

## A Qualitative Study of the Day-to-Day Lives of Families of Indian Squatters in Desa Mentari Hardcore Poor Housing Scheme in Taman Medan, Selangor

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of migration of Kampung Gandhi and Kampung Medan squatter residents to Desa Mentari Hardcore Poor Housing scheme in Taman Medan. This study also examined the factors behind the continued resurfacing of urban poverty among the squatter residents and the impact towards their daily lives in a city. To achieve the study's objectives a qualitative methodological approach was adopted which included the use of intensive interviews. Finding shows that a number of challenges are being faced by the squatter residents ranging from poor sanitation services to the challenge of social vices in Desa Mentari flats. Furthermore, findings also shows that a number of factors ranging from escaping high living costs, increasing family sizes and escaping the impacts of urban poverty were some of the factors that are behind the continued social ill problems resurfacing among the squatter residents in Desa Mentari Hardcore Poor Housing in Taman Medan.

**Keywords:** *Malaysian Indians, poverty, squatter, Desa Mentari*

### 1. Introduction

Malaysia is a multi-racial country with three main races as its core; Bumiputera, Chinese and Indians. The number of people staying in Malaysia makes up to 28.3 million. Based on the department of statistic Malaysia (2010) census it shows that Bumiputera (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and others (0.7%). Indians community is therefore consisting of approximately 1.8 million from the total population in Malaysia. Malaysian Indians however can be further divided based on ethno-lingual groups which are Tamil, Malayalees, Telugus, Sikh Punjabis. The combination of Tamils, Malayalees and Telugus groups constitute more than 85% of the people of Indian origin in the country. Sikh Punjabis on the other hand make up the remainder of the Indian groups (Department of Statistics of Malaysia, 2010).

Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) which was formed to uphold and defend the rights of Indian community since independent however could not uphold and defend the rights of its people. One of the main reason is due to MIC's political power are limited in Malaysian government. Indian community are rather small in each state as compare with other ethnics and therefore it relied on their allies Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) to win in general election since it is formed under the wings of UMNO (Manickam, 2012).

The party's representatives therefore as pointed by Manickam (2012) are weak hence fail in addressing nonetheless to fight for the needs and wants of the Indian community but rather seeking settlement because of they fear of jeopardizing their position in the government. This is clearly seen within the MIC's leaders in the pass and present leader

which is V.T Sambathan. In other word, MIC only acts as a voice for the coalition Government or UMNO. The submissiveness continued abandonment weak Indian leaders has led a major populace of Indian community to live in a poor condition especially on Indians who lived in the squatter houses.

### **1.1 Background of Desa Mentari Hardcore Poor Housing Scheme**

The residents of Desa Mentari mostly hail from Kampung Medan and Kampung Gandhi, which witnessed clashes between Indians and Malays in March 2001 that left six people dead and scores injured. There are 13 blocks of low-cost flats in Desa Mentari and each of the blocks are 18-storeys high with a population around 6,000. There are gymnasium, playground, covered parking, jogging track and mini market build in that area but poorly maintained thus most of the equipment is not usable.

Malays make up 60 per cent of the occupants in Desa Mentari and the balance is made up of Indians. The two sides have seen conflicts between them and not to mention the crime that takes place there. The antagonism between both communities can be traced back to their origins. Most of the dwellers there hail from Kampung Medan and Kampung Gandhi squatter settlements that witnessed clashes between both ethnic groups in 2001. Following the clashes, they were resettled in PPR Desa Mentari in 2004. Like in the squatter neighbourhood, cleanliness and civic consciousness were lacking too. Thus residents here also have to put up with littering, vandalism, gangsterism and a host of unsavoury characters (Kurniawati Kamaruddin, 2012).

### **1.2 Research Objective**

- 1.) To find out the current challenges face by the Indian community Desa Mentari low cost flat houses.
- 2.) To find out whether there are any improvement after moving from squatters to Desa Mentari low cost flat houses.

### **1.3 Research Question**

- 1.) What are the current challenges faced by the Indian community living in the Desa Mentari low cost flat houses?
- 2.) What are the improvement meet by the Indian community after moving from squatters to Desa Mentari low cost flat houses?

