



SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN HIGH-RISE LIVING IN JOHOR BAHRU

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ABSTRACT

Housing is the basic needs for human being. Living in high-rise properties has increasingly become an accepted reality of the today's society particularly in urban country such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. However, high-rise living causes the numbers of social problems such as suicide, social isolation, increasing in crimes, feeling of anxiety and depression and so forth. Hence, this study aims to ascertain the social problems in high-rise living and determine the factors that contribute to the social problems in high-rise living. A Likert-scale questionnaire survey is used to achieve both objectives. The data is analysed by using frequency analysis and mean scores. The findings of the results show that the main social problems in high-rise living is social isolation while the main factors contribute to the social problems is Airbnb factor and lack of communication with neighbours. This study suggested that similar research should be undertaken for different type of accommodation as social problems occur not only for high-rise living residents only.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, people built their houses on ground with only one to two floors height. They never built an underground or high-rise dwelling as both structures will contribute dread feeling and unpleasant living condition for them.

However, more and more high-rise residential buildings are being erected in all continents in the world. This is due to the world today is facing escalating rates of urbanisation and is expected to increase significantly in near future, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Although there is a negative growth rate in some cities of the Europe, the overall population still increase gradually. Same situation persists in the Australia and Canada (Al-Kodmany, 2011). Thus, the overpopulation threat is impending over the entire world.

As stated in the World Urbanization Prospects 2014, the urban population is expected to be 66% in 2050, which was 30% in 1950s. It is promising to say that 2.5 billion people will be added to the urban population by 2050 by looking at the increment percentage in the urban population. Because of the population growths, high-rise residential buildings are resorted to cater for the increased dwelling demand. In highly developed countries like UK, Japan and Singapore, high-rise living can be considered as the most common living style for most of the people due to the high population and scarcity of developable land in urban areas.

There are several studies stated that the key reasons for emergence of the high-rise residential in a large number is due to the in-migration of the people to the urban areas, increased land value, scarcity of land in urban areas and massive

housing shortage (Mir *et al.*, 2012; Arslan and Sev, 2014; Eichner and Ivanova, 2018).

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

As in many other Asian countries, Malaysia also facing a rapid urban growth in recent years. The rate of urbanisation in Malaysia increased from 25% in 1960 to 75% in 2017 and is expected to surpass 80% by 2020. The construction of high-rise development in Malaysia is obvious, especially due to scarcity of land in the urban state such as in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Selangor and Johor.

However, high-rise living has causing many unpleasant outcomes such as suicide. Jumping from high-rise buildings becoming very common method of suicide (Johari *et al.*, 2017; Lester, 1994).

Several studies and reviews concluded that high-rises are not favourable for residents. This is due to social problems arise from the high-rise living which are fear, suicide, dissatisfaction, behaviour problems, stress, poor social relations, delayed child development and reduced helpfulness (Angrist, 1974; Cappon, 1972; Conway and Adams, 1977).

Hence, the research questions for this study are:

- a) What are the social problems in high-rise living?
- b) What are the factors that contribute to the social problems in high-rise living?

The objectives of the research are set as below:

- a) To ascertain the social problems in high-rise living,
- b) To determine the factors that contribute to the social problems in high-rise living.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

High-rise building will always be associated with social problems. This section will be looking at the overview of high-rise building and the social problems that has been associated with this kind of living.

3.1 High-Rise Building

A very basic definition of high-rise building is a tall modern building with many floors. The differentiate of high-rise buildings from conventional low-rise is high-rise buildings need special engineering systems due to their heights (Scott, 1998). However, there is no specific height stated in the several studies.

There are different approaches to determining the number of floors of high-rise buildings in different countries. As stated in Russian building codes, it can be categorised as high-rise buildings if the buildings are rising from 75 meters to 120-150 meters, with the number of floors not exceeding 30. High-rise buildings also can be identified as buildings having six (6) stories or more (Ministry of Housing and Urban Development). Urban planners often identify buildings with ten or more stories as tall buildings. Some researcher stated that the minimum stories of a high-rise building must be at least eight (8) storey high, although this number can be increased to 12, given the advance in facilities Shakeri *et al.* (2010).

