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(IJLGC)**www.ijlgc.com**COMMUNITY CONCERNS ON MIGRANT LABOUR
SETTLEMENT ISSUES IN MALAYSIA**Asma Idayu Izhar¹, Choong Weng Wai^{2*}

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This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

Migrant labours have contributed in boosting Malaysia's economy especially in the development sectors where they occupy most of the 3Ds jobs in the labour market. Most of the migrant labours are either placed in cramped dormitories shared between four to five peoples in a room by their employer or stayed in their own makeshift- ghettos. Most often, their living condition is poor and unhygienic which post high risks of contagious disease to circulate within. As their number increase, so does numbers of their settlement within the locals' neighbourhood and it has prompted the NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) phenomenon among the community. Although the authorities did come out with measures by segregating the migrant labours from the locals' neighbourhood, the NIMBY phenomenon still remain, in which the locals are against the development of the said settlements near to their neighbourhood. In accessing the concerns that perceived by the locals, literature review is conducted to examine the locals' acceptance towards the migrant labour's presence near their neighbourhood is reviewed. Notably, the NIMBY phenomenon may occur due to various reasoning that associate with the locals' main concerns. Furthermore, the NIMBY phenomenon occurrence towards the development of migrant labour settlement is also reviewed. This paper explores the issues of migrant labour settlement in Malaysia and addressed the problems from multiple perspectives. The findings will contribute insights to the authorities about the issues and discovering the appropriate measures in addressing the problems regarding the migrant labour settlement

Keywords:

Migrant Labour, Settlement, NIMBY, Public Acceptance

Introduction

Malaysia's labour market specifically the 3Ds jobs which are Dirty, Dangerous and Difficult are dominated by the migrant labours due to the locals' unwillingness to work in those areas. In Malaysia, migrant labours are generally defined as unskilled and low-wage earning migrants (Pappusamy, 2014). In order to boost the economy, the migrant labour recruitment is considered essential to meet the scarcity of the low-skilled worker especially in the development sectors. As for the migrants, the scarcity of labour in Malaysia are seen as an opportunity for them to secure jobs due to various reasons of their inability to do so in their countries. For example, as Indonesia has a very concentrated population, the job opportunity there is difficult and challenging to secure.

Malaysia has been one of the Southeast Asia that accept migrant labours from other countries at a large scale. For decades, Malaysia has been recruiting migrant labours through agreements called Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Malaysia and the countries that supply the labour forces such as Indonesia (Hosen, 2005; A. Kaur, 2014), Philippine, Bangladesh, China, Vietnam, Pakistan and Thailand (Devadason & Meng, 2014). These migrants are signed up through a guest-worker program where the migrants are bound to their employers and can only works for certain locality type of jobs. The migrants are strictly only permitted to enter the labour market of six sectors which are manufacturing, agriculture, plantation, construction, mining and services (Wahab, 2020). However, in early years during 1970s until 1990s, the lack of comprehensive policy in the migrant labour recruitment had caused irregular labour migration to occur surreptitiously resulting in having an increasing number of illegal migrants to enter the country. Therefore, the guest-worker program was instigated to control the illegal migrant entries into the country.

Migrant Settlement

Inadvertently, as the number of migrant labours grows, they are bound to have their own settlement for them to stay within the host country. Their settlements would either be prepared by themselves (which is only possible if they have connections with the early migrants that have settled down in the country) or by their employers. Usually, these settlements would reside in the housing units of local neighbourhood that had turned into dormitories. These so-called dormitories are either rented by the employers or by the migrant labours themselves as a group and usually consists of the low-to-mid-priced housing units such as apartment units, terrace houses or shophouses' upper floor (Choong, 2017).

Some migrant labours build their own settlements such as makeshift ghettos which usually near their working sites. These ghettos are usually very unhygienic and poor in condition due to their lack of proper basic needs such as water and electricity. Although initially the migrant labours would be sent back to their own countries once their contract is over, the migrant labours would proceed into living in their settlements and sometimes even brought their own family to live together later. Thus, by having their family living together especially with young children in these unsanitary, small spaces can pose harm to the their mental, physical and emotional health and these is against Malaysia's policy in protecting the migrant labours' welfare. The existence of these settlements has brought direct impacts on the social standpoint of the local community and receive a number of reactions.

