***4.1 Space and Density of the Desa Mentari apartments***

The housing units are 17- storey high-rise flats with a minimum built-up area of 60 square metres that accommodate three bedrooms, a living and dining area, a kitchen and a separate bathroom and toilet. The size of the housing unit is a significant issue, as several other researchers have highlighted it. Although each unit has three bedrooms, these units have been described as 'pigeon holes' and 'chicken coops' by its dwellers (Ali, 1998; Yeoh, 2001; Bunnell, 2002; Suffian & Mohamad, 2009).

Most families who relocated here consist of an average number of five to seven people per family, and the 60-square-foot units do not provide the comfort and space required by a large family. The housing units were divided to the former squatter dwellers regardless of how many family members were in each household. Even if the family included multiple generations (grandparents, parents, and children), it was still counted as single household. A census exercise conducted in 2010 by the Statistics Department found that a family of 20 people, consisting of seven adults and 13 children, was living in one housing unit in Desa Mentari. This situation would undoubtedly have a negative impact on this family, especially the younger generation. An interview with a Chairman at the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia stated that he strongly believed that the design of the settlement and the spaces provided play vital roles in the development of a positive community.

Moreover, each housing unit is placed close to the next, eight to eleven units per row, and due to the closeness, there is no privacy. As there is no proper ventilation, apart from the kitchen rear bedroom windows and the front door, the doors of most homes are left open, allowing neighbours to see activities happening inside. On top of



that, all wet laundry is dried out along the corridors, as there is no proper equipment installed or drying area provided. The corridors and balconies of adjacent buildings are so narrow and close together, little ventilation and light can flow through, resulting in dark, humid and suffocating flats.

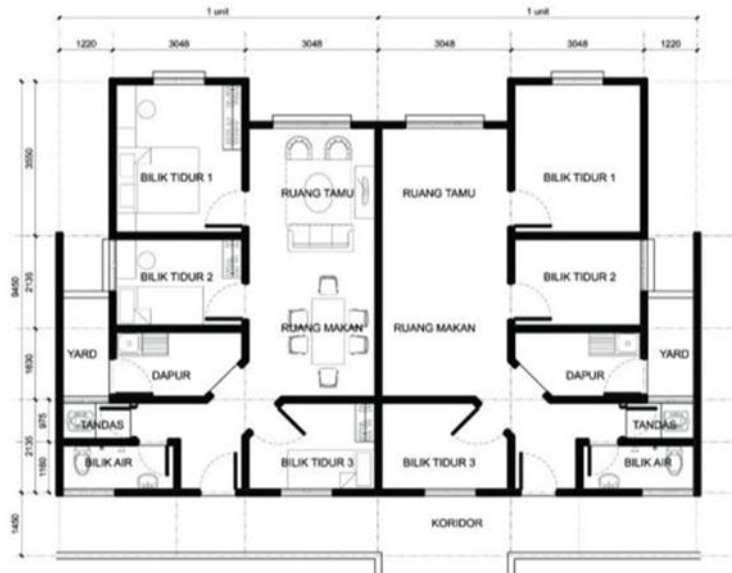


Fig. 3. Standard Unit Layout Plan for 18-storey Low-cost Flat (JPN, 2006)



Fig. 4. A family of 20 living in one housing unit (The Star, 2010)

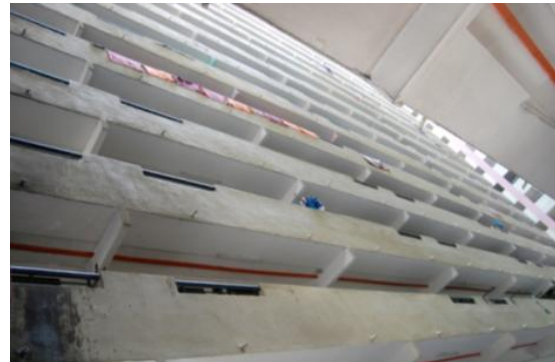


Fig. 5 & 6. Housing units are placed closely next and opposite (photos taken by author)

Overall, the flats are too small to accommodate the families of former squatter dwellers. Nearly 7,000 squatter families were crammed into eight 11-storey blocks and two 17-storey blocks in two neighbourhoods. The flats are crowded, there is little space on each floor, and there is no privacy from the neighbours.