From urban studies perspective, the main problem regarding the definition of high-rise buildings is that this definition is not adequately flexible. This is because there is relative concept for "tall buildings", not only to its heights, but other things should be considered as well. Hence, definition of tall buildings with respect to urban problems can be combined of both qualitative and quantitative variables. For instance, the meaning of tall buildings in some parts of the UK are based on the height, their effect on the surrounding environment or major impact on the skyline. If a building has one of these conditions, it considered as a high-rise building. Thus, a building with a middle height can be considered as a high-rise building on condition that it has impact to the skyline or the surrounding environment (Karimi and Adibi, 2010).

On the other hand, Davis and Everest *et al.* (2002) states that it is not possible to give the definition of tall buildings by using absolute measures. It is believed that "tall buildings are best understood in relative terms as buildings whose planning, design, construction and occupation is influenced by height in ways that

are not normally associated with more typical, local developments.”

3.2 Social Problem

Although a huge amount of papers was written regarding social problem, yet there is no universal definition about social problem. However, the common definition of social problem is any condition or behaviour that has negative consequences for large numbers of people and that is generally recognized as a condition or behaviour that needs to be addressed (Peck and Dolch, 2001).

Mental health, insecurity, health problems, children development are among social problems being brought up in previous studies by various researchers (Williams & Braun, 2019; Fujiwara *et al.*, 2014; Gifford, 2007; Hummelsheim *et al.*, 2011).

Apart from that, studies also reveal that loneliness and social isolation becoming big issue for social problem (William and Braun, 2019). Hummelsheim *et al.* (2011) also discusses insecurity and living in fear as main issues in their research.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This research was based on study area that has been identified. This section will discuss study area, surveys, data sampling, collection and lastly data analysis.

4.1 Study Area

This study has been focused in Johor Bahru area. Johor Bahru is the state capital of Johor, which are the most southern state in Peninsular Malaysia. It has grown to become the second most important economic conurbation in Malaysia overall. This area also is one of the urbanise cities with the most population in Johor due to the in-bound migration. The existing supply of high-rise buildings unit including condominiums and apartments is 51,921 units and 10,807 units are incoming supply which indicates a high number of units after Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (NAPIC, 2018).

4.2 The questionnaire surveys

Basically, there are two types of questions structure used in forming questionnaire survey to collect data which are closed-ended questions and open questions. For closed-ended questions structure, respondents only allowed to response based on pre-decided categories. Data that can be placed into a category is called nominal data can be restricted to as few as two options such as ‘yes’ or provide ordinal data (which can be ranked) to measure the strength of attitudes or emotions such as 1 represent strongly disagree and 5 represent strongly agree.

For this research, there are three sections in the questionnaire survey which was designed to meet the objectives of the study respectively. Section A is demographic information about respondents such as gender, age, stakeholder, education level, marital status, income and so on. Questions in Section B will cover the social problems in high-rise living whereas Section C will cover on the factors that contribute to the social problem in high-rise living. The questions used in this questionnaire survey are closed-ended questions. Five-point Likert scale also adopted in this questionnaire survey.

4.3 Data Sampling

For the purpose of this research, the snowball sampling method was chosen to be the main way of collecting and selecting respondents. This method is a non-random sampling method used when the desired sample characteristic is rare. First respondent will be taken from the relatives or friends who are fulfil the requirement such as a resident in the medium to high-end high-rise residential or the management body in the high-rise residential buildings and then ask him to recommend to other respondents who will fit the description of the sample needed. As this referral technique goes on, the sample size will be increased.

4.4 Data Analysis

Frequency analysis is a simple data analysis method which is used to determine the frequency or number of respondents for each replied question. It is also a technique that is used to

determine the frequency of certain answer chosen by respondents. For this research, most of the questions formed in this questionnaire survey in Section A are analysed by using this method.

Likert scale is a psychometric scale where questions based on this scale are normally used in a survey. It is one of the most widely used question types in a survey. It is used to measure a respondent's opinion or attitude towards a given subject. The Likert scale is a 5- or 7-point scale that offers a range of answer options, from one attitude to another, like "agree" to "disagree".

