

## **Quality of Life of Residents in Urban Neighbourhoods of Pulau Pinang, Malaysia**

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**Abstract:** Residential neighbourhood satisfaction is an important indicator of housing neighbourhood quality which affects individuals' quality of life. This paper aims to examine social, economic and physical features of urban neighbourhoods that contribute to the overall satisfaction of with the neighbourhood which in turn affects positively the overall feelings toward life. Data for the study come from primary source collected through personal interview of households randomly selected using the systematic sampling procedure from households living in middle income residential neighbourhoods in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. Data are analysed using descriptive statistics of the mean scores of satisfaction based on a Likert scale. The findings of the study indicate the residents were generally satisfied with the overall quality of life. However, the satisfaction level was low for public transport, political activities and cost of living from physical, social and economic aspects respectively.

**Keywords:** Quality of life, Neighbourhood satisfaction, Housing satisfaction

### **INTRODUCTION**

Quality of life is individual's overall satisfaction with life (Schumaker, Anderson and Czajkowski, 1990). Many studies have shown that satisfaction with neighbourhood features affect residents' quality of life (life satisfaction). An involvement of community in urban neighbourhoods is an essential ingredient of sustainable housing which affects their quality of life (Choguill, 2007). A study in Malaysia has shown that residential neighbourhood satisfaction is an important indicator of housing quality and condition which affects individuals' quality of life. It determines the way they respond to their residential neighbourhood and environment (Abdul Ghani, 2008).

Satisfaction with social, economic and physical features of the neighbourhood tend to contribute to the overall satisfaction of with the neighbourhood (neighbourhood satisfaction), which in turn affects positively the overall feelings toward life (life satisfaction). The empirical evidence which support neighbourhood quality or neighbourhood satisfaction can be divided into 17 components in three categories as cited in Sirgy and Cornwell (2002):

1. Physical Features:
  - i. Satisfaction with homes and yards.
  - ii. Satisfaction with landscape in the neighbourhood.
  - iii. Satisfaction with street lighting in the neighbourhood.
  - iv. Satisfaction with nearness to the neighbourhood facilities.
  - v. Satisfaction with crowding and noise level in the neighbourhood.
  - vi. Satisfaction with quality of environment in the neighbourhood.

2. Social Features:
  - i. Satisfaction with integration with neighbours.
  - ii. Satisfaction with outdoor play space.
  - iii. Satisfaction with people living in the neighbourhood.
  - iv. Satisfaction with ties with people in the community.
  - v. Satisfaction with crime level in the neighbourhood.
  - vi. Satisfaction with race relations in the community.
  - vii. Satisfaction with sense of privacy at home.
  
3. Economic Features:
  - i. Satisfaction with home value in the neighbourhood.
  - ii. Satisfaction with the cost of living in the community.
  - iii. Satisfaction with socioeconomic status of the neighbourhood.
  - iv. Satisfaction with the neighbourhood improvement.

According to Sirgy and Cornwell (2002), satisfaction with neighbourhood physical features as indicated above contributes significantly to one's satisfaction about the housing and neighbourhood. Similarly, according to them, satisfaction with neighbourhood social features and economic features significantly affect life satisfaction through one's overall feelings of these neighbourhood features. The neighbourhood features such as adequacy of services, safety and accessibility also affect the overall assessment of the neighbourhood quality. The housing and neighbourhoods can be the source of dissatisfaction with the current location. Thus, the quality of the neighbourhoods if not improved would be an important motivation for moving out to another location.

Research in quality of life indicates that there are many factors in the neighbourhood that contributes to residents' quality of life through neighbourhood satisfaction. Examples of these factors are environment, safety, public facilities and housing satisfaction (Lee and Guest, 1983). Studies by Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976) and Sirgy et al. (2000) indicate that neighbourhood satisfaction is a significant predictor of life satisfaction. As stated above, satisfaction effects on the neighbourhood physical, social and economic features play a very important role in neighbourhood satisfaction which determines life satisfaction. Firstly, satisfaction with housing, street lighting and noise level in the neighbourhood are among the main neighbourhood physical features affecting neighbourhood quality (Dahmann, 1983; Miller et al., 1980; Bonnes, Bonaiuto and Ercolani, 1991). Secondly, satisfaction with integration with neighbours, people living in the neighbourhood and race relations are among the main social features affecting the neighbourhood quality (Ahlbrandt and Cunningham, 1979; Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, 1976; Miller et al., 1980). Lastly, satisfaction with home value and homeownership, cost of living in the community and socioeconomic status of the neighbourhood are the main economic features affecting the neighbourhood quality (Galster, 1987; Lu, 1999).