#### ***4.2 Safety and Security***

The settlement's area was labelled as a high-risk neighbourhood back in 1996 or 1997 by the then Minister of the Home Ministry department. During that time, a public outcry over the Indian community involvement in gangsterism and other antisocial behaviour and violent crime urged the Home Minister to act. Certain areas have been outlined based on where the identified perpetrators resided. These areas were then classified as high-risk, based on factors such as socio-economic status, predominantly low-income group neighbourhoods, low education, limited opportunities and mainly, the crime rate.

The community also raised the issue of crime and social ills as contributing factors to their settlement's problems. They stated that motorcycle theft is the major crime in Desa Mentari, followed by occasional fights among its residents. This was supported by a Crime Mapping System developed by one of the professionals interviewed, which identified Desa Mentari as one of the hotspots for vehicle thefts. Some of the residents even claimed that snatch thefts also occur here as fights and disputes transpired due to racial conflicts between its two main racial groups, the Malays and the Indians. Although the crime rate has dramatically decreased due to a neighbourhood watch, social issues continue to be a concern. Apart from that, some residents still feel unsafe due to their past experiences. Some residents are so paranoid and overcome by fear that they still believe otherwise despite the decreased crime rate. In reality, the people themselves are the ones who created the unsafe atmosphere within their settlement because of their negative perception of safety. However, the lack of facilities and the physical living condition, such as its size, cleanliness, and overall planning (accessibility), also contributes to the settlement's security level and social problems. This issue demonstrates that no amount of policing in a neighbourhood can determine the level of safety, but how the settlement was designed and planned in the first place.

In addition to crime, both the household and professional data confirmed that the youths from this area are involved in social ills such as drug and alcohol abuse, immoral conduct and aimless loitering. The situation is no longer under control, and other residents are afraid of these troubled teenagers. This problem can be traced back to the lack of support these youths receive from their families and their living environment. As the blocks are overcrowded and close together, the environment is stuffy and suffocating, making being outside preferable to being at home. Based on the author's observation, there were no outdoor spaces for the teenagers other than a run-down playground and badminton court. When there is no space and facilities provided, there are no activities, which justifies the respondents' claims that the youths are involved in social ills because of the lack of space for activities. A study conducted by Sufian and Mohamad (2009) also stated that lack of facilities and the overall living condition could contribute to social ills.

### 4.3 General Health and Comfort of Residents

According to the Malay Mail (2009), the apartments are poorly built with cheap materials and are unsafe to live in. During the relocation, it was also claimed that these buildings were only given temporary Certificates of Fitness (CF). This means that although residents are allowed to move into the housing units, the apartments have not yet met the safety standards or other requirements required for a CF to be awarded, or they have not been fully cleared for occupation and use by the authorities. Another concern is that a temporary CF must not exceed six months, yet the residents have lived there since 2004. Therefore, the developer and local authority have put the residents' safety at risk since the relocation. In addition, for a CF to be granted, the development should be fitted with sufficient fundamental facilities and services, which is not the case. It was also reported that residents could feel the buildings shaking every time there was a strong wind, and in 2004, a strong wind blew off the roof of one of the blocks. This is astonishing considering that in 2004, residents had just moved into Phase One of the development. Research conducted by Azita et al. (2015) also supports the claims that the safety level of the PPR's building structures is low. Based on observation, the flats are pretty run-downed, floor slabs were cracked or missing, elevators are sometimes not working, and some staircases had no railings. According to respondents, complaints were made, but no action was taken.