In this research, a Likert scale of 1 to 5 used in the questionnaire survey is in Section B and Section C to determine whether the respondents completely disagree, disagree, partially agree, agree or completely agree with the statement provided. The findings from the questionnaire are then analysed by using SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

5.0 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section is about results and research analysis. The discussion will be based on respondents for this study. The analysis then will be discusses based on the research objectives for this study.

5.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic of the respondents. Out of the total 168 filtered respondents for this study. It can generally conclude that 85.7% of the respondents is residents, 54.2% out of the 144 residents is tenant, more than half of the respondents is male, 47% of them is Chinese, 39.3% of the respondents is in the age range between 26 to 39 years old.

Almost half of the respondents have the degree level (47.6%), more than half of them is married (54.2%) and have no child (50%), 32.7% of the respondents' income is RM3,000 and below and most of the them live in condominium (45.8%).

Table 1: Respondents Profile

Demographic Attributes	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Stakeholder	i. Management office	24	14.3
	ii. Resident	144	85.7
Gender	i. Male	86	51.2
	ii. Female	82	48.8
Race	i. Malay	37	22.0
	ii. Chinese	79	47.0
	iii. Indian	22	13.1
	iv. Others	30	17.9
Age	i. Below 25 years old	37	22.0
	ii. 26-39 years old	66	39.3
	iii. 40-59 years old	56	33.3
	iv. 60 years old and above	9	5.4
Types of ownership	i. Owner	66	45.8
	ii. Tenant	78	54.2
Education level	i. SPM and below	18	10.7
	ii. Diploma	30	17.9
	iii. Degree	80	47.6
	iv. Master	28	16.7
	v. PHD	12	7.1
Marital status	i. Single	91	54.2
	ii. Married	77	45.8
Number of children	i. 0	84	50.0
	ii. 1	29	17.3
	iii. 2	28	16.7
	iv. 3	18	10.7
	v. 4 and above	9	5.3
Income	i. RM3,000 and below	55	32.7
	ii. RM3,001-RM5,000	37	22.0
	iii. RM5,001-RM7,000	33	19.6
	iv. RM7,001-RM9,000	11	6.5
	v. RM9,001-RM11,000	20	11.9
	vi. RM11,001 and above	12	7.1
Types of high-rise buildings	i. Apartment	32	19.0
	ii. Condominium	77	45.8
	iii. Others	59	35.1

5.2 Analysis for First Objective

Table 2 shows the results of the Likert scale analysis that has been carried out on the first objective which is social problems in high-rise living.

From the analysis, the main social problems in high-rise living is social isolation as it obtains the highest mean score value which is 4.17. This is because most of the high-rise residents are lack of communication with their neighbours, accordingly towards the outsiders.

It is then followed by the feeling of insecurity as the mean score value obtained is 4.02, Most of the respondents feel insecurity living in high-rise is most probably because of there are huge number of people reside in the same residence, which means they need to share the dwellings especially the common facilities with the strangers.

Table 2: Mean Scores for Social Problems in High-Rise Living

Category	Social Problems in High-Rise Living	Mean Score
Completely Agree	Social Isolation	4.17
	Feeling of Insecurity	4.02
Agree	Living in Fear	3.75
	Health Problem	3.57
Partially Agree	Noise Problem	3.46
	Development of Children	3.30
Disagree	Behaviour Problem	3.07
	Mental Problem	2.98
Completely Disagree	Distance to Religious Centre	2.42

Respondents agree that living in fear as a social problem in high-rise living most probably because of high-rise living evokes unsettling fear such as residents could be trapped in a fire or fall or jump from the buildings. Besides, loop of dust and poor air flow in the high-rise residential affect the respiratory system of the residents (Arslan and Sev, 2014). It is then indicating the reason respondents agree health problem as one of the social problems in high-rise living.

The problems of noise and development of children are partially agreed by the respondents as the social problems in high-rise living. The noise can be come from the day-to-day living such as talking, carrying out household activities, walking and when there is a party while development of children such as dressing was slower if compared to the children in low-rise or landed residential.