The efficiency and effectiveness of the housing construction and delivery system, the determinants of homeownership, is crucial to sustainable development in Malaysia (Tan, 2008). With rapid urbanisation constrained by the lack of land in Pulau Pinang, quality of life of its residents will be affected if urban development is not properly managed. Thus, this study aims to examine the quality of life urban residents in Pulau Pinang based on their satisfaction of physical, social and

economic features of their neighbourhoods. It can be hypothesised that neighbourhood features, such as physical, social and economic features affect life satisfaction as indicated in Figure 1.

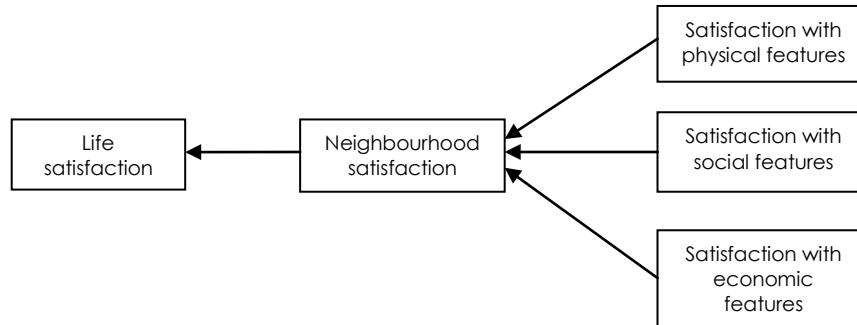


Figure 1. Neighbourhood Features Affect Life Satisfaction

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data for the study come from primary source collected through personal interview technique using a structured questionnaire. Using this technique, set questions were asked by the interviewers to elicit information from the respondents. Structured questions were used in preparing the questionnaire for the survey. To avoid bias resulting from questionnaire design, the questions were constructed in such a way that they were direct, simple and familiar to the respondents. Nevertheless, some explanations by the interviewers were expected to clarify certain points so that certain level of consistency could be achieved in the interview.

The questionnaire is divided into five sections as follows:

1. Household information
2. House ownership information
3. Level of satisfaction with physical aspects of life
4. Level of satisfaction with social aspects of life
5. Level of satisfaction with economic aspects of life

The level of satisfaction of housing is measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = very unsatisfied, 2 = unsatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = satisfied and 5 = very satisfied. Using the mean values of the scale, 3 is considered to be the midpoint. Thus, any value above 3 is considered somewhat satisfied but of lower level. Similarly with any value below 3, it is considered to unsatisfied but of lower level.

The field surveys were conducted in 2008. A sample of 100 households was randomly selected using the systematic sampling procedure from households living in middle income residential neighbourhoods of N-Park, Taman Pesara Indah, Island Glades, Taman Brown and Taman Sri Nibong in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. Pulau Pinang is one of the most developed states in the country with a population of 1.5 million and urbanisation rate of 80%. Data were analysed using

descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics generated frequencies and percentages of respondent characteristics and mean scores of satisfaction.

### Household Characteristics

The population in urban neighbourhoods of Pulau Pinang comprises households of multi-ethnic backgrounds with 20% of the households were Malays, 57% Chinese, 19% Indians and 4% others. The heads of household were relatively young with a large percentage of them in the age bracket of 31 to 40 (44%) and 80% of them had married. Their average income levels were mostly between RM 3,500–RM 4,400 per month (USD 1,080–USD 1,358).