**Fig. 7 & 8.** Missing floor slabs and damaged ceiling (photos taken by author)



**Fig. 9.** Staircase with no railings (pictures taken by author)

#### 4.3.1 Cleanliness and rubbish disposal

When discussing Desa Mentari, the majority of concerns revolve around cleanliness and the indiscriminate dumping of waste. Amry (1997) and Hisham (1997)

have also highlighted this cleanliness issue in their studies on slum relocation (refer to Bunnell, 2002). Based on the data, both the household and professional respondents believed that although the residents' attitudes are the cause behind the problem, the design and management of the flats are partly to blame. Nevertheless, a few professional respondents emphasised the 'squatter behaviour' of the dwellers and their squatters' habits which are their 'primitive level' of waste disposal and their 'unacceptable' living condition, also known as 'kampung conduct' (ibid). Arguably, the design of the flats raised the problem to a higher level, and since the authorities were aware of this 'squatter behaviour' before they were relocated, it begs the question of why the new settlement was designed in such a way.



**Fig. 10 & 11.** Indiscriminate dumping of waste (photos taken by author)

Rubbish thrown from windows litters the roofs below, and even large objects have also been disposed of from upper floors. There were cases where other residents have been injured and the car's windshields have been damaged because of these irresponsible actions. This is a common problem in other low-cost high-rise accommodations such as in Seri Pantai PPR in Pantai Dalam where an office chair was thrown from the upper floor, killing a teenage boy (MalaysiaKini Online, 2018). In addition, garbage is disposed of and left in the air wells of the flats. On top of that, it has been claimed that this filthy, unhealthy environment contributed to children contracting skin diseases (Johari, 2018).



**Fig. 12.** Litter strewn roofs (photos taken by author)

Examining the design of the settlement, it was discovered that the 17-storey flats have no rubbish chutes installed. Residents are expected to dispose of household wastes at the dumpsters located at the parking lot, either by using the elevators (of which there are only two provided) or the staircases. This arrangement is not an issue for those who



live on the lower levels. However, it is a significant issue for those who live on the fifth and higher floors. They may cooperate for the first few months, but they will eventually resort to throwing their thrash out the windows or leaving it on the stairs for the custodians to collect. Even though monthly maintenance fees are collected, the flats are poorly maintained, and waste collection is irregular and inefficient. What was supposed to be a modern, quality residential development to improve the lives of former squatter dwellers eventually became a slum. This unhealthy, squalid and deficient environment has had a significant negative impact on the residents' everyday life.

#### 4.4 Provision of Basic Infrastructure

##### 4.4.1 Facilities and amenities

A significant complaint by the community is the lack of and inadequacy of facilities. Most of the facilities provided in Desa Mentari are merely to fulfill the basic requirements in the housing regulations and guidelines. The lack of indoor and outdoor spaces incorporated into the settlement's design has received the most criticism. For Desa Mentari, PJS 2, only a playground with a badminton court has been provided to serve two 17-storey residential buildings occupied by thousands of residents. Although these residential were developed on leftover landsto fulfil the requirement set by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, which states that every housing development must reserve a minimum of 10% for open spaces or recreational areas. The size is inadequate and results in children playing along corridors instead. The function of the spaces does not meet the needs of the various age groups in this community.



**Fig. 13 & 14.** The only green area in Desa Mentari and a badminton court (photos taken by author)



**Fig. 15 & 16.** The playground and *wakaf* provided (photos taken by author)



As a result of the shortage of space provided for the community, especially for the adults and the elderly, some community members resolved to develop their own outdoor space. The authority and developer's neglect in providing basic amenities and facilities that brought to the community's inability to function properly is unacceptable. This neglect indeed intensifies the feelings of mistrust and hatred towards the authorities, further breaking the bond between them.