## **2. Literature Review**

Embong (1996) have pointed that NEP was introduced to the Malaysian system in order to bring equality for its people and at the same time boost the country's economy for the betterment of the people and the country. As years pass by of the two aims of the NEP, however, it has also become quite clear, especially in the 1980s, that for both Malays and non-Malays, Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras, the restructuring aim of the NEP has taken precedence over poverty reduction effort. As a result, poverty eradication is widely believed to mainly involve efforts to improve the economic welfare of the Malays, and perhaps other Bumiputeras, even though such a perception is contradicted by the official commitment to poverty eradication regardless of race. Such a view is reinforced by the fact that poverty eradication measures mainly seem to

involve Malay peasants, more specifically those in the officially designated poverty target groups, especially rubber smallholders, rice farmers, and fishermen (Jomo, 1990).

In the study conducted by Embong, he made a comparison between the situations in the 1950s to 1960s before the implementation of NEP and export-led industrialization with the situation in the 1980s and 1990s. The results of this comparison shows that the middle class growth and expansion has been swift. From being a relatively small group in the early years of Independence, making up only 4.0 per cent in 1957 and 5.9 per cent in 1970, the "new" middle class increased significantly to 11.2 percent in 1990, 13 percent in 1995, and is expected to increase further to 15.3 percent in 2000 - an increase of almost 10 percentage points in 30 years (Embong, 1996). These noteworthy outcomes prove that NEP has been effective in expanding the middle class. Besides that, looking at the results obtained by Embong there is a distinct change in where it showed the effectiveness of NEP as there in as an increase in all race groups but however Malays seem to have a larger increase rate compared to Indian and Chinese middle class group.

Embong (1996) supports what Jomo says as according to him the UMNO middle class elites believe the country needs a strong ethnic group to be the spearhead in industrial development and nationalism hence birth of Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC) was inevitable. 30% share ownership and participation as well as other quotas consolidating the power of BCIC were given to this special community. At the same time this gave rise to Mahathir's Melayu Baru which proved that non-Malays were just of second importance and the priority is all for the Malays.

### **2.1 Indians in Estates**

According to Sinnappah as quoted in Manickam (2012), V.T Sambathan failed to obtain enough funds for the Indians community when the government allocated millions of dollars for education outlines for Malaya under The Razak Plan in 1956. Furthermore, inadequate representation of Indians appointed in the upper chamber of the Parliament resulted in not enough people in power to handle the Indian community issues. In late 1950s and early 1960s the Indian community encountered a major economic turmoil as the British capitalist left after Malaya gained her independence, thus thousands of acres of rubber plantation were split and sold off to industrialists. This unfortunately left many Indians jobless and vagrant creating a distressed Malaysian Indians as almost 80% depended on rubber plantation as means of support.

In the Fifth Malaysian Plan 1986-1990, it showed Malaysia suffered from inflation in between. The main victims for the inflation were the poor estate workers who were earning so little had to suffer even worse. Below is the table to show the incidence of poverty and hardcore rural sector.

Table 1: The Incidence of Poverty and Hardcore Rural Sector (%)

<b>Groups</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1987</b>
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Rubber estate workers	65.0	40.0
Padi farmers	88.0	50.20
Estate workers	40.0	15.0
Oil palm workers	9.1	-
Coconut farm worker	53.0	39.2

Source: Fifth Malaysian Plan 1986-1990

The Malaysian government classified The Indians who reside in these estates are all considered to be the backward class and labeled as poverty category. These estates at that time where all being fragmentized and owned by private owners and therefore the Government could not dispense the funds for private concerns (Manickam, 2012). The estate workers in the year 1979 according to Ramachandran only received salary Rm 7.90 per day which would come up to RM 237, and since in estates not just the husband works but also the wife the bare minimum earning for a family would be RM 474 (Ramachandran,1994). The PLI at time states that any family that earns below RM 500 is considered to be in poverty for rural (estate) and RM 700 for urban but as the years pass on in the 90's the PLI for the for the rural changed to RM700 but however the wages earned by the workers did not increase (Manickam, 2012). This then led to the immigration to squatters.

