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The Role and Activities of Malay Housewives and their Influence on Housing Design Preferences

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Abstract

Previous studies suggest that home activities of housewives affect house design significantly. This paper aims at identifying roles and household activities of Malay housewives and their relationship with housing design preferences. A study was carried out on selected working and non-working Malay housewives of Bandar Tenggara, Johor, Malaysia, using a combination of close-ended and open-ended questionnaire survey. The results suggest that activities such as cooking and other day-to-day operations have some correlation with their sense of space. The results suggest that patterns of housewives' home activities affect their housing design preferences.

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Keywords: Home activities; house design; women preferences; working and non-working housewives

1. Introduction

Previous studies on housing suggest that there exist gender-relation on various design aspects. However, research on this kind of relationship in the context of women as housewives are scarce. Housewives are regarded as home

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managers regardless of their employment status. Therefore, studying routines of the housewives in their houses is vital to understand their contentment of house as a home. In other words, it is necessary to identify the behavioral, social, and psychological characteristics of its setting. It is because of the way these features may relate to the cognitions of the place (Smith, 1994b). Emmanuel (2013) agreed in his paper that improving the welfare and happiness of people is a process to achieve the quality of life. A study on household furniture preferences also mentioned on how retailers concern with furniture designs that suit consumers lifestyle (Soltani et al., 2012). Even from a developer point of view, the design is one of the important criteria for enhancing the price of housing products (Rahadi et al., 2012). Zavei & Jusan (2012) also suggest that there is an urgency to determine usable data on preferred attributes for scheming new housing units. The importance of quality design makes exploring housewives behavior and lifestyle at home, feasible and sustainable.

Moreover, the role of these housewives at home are central as they are caretakers of houses and families. Although women have equal rights in many parts of the world, the patriarchal system among Asian nations are still practiced (Bih & Chen, 2011). They look after the household, manage the early education of children and even their husbands' elderly parents such as in Japan (Lemu, 2007; Ronald & Hinokidani, 2011). Women and men have different choice of house design due to differences in house-routines and time spent in each room (Ahrentzen, Levine, & Michelson, 1989). There is a tendency that women identify their home environment to a greater extent than men (Ghomeshi & Jusan, 2012). Previous studies have indicated that home and women's experience can be an important subject for exploration (Roberts, 1991; Smith, 1994a). The more recent literature also maintains that style is a concern for house owners, particularly for women (Leslie, 2012; Omar et al. 2012). It stresses the importance of studying women's influences in house design as they are the primary role player in defining housing style. Thus, these objectives are formulated for the matter:-

- To establish the importance of housewives' voice in housing design;
- To determine roles of housewives as home manager and decision makers; and
- To explore housewives' daily routine pattern that influence housing design preferences.

2. Literature review

It is hard to trace the influence of women in house design in Malaysia, even from the recent housing research. Some works on personalization (such as Jusan, 2010a; Rahim and Hashim, 2012) indicate house owner's concerns with appropriate spaces for women, and men-women segregation among Malay house owners. Personalization in Malaysia is inevitable no matter how efficient is the architect's design for individual's needs (Bajunid et al., 2012). Alteration projects may affect house owners and their neighbors' health and safety, particularly due to improper construction practices (Isnin et al., 2012). The remodeling works were carried out due to lack of space and inadequate rooms as well as to improve functional and psychological comfort (Omar et al., 2012). The main reason for such costly modifications undertaken by house owners is "culture" that has significant impacts on housing preferences. Jusan's (2010) works on housing personalization suggest that user-values (an expression of culture) determine users' decision in house remodeling. Religious belief has also been found to determine the spatial modification of the renovated houses, especially among Malay house owners. One can assume women have a significant role in such extensive modification works, although not specifically are covered in the research. For instance, Ghomeshi and Jusan (2012) discovered that design decision particularly the living room, dining room, and kitchen of the studied house remodeling in Tehran were made mostly by the housewives. It is an astonishing finding as Iranian communities are known for supporting patriarchal framework but choose a family decision-making in certain aspects of house design. In a wider context, studies on gender comparison discovered that women have a strong relationship with home activities, particularly in the kitchen and laundry areas (Amole, 2011). Women are also involved in these areas more than men even before reaching their marriage life (Ardener, 2000). Similarly in Taiwan, modifications of houses are claimed to design according to women's taste by locating the kitchen at the center rather than at the corner of the chambers (Bih & Chen, 2011). These facts have motivated the authors to investigate women's influence on Malaysian's house design. Such study is necessary, as the home manager of the house are these housewives (Lemu, 2007). Additionally, for the state that the activity patterns and its tendency to influence house design are not rigorously studied in this country.

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