**Fig. 17.** Mini garden developed by community (photo taken by author)

#### 4.4.2 Cultural and religious needs

Due to the absence of a community hall, the residents utilised ground floor shop lots as a 'hall', which is insufficient to support and fit the thousands of residents. The space is too small, with columns running throughout the hall. On top of that, to help working parents with small children, the community opened up another shop lot as a nursery. However, the nursery is only provided for the Malay community.



**Fig. 18 & 19.** The hall and nursery (photos taken by author)

One of the significant cultural needs of a community in Malaysia is practising religious beliefs and rituals and other cultural activities openly. In Desa Mentari, the community consists of two major religious groups, the Muslims and the Hindus. These two groups differ in culture and religion and are strikingly different in beliefs and practices. This could have made for a colourful Malaysian community, but the settlement does not reflect or celebrate cultural diversity. The development of the two residential blocks did not incorporate any religious and cultural space, resulting in the Malays using one of the shop lots as a surau (small mosque), whereas the Hindus require a designated space to erect a small temple. The lack of facilities and amenities

for religious, communal and recreational purposes is mostly voiced, hindering the community from leading healthy and spiritual lives. The community, on their initiatives, developed the available ones. On top of that, it creates conflicts between the dwellers when one group have more priority or have complete control over the usage of the spaces.

#### 4.4.3 Accessibility and vehicular parking

For decades, insufficient parking space in PPR and public housing has persisted (Syed Akil, 2019). Undoubtedly PPR housing is so densely populated, coupled with the relatively limited free space, definitely parking issues are the main problem. There are about 697 housing units in each block, and each house has at least one car and a motorcycle; some even have two cars. To make matters worse, outsiders also park in front of their flats and along the main road. They even park vans, buses, and lorries here, adding to the congestion problem they face.



**Fig. 20 & 21.** Motorcycles parked along the corridors and cars are double-parked (photos by author)

Motorcycle parking spaces are insufficient and do not provide any safety mechanism to prevent thefts. This resulted in some residents taking matters into their own hands by moving motorcycles up to their homes. This action also becomes an issue with other residents who claim the elevators' floors are strewn with motorcycle oil and children are at risk of being hurt by the hot exhaust pipe when they are cramped in the elevator. Motorcycle theft is also the most common crime, as the area is easily accessible and allows for easy exit or escape. The lack of natural surveillance can be blamed for this occurrence as residents now live on higher levels, away from the ground floor, making it hard to monitor properties parked in the parking bays. The settlement's location is another reason the neighbourhood is a target since it can easily be accessed from the highway. As the settlement is overcrowded, controlling crime is made even harder.

According to some professional respondents, the crimes in Desa Mentari, mainly thefts, are committed by outsiders. As this area is a crime hotspot, it attracts criminals. A report in Utusan Malaysia (2008) claimed that Taman Medan and the whole of Petaling Jaya Selatan is a target for kidnappers due to the physical and environmental factors of the area. Police do not rule out the possibility that this is due to the position of the settlements, and the population density exacerbates the situation. As mentioned above, the settlement is easily accessed, allowing for easy getaways, and as it is

overcrowded, outsiders can also easily blend in with the community. The fact that neighbours do not recognise each other adds to the problem.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper highlights a study on Malaysia's urban high-rise and high-density public housing for former squatter dwellers. The findings from this study contribute important information on the plight of these residents and may reflect the character of similar settlements in other parts of the country. These findings provide insights into the needs of these population groups and can help urban planners, designers, and managers create a better living environment for the residents. When developing new housing for the low-income and those who have been relocated, it is crucial to include them in the early planning stages because they are aware of the issues in their community, what should be resolved, and their needs. It can be concluded that the home and neighbourhood domain, as a whole, identifies that the necessities of Desa Mentari are inadequate and insufficient, while the cleanliness, management and maintenance of the complex is a significant concern. When the deteriorating physical environment is not addressed, it has a negative impact the daily lives of the community.

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