## **2.2 Squatter settlements**

In early stage of Indian settlement begin from squatters in Kuala Lumpur, Klang Valley, Johor Bharu, Butterworth and Penang. The settlement was largely focused on outskirts of Kuala Lumpur such as Old Klang Road, the Federal Highway, Cheras, Sentul, Selayang and Damansara including Petaling Jaya (Rajoo, 1993). In several states in Malaysia squatter settlements still remain as a major problem. Squatting problem began with when land now belonged to the state and not the people. The proper ownership of the land can and will only be acknowledged through land registration thus whoever does not have proper documentation or even stays at the land without permission is considered to be an illegitimate tenant. This illegitimate tenant may be put on trial as it states in section 425 of the National Land Code 1965.

Squatter area refers to a residential area in an urban locality inhabited by the very poor who have no access to tenured land of their own, and hence "squat" on vacant land, either private or public (Srinivas, 2012). A squatter settlement, due to its inherent "non-legal" status, has services and infrastructure below the "adequate" or minimum levels of services such as water supply, electricity, sanitation system, proper roads (Srinivas, 2012). Infrastructure education institutes, clinics or hospitals, and shops in squatters area are also tend to be in tattered conditions identical to the squatters they live in. Water supply, for example, to individual households may be absent, or a few public or community stand pipes may have been provided, using either the city networks, or a hand pump itself.

A study conducted by Ramachandran (1994) revealed that the Indians who originally stay in estates can be either voluntary or involuntary moved to squatter areas when their homes were taken over by either by private sectors and fragmentized or it used by the government for property and township development. On top of it, Around 300,000 Indians (16.6%) who have lost their jobs and home were forced to move to urban area however do not have prior savings and ends up living in squatters area. This led to the

rise of the squatter settlements that were present during both British and Japanese occupation.

This paper is borrowing the definitions of squatter settlement as a slum settlement (sometimes illegal or unauthorized) of impoverished people who live in improvised dwellings made from scrap materials, often plywood, corrugated metal and sheets of plastic (Whitehouse, 2005). Squatter settlements are also known as shanty towns, informal settlements, low income settlements and semi-permanent settlements or unplanned settlements (Srinivas, 1991). Abrams (1964) mentioned that the slums or squatter as a "conquest" of urban areas for the purpose of protection and shelter, defined both by laws of force and the force of law. Turner (1969) takes a positive view and describes slums as a very successful solution for the housing problem in urban areas of developing countries. During the British rule, Peninsular Malaysia was viewed as a gold mine due to it being rich in various resources. Because of this, the British's main goal was to obtain the natural resources of the country. To achieve this goal they formulated an economic policy which was more to the capitalist expansion of tin-mining and export-oriented agricultural industries. For this to be feasible they need more workers, so they brought in workers from China and India. The Chinese was to work at the tin mines and the Indians at rubber estates. The British who brought all of these workers did not prepare proper facility for their housing thus squatter settlements were made to accommodate these workers. At the same time, where the land ownership system was made, laws regarding the use of land and building were implemented as well.

The Second World War which occurred at 1939 to 1945 also played a role in the increase in squatter settlements in Malaya. During this era, Malaya's economy was thriving only on tin and rubber industries. But however due to the war, British government encouraged the growing of food crops in the whole country even by squatters in urban areas like Kuala Lumpur, as their supply for necessary food rations were depleting due to the war (Friel-Simon and Khoo, 1976). Besides that when the Japanese invaded Malaya, people living in the urban areas was moved to rural areas to grow food crops. The moving done was either voluntary or involuntary. The effect of this movement and the need to produce food locally led to a drastic decline in the economy as imports of foodstuffs and exports of tin and rubber had come to a halt. Archives show that during the Japanese rule (1942-1945) the number of squatters in Kuala Lumpur was higher than the years 1939 to 1942 as the fear of the Japanese drove the people living in urban areas to squatter settlements (Friel-Simon and Khoo, 1976). From the year 1947 to 1951 approximately 10,000 squatter houses were built within the town area providing houses for about 85,000 people. To curb with the issue of providing suitable land for squatters and for improperly sited industries that had arisen in Kuala Lumpur from the time of the Japanese rule, an outline was planned for the setting up of a new settlement in Petaling Jaya, Selangor (Pushpa, 1989).

