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The drawbacks of housing overcrowding characteristic to rural migrants' life in Beijing

Liu Wen Tao

Anyang Normal University, Anyang, Henan Province, China

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Abstract Chinese government did great contribution in improving the residents' housing characteristics and was quite successful especially in urban area. However, in the big cities, the negative interrelationships between housing overcrowding characteristic and people's life still emerge and seriously affect people's life. In this research, the researcher will investigate the capital city Beijing as the target and to know the situation of housing overcrowding problem, also do some implication to the rural migrants' life. By the way, some suggestions will be forward in solving the housing overcrowding problem in Beijing among rural migrants. At the end, the Beijing local government should take some necessary actions to carry out the housing policy. In this research, the researcher obtains the data from two types of interviews: rural migrants and government officers. It is also supported by the utilization of secondary data. The findings of this research indicate that majority of the rural migrants endure by the housing overcrowding problem, also this housing problem seriously implies to their regular life in Beijing. Therefore, the Beijing government should provide some necessary assistance to this group people. This paper reports the housing overcrowding problem in Beijing and does the implications to the rural migrants' life. It also provides some suitable advice to other urban areas in solving the housing overcrowding problem.

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Introduction

The rapid urbanization process in the developing countries coupled with high population growth rates has pressured city development, especially on the issues of housing. The increase

in urban population is related to environmental, occupational and living adaptations in urban areas, notably in the metropolis such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen. Thus, the environmental problems such as air and water pollution and work-related competition together with housing shortages have emerged. However, the central government of China and its housing authorities seem to have little ability to solve housing problems promptly and quickly. The exponential population growth, together with the vast influx of migrants into urban areas, has created substantial impacts on housing development. Since housing is the basic and the most important issue for human beings, housing problems need to be settled first and foremost [1].

E-mail address: wentao_liu@126.com

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Rural migrants in Beijing refer to the migrants who live in Beijing for more than one month, without Beijing's urban *hukou* (household registration system), but who carry the rural *hukou* from other provinces [2]. A study on rural migrants has revealed that the proportion of these people is 73% of the total number of migrants, and that in Beijing, it constituted approximately 23% of the total population. Undeniably, there is an important reason for scholars to investigate the rural migrants' housing characteristics and the effects on their life. Housing characteristics signify the largest proportion of housing problems for rural migrants [3]. Some researchers have examined the rural migrants' housing characteristics in Beijing, but they have never done any research on how the housing characteristics influence rural migrants' life.

It is important to recognize that a major problem for these rural migrants in Beijing as identified by Jiang [4] rests in the fact that their housing in Beijing is very crowded. Jiang also establishes that the rural migrants in Beijing live in very crowded houses and their privacy has been affected due to this poor life. In addition, the majority of the rural migrants' housing is deprived of basic housing facilities. Similarly, as stated by Pang [5] housing characteristics as aforementioned are very common. According to their research in 2000, they state that in Beijing, nearly half of the rural migrants' housing is without kitchen and bathroom, 40% of their housing is very crowded, with 4–6 people sharing one small room, and 20% of them admitted that they did not have running water.

Wang [6] also views that the rural migrants in Beijing have very few housing choices without *hukou*. The Beijing urban *hukou* allows residents to purchase three types of housing with reliable financial capabilities. These three types of housing are as follows: (1) Commercial Housing; (2) Economically Affordable Housing; (3) Low-rent Housing. However, these choices are unattainable by rural migrants since one Square Meter would cost around 30,000 RMB. This automatically would make anyone understand that very few rural migrants can afford their own housing in Beijing. A study of housing characteristics in Melanesia suggests that good housing can be interpreted by "achieving privacy and avoiding crowding", especially in reference to the migrant housing [7]. Moreover, another research in Ethiopia has stated that good housing should not be crowded and supplied with good sanitation conditions [8].

Overall, the nature of the relationship between the three housing characteristics and life suggests that some analyses of the rural migrants' housing characteristics are very timely. In the context of this study the nature of this relationship has to be verified in order to determine the significance of rural migrants' housing characteristics and the effects on their life.

The problems discussed above are directly relevant to the main areas of rural migrants' housing characteristics and effects on their life. Moreover, good housing characteristics play a significant role in rural migrants' lives and they can affect their life. In relation to this, the researcher hopes that this research could perform certain functions, which are worthy of much closer examination.

Literature review

Overcrowding is a human reception that is stimulated by social activities and represented by housing characteristics. Some other researchers define overcrowding as a relative availability

of a space in terms of area and number of room. According to the National Population and Housing Census in Ethiopia in 1984, 39% of the urban population accommodates very crowded houses [9]. Now, the overcrowding problems have become a common issue in the urban areas especially in big cities such as New York, London, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai.

Overcrowding was a problem that started from the World War II and has steadily become a social problem in urban areas up until now. Due to the fast increase of the population, overcrowding in urban areas is a very serious issue. Also because of urbanization, many rural migrants migrate to urban areas and this migration further aggravates the housing overcrowding problem. According to the United Nations [10], the overcrowding problem in urban areas becomes much more severe in the last 20 years especially in the developing countries. In some big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, four or five people sharing a room is very common. Therefore, due to the overcrowding problem, it seriously disturbs people's sleep, work, personal privacy and so on.

Huang [11] states that rural migrants' rented houses in the urban areas of China are indeed, very crowded. He has pointed out that more than 70% of rural migrants' houses accommodate more than three people in a bedroom and the living rooms also tend to be used as a bedroom. Huang further point out that overcrowding usually happens in the urban areas, especially within the rural migrants' houses. In 1995, the data from Beijing and Shanghai have shown that rural migrants' average living areas in the two cities are only 7.5 and 9.0 m², while the local residents' living areas are three times more than those of the rural migrants.

Therefore, due to the high living density in big cities, the overcrowding problem can seriously affect people's life which includes sleeping, working, etc. Due to the overcrowding problem, people tend to feel unhappy, worried or even have some psychological problems. Renting private houses is a key housing choice for rural migrants and the rural migrants tend to save cash and many people share houses. Thus many rural migrants live together leading to the congested housing.

In China, rural migrants usually occupy very less space compared to urban local residents. Each rural migrant only occupies one-third of the average housing area compared to local residents. Stated by Krivo [12] the migrants, especially rural migrants usually live in super crowded housing in comparison with their own homes in their hometowns. The researcher conducted the research in United States in 1989 and found that accommodating more than one people per room is common and emphasizes that the migrants live in crowded houses because they simply have no other choices.

In conclusion, the prevalence of overcrowding among rural migrants may be attributable to several factors. First off, the finance limitation has forced the rural migrants to migrate in cities and rent small houses; thus, overcrowding cannot be avoided. Second, the rural migrants adopt some economic strategies to bring money to their hometown and save on daily expenses. For the rural migrants, overcrowding is not necessary for them.

Research methodology

As in previous empirical studies on this subject, the research on the housing overcrowding characteristic among rural migrants

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