In terms of housing tenancy, the residents were generally house owners with 74% of them owned their houses, while 24% of them rented their houses. The houses in the study area were recently built within less than five years of age (46%).

### Satisfaction with Overall Quality of Life

The residents were generally satisfied with the overall quality of life with 56% of the respondents indicated this category, while 44% of them expressed their feelings otherwise. They expressed their satisfaction with three main aspects of neighbourhood features, i.e. physical, social and economic as discussed below.

### Satisfaction with Physical Aspect of Life

In this section, satisfaction with physical features is discussed based on the level of satisfaction of the residents. The residents have expressed their satisfaction with the neighbourhood physical features, such as dwelling units, housing area, environment, education and health facilities, public and recreational facilities and public transport. They have expressed their satisfaction more in the dwelling units, housing area and educational and health facilities (mean scores of 3.56–3.65) than their neighbourhood environment, public and recreational facilities (mean scores of 3.35–3.46). On the other hand, the mean score for public transport is 2.84 which indicate their dissatisfaction with the service (Table 1).

Table 1. Satisfaction with Physical Aspect of Life

Physical Features	Level of Satisfaction (Mean Score)
Dwelling units	3.65
Housing area	3.56
Environment	3.35
Education	3.62
Health	3.60
Public facilities	3.39
Recreational facilities	3.46
Public transport	2.84

### Satisfaction with Social Aspect of Life

The residents have expressed their satisfaction with the neighbourhood social features, such as interaction with neighbours, social interaction, ethnic relation, public safety, religious facilities and political activities. They have expressed their satisfaction more with social interaction with a mean score of 3.56 than their interaction with neighbours, ethnic relation, religious facilities (mean scores of 3.30–3.46) and public safety with a low mean score of 3.14. On the other hand, the mean score for political activities is 2.93 which indicate their dissatisfaction with the political interference in the community (Table 2).

Table 2. Satisfaction with Social Aspect of Life

Social Features	Level of Satisfaction (Mean Score)
Interaction with neighbours	3.30
Social interaction	3.56
Ethnic relation	3.46
Public safety	3.14
Religious facilities	3.45
Political activities	2.93

### Satisfaction with Economic Aspect of Life

The residents have expressed their satisfaction with the neighbourhood economic features, such as employment, income, work place, the cost of living and home value. They have expressed their satisfaction more with employment with a mean score of 3.60, than their income, workplace and neighbourhood home value (mean scores of 3.32–3.39). On the other hand, the mean score for cost of living in the neighbourhood is 2.71 which indicate their dissatisfaction with the rising cost of living in their neighbourhoods (Table 3).

Table 3. Satisfaction with Economic Aspect of Life

Economic Features	Level of Satisfaction (Mean Score)
Employment	3.60
Income	3.39
Workplace	3.37
Cost of living	2.71
House value	3.32

### Relationship between Household Characteristics and Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is mainly influenced by household backgrounds and characteristics of the respondents. Using Pearson Chi-Square analysis, there is a significant relationship between life satisfaction from physical, social and economic aspects with household characteristics, such as ethnic background, age, education and income. However, life satisfaction of the respondents from

social aspect is not very much influenced by their educational background. This implies that social aspect of life satisfaction is an important indicator of quality of life as expressed by the respondents irrespective of their educational background.

## CONCLUSION

In general, the residents in urban neighbourhoods of Pulau Pinang are generally satisfied with physical, social and economic aspect of life. However, there are variable levels of satisfaction for some features. The residents are particularly dissatisfied with public transportation services, political activities and the cost of living in their neighbourhoods. Besides that, they are also concerned about their safety which would affect their quality of life.

The policy implications of the findings of the study indicate that the construction and development of new urban neighbourhoods in developing countries, like Malaysia, needs to address the above problems, such as public infrastructure and transportation, cost of living and negative influence of political activities in order to achieve a livable environment and a good quality of life. The cost of living is generally influenced by regional and national factors. However, the development of new urban neighbourhoods should not burden the residents with high living costs and the lack of good infrastructure and community facilities. Therefore, sustainable neighbourhood development policies should take into account residents' own assessment of their local condition.

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