At the present time, there are many explanations for squatters to still be occupying any land illegally but the reasons would be unlike the factors present during the British era. Now it can be because of poverty, illegal immigrants or encouragements and promises from the political leaders (Sufian & Mohamad, 2009). According to Nadarajah (2006) the people started squatting in this area during the 1960s, when rubber and oil palm plantations elsewhere in the country began to close down and the rural mining industry entered a prolonged slump. People moved to the city so that they can find their new

livelihood but with the high cost of living, they had to resort to squatting. By 1999, the population in the squatter settlements had reached about 30,000, and that is when efforts began to move them out into either temporary or permanent low-cost flats built for this purpose (Nadarajah, 2006). The increase in number of Indians from estates moving to cities gradually as years pass for reasons such to earn more income or they have lost their jobs and houses in estates as shown below in table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Indian in Rural and Urban Areas in Peninsular Malaysia

<b>Year</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Total</b>
1970	323,435	609,194	932,629
1980	448,397	644,715	1,093,112
1991	837,659	475,929	1,313,588
2000	1,338,510	341,622	1,680,132

Source: Population and housing census report of 1970, 1980, 1991, 2000, Department of Statistic Malaysia.

However, their move to urban areas can be viewed as something that is ill prepared. This is because they do not have the required skills or capital to survive in urban areas as the skill they know is all related to plantation and in urban areas that skill is useless thus becomes a contributing factor for urban poverty (Rupasingha, & Goetz, 2007). In order to survive they have to take up hard labor jobs which they still earn little but nevertheless more than that they earn in the estates. Although their wages have increased considerably the Indians now face a new poverty which is urban poverty. This is where they make ends meet to survive with the high-living costs in the city (Hoy & Jimenez, 1991). Besides facing the poverty the residents in the squatters also face another problem which is social problems such family disputes, child abuse, alcoholism, robberies, murders and gangsterism start to give rise in the area and as time passes by it became common (Manickam, 2012).

### **2.3 Urban poverty**

The Malaysian government defines poverty in two approaches as stated by Anand (1977) which are absolute approach and relative approach. In the absolute approach a definite "minimal" living standard (in terms of nutrition levels, clothing, etc.) is specified, and the income required to support it is calculated where else the relative approach on the other hand interprets poverty in relation to the existing living standards of the society, by recognizing clearly the interdependence between the poverty line and the entire distribution of income. In short, Poverty can be defined as the state of being poor; lack of the means of providing material needs or comforts for the household.

The Poverty Line Index (PLI) which refers to the level of income that just sufficient to obtain the minimum necessities of life or basic needs which includes both food and non-food items is used to measure how poor is an individual or a household. Therefore, a person/household is considered poor if his or her income falls below that line (Zain, 2007). Poverty can also be separated into two types of poverty which is urban poverty and rural poverty. Aiken, & Leigh (1975) however through their study which focused on urban poverty. The Malaysian government defines urban poverty as lack of monetary ability to procure basic needs, which are separated into food and non-food components. It was based on the minimum requirements of a household for food, clothing and footwear, and other non-food items such as rent, fuel and power

(Musalmah, 2005).

Projek Perumahan Rakyat Miskin Tegar (PPRT) or Housing Development Program for the Hardcore Poor stated in Rancangan Malaysia ke-7 which was founded by the former finance minister Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim in 1995 were carried out with its. PPRT main goal was to relocate squatter settlers into low cost houses in order to overcome poverty issue among Indians communities. Two types of housing were building under this project under the Developers' Association Malaysia (REDHA) which comprised 5 storey walkup flats and another is single and double storey terrace houses. The houses were sold with a price cap of RM25, 000 to RM 42,000. For instance the low cost houses in Desa Mentari were sold at the price of RM 32,000.

Urban poverty is usually coupled with the presence of squatters as it is the major source for urban poverty. Low level of education, lack of job opportunities, large family size, and lack of access to social facilities are the factors that urban poverty occurs and this are all mostly found when one looks at the residents of the squatters (Siwar, & Kasim, 1997). Other scholars such as Hassan and Saleh also support this statement as they mention that low level of education and also low level of income and wealth in squatter areas are the cause for urban poverty (Hassan & Saleh, 1991). According to Musalmah (2006), low levels of education or skills, lack of employment opportunities, low wages, large family size and lack of basic amenities are among the factors causing urban poverty.