Locals' Acceptance

However, the locals are voicing out their concerns and feedbacks regarding the matter. The migrant labours' presence in the neighbourhood had raised the locals' concerns and worries due to numerous economic, political and social problems (Azizah Kassim, 2000) and had developed distress among the local community. The migrant labours are always placed inside dormitories by cramping four to five people in each room by their employer and usually the units are in poor living condition and unhygienic with high risks of spreading contagious disease.

It has been brought to the attention that the emerging of the COVID-19 pandemic has developed larger concerns among the locals as the social and physical distancing among the migrant labours are not practiced. According to the World Bank (2020) existing reports, studies indicate that the rapid transmission of infection of COVID-19 among migrant labours is led by the unsanitary and poor living conditions of the cramped dormitories.

Methodology

For the purpose of finding out on local community concerns towards migrant labour settlement in their neighbourhood, literature regarding the migrant labours' behaviour, the impact of their presence and how the local community reacts towards it are reviewed. The paper also reviewed the local's reactions towards the development of the migrant labour settlement within their neighbourhood. Subsequently, the results were compared to past people's attitude which analyse their behaviour in opposing the development of projects in regards to provide better lifestyle for the community. This attitude may occur due to the NIMBY phenomenon. The following address the concerns among the community and its relation with NIMBY phenomenon as collected from secondary sources.

Main Results

The locals raised their concerns on a few matters such as depreciation of property value (Burchell & Listokin, 1995; Pendall, 1999; Brown & Glanz, 2018), safety and security (Li et al., 2019; Bachtiar et al., 2015), environment's hygiene (Schively, 2007), downgrading social status (Burchell & Listokin, 1995) and traffic inconvenience caused by the transportation of the migrant labours. As mentioned previously, the poor living condition and the unhygienic dormitories settled within the neighbourhood has incur the negative perceptions towards the migrant labours settlement and this had caused the neighbourhood to be less attractive. This had brought to the locals' worries especially landlords as their property value would decrease as the neighbourhood will be shunned by others. In Malaysia, migrants are often found settling in low-priced flats, terrace houses and shophouses where the upper floor of the shophouses are used as dormitories to place the migrant labours. Their employer often cramped these dormitories to cut expenses. The landlords of neighbouring properties agonize on having difficulties to find tenants and buyers due to the bad reputation nearby causing them to lower their property rent and price.

Moreover, the locals perceive that by having the migrant labours living nearby will pose them to danger and risk their security. Aside from having difficulties in securing properties, the locals are also against the development of facilities due to the risk of securing their own lives (Li et al., 2019). The migrant labours' presence in the neighbourhood is intimidating and it caused worries especially towards parents as they concern on their children safety. Crime incidents such as house break-in theft, vehicle thefts, robbery, murder, kidnaping and physical

offence that caused body injuries are higher in neighbourhood that has high concentration of migrant labours. There are also fights that occur among them and these incidents upset the locals even more (Akmal, 2020). These types of negative incidents that occur had caused trauma to the locals making the situation to be worse as the bad stigma of the term of migrant labour and crime being synonymize. Parents are also concern that these bad attitudes and behaviours may influence their children upbringing. Media reporting involving the migrant labours with crime also contribute in spreading fear and negative perceptions among the local community.