On the other hand, social problems of behaviour problem and mental problem are in the category of disagree. The mean score obtained by the behaviour problem and mental problem is 3.07 and 2.98 respectively. Most of the respondents do not agree with the both social problems in high-rise living most probably because of they do not found much mental difficulties and significant behaviour problems among the residents.

For the problems of distance to religious centre, it is completely disagreed by the disagreed by the respondents as a social problem in the high-rise living as it has the lowest mean score value which is 2.42. This is most probably because of majority of respondents are willing to go to the religious centre no matter how far the

distance between the religious centre and dwelling places.

5.3 Analysis for Second Objective

Table 3 shows the results of the Likert scale analysis that has been carried out on the second objective which is factors that contribute to social problems in high-rise living.

Table 3: Factors Contribute to Social Problems in High-Rise Living

Category	Factors that Contribute to Social Problems in High-Rise Living	Mean Score
Completely Agree	Airbnb	4.23
	Lack of Communication with Neighbours	4.23
	Management Problem	4.07
Agree	Building Design	3.57
	Parental Problem	3.46
Partially Agree	Building Material	3.43
	Lack of Facilities Provided	3.20
Disagree	Lack of Facilities Provided	3.20
Completely Disagree	Acrophobia	2.52

From the analysis, it is found that factors of Air Bed & Breakfast (Airbnb) and lack of communication with neighbours are the main factors contributed to the social problems in high-rise living as both factors have the highest mean score which is 4.23. Most of the owners or investors in their dwellings use Airbnb to market their dwellings for short-term tourism by renting out their room or whole places (Oskam and Boswijk, 2016). Due to the feeling of insecurity or fear to communicate with the strangers as their neighbours that always been different. Most of the residents have fewer interactions with their neighbours and they tend to live in isolation. As a result, this had contributed to the social problem of social isolation.

It is then followed by the factor of management problem with the mean score value of 4.07. Most of them are not professional, lack of knowledge and experience in managing the residential building and the most importantly is too profit oriented (Tiun, 2009).

Building design factor is also one of the factors which agreed by most of the respondents as the factors that contribute to the social problems in high-rise living. The increasing height of the building cause large wind shadows and minimize the air flow which could affect the lightning in the high-rise, accordingly, impact the health of the residents (Arslan and Sev, 2014).

Moreover, factor of parental problem and building material are partially agreed by the respondents with the mean score value of 3.46 and 3.43 respectively. Parents need to have their children in their visual vicinity. Hence, children in high-rise buildings are more restricted access to open spaces (Gifford, 2007). Building material of the high-rise building also be a factor as the issues of water and airtightness of the material used are always neglected. This will cause cracks on the wall and help the growth of mould and fungus which could affect the health of the residents (Baxi *et al.*, 2016).

The factor of lack of facilities provided is fallen in the category of disagree with the mean score value of 3.20. Most of the respondents did not agree with this factor most probably because of the facilities provided in their high-rise buildings is enough for them.

The last factor that contributed to the social problems in high-rise living is acrophobia factor. This factor is completely not agreed by the respondents with the mean value of 2.52. This is because majority of the respondents do not suffer from acrophobia.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Overall, based on the findings in this study, the main social problems in high-rise living is social isolation and followed by the feeling of insecurity while the main factors contributed to social problems in high-rise living is Airbnb and lack of communication with neighbours and then followed by management problem. As more and more of the high-rise residential has been market using Airbnb for short-term stay, the increasing number of strangers has increasing the feeling of insecurity and fear of residents to communicate with the neighbours as their neighbours always been changed. This had led to the main social problem which is social isolation among the residents as they tend to live in isolation.

Social problems in high-rise living can become serious if the appropriate measures do not been taken up. This issue could cause many unpleasant outcomes for the residents and consequently affect the image and development of the country if the issue remains unchanged. Hence, the issue of social problem in high-rise living should be concerned by the relevant

authorities and the ways to overcome this issue should be done in the future study to change the scenario in the future. It is suggested that similar study should be carried out for different living style as social problems not only occur for high-rise living resident only.

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