According to Curley (2005) urban poverty has been the subject of sociological and political debate for more than a century as causes, consequences, and solutions to poverty. The increase in poverty concentration has coincided with a dramatic increase in joblessness, F-headed households, welfare dependency, out-of-wedlock births, segregation, and crime. Teitz and Chapple (1998) in their studies identify there are eight characteristics on inner-city poverty as. Any one or more of this hypothesis mentioned by the scholars could be used to understand why a country is facing urban poverty. The hypotheses are show below,

H1: Inner-city poverty is the result of profound structural economic shifts that have eroded the competitive position of the central cities in the industrial sectors that historically provided employment for the working poor, especially minorities.

H2: Inner-city poverty is a reflection of the inadequate human capital of the labor force, which results in lower productivity and inability to compete for employment in emerging sectors that pay adequate wages.

H3: Inner-city poverty results from the persistence of racial and gender discrimination in employment, which prevents the population from achieving its full potential in the labor market.

H4: Inner-city poverty is the product of the complex interaction of culture and behavior, which has produced a population that is isolated, self-referential, and detached from the formal economy and labor market.

H5: Inner-city poverty is the outcome of a long, historical process of segregating poor and minority populations in cities that resulted in a spatial mismatch between workers and jobs when employment decentralized.

H6: Inner-city poverty results from migration processes that simultaneously remove the middle-class and successful members of the community, thereby reducing social capital, while bringing in new, poorer populations whose competition in the labor

market drives down wages and employment chances of residents.

H7: Inner-city poverty reflects an endogenous growth deficit that results from low levels of entrepreneurship and access to capital, especially among minority populations.

H8: Inner-city poverty is the unanticipated consequence of public policy that was intended to alleviate social problems but has, in fact, caused them to worsen in some aspects.

Poverty may also be understood as an aspect of unequal social status, inequitable social relationship, experienced as social exclusion, dependency, and diminished capacity to participate or to develop meaningful connection with other people in society (Silver, 1994). The poor rarely speak of income, but focus instead on managing assets-physical, human, social and environmental as a way to cope with their vulnerability (Sen, 2003). In the squatter, life of people seems insecure, unhinged and unstable. This strongly indicates that opportunity crisis in the rural areas has caused migration of the people. However, migrated have also faced same problem in the city life being a poor, illiterate or belonging to the member of excluded family (Acharya, 2010).

Sandhu (2008) mentioned that the socio economic act as a determinant of Indian urban poverty through employment and income and the effect of unemployment among the Indian is due to lack of skills and education. Mahaganapthy Dass et al (2010) mentioned that the Indian community is facing many social problems due to urban poverty and the participation of Indian community in developmental projects is very limited. And the major social issues like alcoholism and gangsterism are not new to the community because this unhealthy lifestyle was brought from living condition in plantation where the subculture of poverty among the Indian could not be prevented.

### 3. Methodology

A series of interviews were carried out on ten people who have stayed in squatters and are living in PPR Desa Mentari. All interviews were recorded and transcripts accordingly and further analyze using thematic analysis. The required conditions for the respondents to be qualified are, they must originate from the squatters area such as Kampung Medan and Kampung Ghandi and now currently staying in PPR Desa Mentari.

### 4. Findings

Table 3: Basic details of Desa Mentari respondents

Gender	Age	Occupation	Income (RM)	No. of Family Members	Squatter Areas
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Male ( <b>M1</b> )	40	Electrician	RM1,200.00	5	Kampung Medan
Male ( <b>M2</b> )	42	Security Guard	RM1,200.00	4	Kampung Gandhi
Male ( <b>M3</b> )	45	Contractor	RM900.00	5	Kampung Gandhi
Female ( <b>F1</b> )	42	Packaging Operator	RM900.00	3	Kampung Medan
Female ( <b>F2</b> )	44	Cleaner	RM900.00	4	Kampung Medan
Female ( <b>F3</b> )	41	Flower Vendor	RM750.00	3	Kampung Gandhi

The above table 3 shows the basic details of Desa Mentari's respondents. Another common thing that could be seen was all of the respondents actually originated from estates. The reason for their move was the income they were earning in the estate was too low where they only earned minimum RM8 and maximum RM9.50 per day. So they left the estate in order to establish a better life for themselves. **M1** (electrician) and **M2** (security guard) both earn RM1200 whereas **M3** (contractor) earns RM 900 per month. **F1** (packaging operator) and **F2** (a cleaner in a school) also earn RM900 whereas **F3** (flower vendor) earns RM750. The respondents felt although the income they earned was low but they could still make through with their daily lives.