The migrant labours also practiced unhealthy and unsanitary culture such as sharing personal belongings and bundling trash in front of their dormitories' doors without proper wrapping. Some of them also has the habits of throwing food disposal into the drain causing it to be clogged. The locals concern and against the unsanitary lifestyle of the migrant labours which had contributed to pollution and unhygienic neighbourhood. Given the nature of their jobs that come hand-in-hand with the word 'dirty', having these unsanitary behaviours had put bad impression to the locals that live in the neighbourhood and also to the outsiders. This had increased the risk of spreading diseases among them and the possibility of spreading the diseases to the community such as malaria and dengue (K. Kaur, 2005). In addition to the current spreading of COVID-19 pandemic, the locals are getting restless with fear due to the high risk of a new cluster emerging in their neighbourhood. With the current rise in the number of cases in Malaysia, the ending of Movement Control Order (MCO) imposed by the government seem farther from the near future and this has made the locals more upset if a new cluster emerge from their neighbourhood. Furthermore, the locals also disturbed by the act of the migrant labours in controlling the public space such as monopolizing the community's park. Their social norms where they loitering in front of their dormitories, getting drunk and make loud noises during the nights also pose negative judging from the locals. The locals are troubled as they worry that these incidents will bring bad reputation onto their neighbourhood causing their social status to be downgraded. Based on these concerns, the locals are prompt to discriminate and caused them to be xenophobic towards the migrant labours as a whole.

Considering the issues, government took measures by segregating these dormitories by developing settlements built specifically for migrant labours. This is an effort adapted from Singapore's workers housing system where the migrant labours are segregated from the local community. However, the locals also oppose to the idea of having the settlement developed near their neighbourhood (Audrey, 2020). They claimed that the buses that transport the migrant labours to and from works will caused traffic inconvenience during peak hours together with noise pollution (Predeep, 2019). The locals also argued that the course took by the buses had damaged the neighbourhood roads as it is not meant to be used by heavy transport frequently. Some locals took action by protesting at one of the sites of migrant labour settlement during its development to voiced out their opposition.

Not in My Backyard (NIMBY)

This opposition towards the idea of developing the migrant labour settlement is also known as NIMBY which implies the locals' social dilemma where the intensity of defensive attitude adopted by the public upon unwelcome development in their neighbourhood (Dear, 1992). NIMBY is assumed to occur as the locals believed that a certain development or facilities are located near enough for them to be affected by the risk of it (Kraft & Clary, 1991). It is considered normal for the NIMBY phenomenon to occur as this behaviour may be due to

complex reasoning, comprising wide range of concerns on many factors such as adverse impacts on property values, negative past experiences, negative externalities and different social norms that the locals are not comfortable to deal with (Choong, 2017). Furthermore, negative information and news reported regularly regarding crime involving the migrant labours on the media has developed negative perceptions among locals towards the migrant labours (Kaur, 2005; Kosho, 2016) and caused discrimination and prejudice to occur.

Furthermore, the locals are also having trust issues towards the financial supplier of the migrant labour settlement development. Kraft & Clary (1991) also argue that NIMBY can also be driven by the distrust and lack of confidence towards the sponsors of a development or project as the public perceive that the development carried mainly for the sponsors' interest rather than the actual impact that it can bring to the community. Driven by their xenophobic nature, in addition to the political issues and their mistrust towards the sponsors of the development, the locals are fully against the development of the migrant labour settlement within or near their neighbourhood. Some of developments are cancelled due to the locals' opposition. The locals also believed that by having the settlement built nearby, it will threaten their sense of belonging in their own neighbourhood. This is consistent with Devine-Wright (2005) argument that by disrupting the emotional bonds between the local public and place, it has threaten the place initial identity and hence the opposition behaviour.

In simple words, NIMBY is a phenomenon where continuous criticisms and protest towards a certain development to occur. This phenomenon can be driven by the prejudice, discrimination and xenophobic nature that dwells among the local community towards a certain party or development. Therefore, it is essential to achieve greater understanding regarding the trigger that prompt the NIMBY phenomenon among the local community towards the migrant labour settlement development within or near their neighbourhood in order to surpass the conceptual tension by taking appropriate measure.

Conclusion

There is possibility of co-existence between the local community and the migrant labours. The migrant labours are essential in maintaining the country's economy as they contribute a lot in the development sector. Therefore, it is important to enhance the connections of both parties in order to create a better, harmonious living environment among the citizens of Malaysia. This will also help to enhance the lifestyle of the migrant labours and protect their welfare as they are huge contributors to Malaysia's economy especially in the 3Ds labours. Understanding the concerns among the local community will provide insights to the stakeholders to plan viable solutions in solving the migrant labour settlement matters.

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