#### 4.1 Economic

For this particular study economic theme will be revolving around issues like income, living cost and job opportunities. *"When I was working back in the times when I was still living in the squatters although I only earned RM 500 I could still provide for my family"* (**M1**). In terms of job opportunity all of the respondents gave the same answer. They said that due to their lack of skills and knowledge in other job sectors they could not find good jobs but rather jobs that demanded manual labor. *"The only I thing I knew was how to rubber tap because that was the only job I knew, and when I came to the city it was hard for me to get a better job so I joined the company nearby"* (**M2**). All of the respondents once they moved to PPRT flats switched their current jobs and got a better job. The reason for this change in career path was due to the increase in living cost where their previous income could not support them or their families. *"I feel that the move to the PPR flats had positive side in my life because through it I found a new job and also I own my own house"* (**M3**). Nonetheless, they could achieve this improvement only because of they already manage to adapt to the urban lifestyle as well as due to them gaining other skills as well. However in regards to income all the respondents have higher income than previously however they felt that the earning is not enough to sustain their family. This is all because of the fact that they have additional costs such as electric and water bills, house tax, land tax, vehicle and house monthly payment for those could not pay full cash in addition to their family living cost. *"In order for me to manage the living costs since the move to here, I actually rotate paying bills. For example, in January, I pay electric bill only then in February, I pay my house installments then in March I pay water bill then on April it is electric bill again. I have been doing this ever since I moved to the flats"* (**F2**).

## 4.2 Social

This section comprised of the social problems such as lack of facilities, issues with education, gangsterism, alcoholism and last but citizenship issues faced by the residents in Desa Mentari Hardcore Poor Housing Scheme. When asked about the challenges that the Indian communities faced when they were staying in squatter areas in the aspect of facilities and social problems. All of the respondents when they had no electricity connection like normal houses do, but rather they have a generator that supplies the electricity to them at fixed times per day. *“We relied on generators for electricity supply when we were staying in the squatters. One generator could only supply electricity to twenty houses. The generator is usually started up at 6pm and closed at 7am” (M2)*. Besides that the respondents also mention the fact that they had no proper water supply for almost one decade in the squatters’ area. So during the time where there was no water supply nearby river was relied for water supply. It was noted some of the residents (children) actually became sick because of the consumption of polluted water. *“After 10 long years staying in the squatters and dozens of complain to the local ADUNS and ministers finally we received proper and clean water supply. However each of us had to fork out small money to pay for the installation (F2)*. The respondents also mentioned that during their stay there was no one who came to collect rubbish in the squatters where they lived for a long time. They had to hire their own lorry to come and collect the rubbish. *“We never had Majlis people come and collect the rubbish so we gathered all the rubbish in an area. However after a while the stench become to unbearable till we had to hire our own lorry to come and collect the rubbish” (M1)*.

The roads were only built once the election time when the Minister of Works for Malaysia, of that time Dato' Seri Samy Vellu Sangalimuthu came and asked to support Barisan National. *“We were happy to see that finally we have proper roads instead of soil roads after so long.” (M1 & M3)*. In terms of social problems alcoholism and gangsterism where something that was start to brew up in the squatters area. *“Fights occurring here is something common but it usually something small only. The Kampung Medan incident was the most serious issue that happened there because police never came before when there were any fights occurring.” (F3)*. In terms of facilities the respondents feels that they are doing better off compared to their stay in the squatters. The only facility problem that they face is the lift that is not maintained properly which makes it hard for the older folk to travel to their houses. *“The lifts have been spoilt for more than a year and the maintaince people does not want to repair it because a majority of them do not want to pay the maintaince fee” (F1)*. The social problems all the respondents highlighted were lack of education and rise gangsterism as they felt it is the most prominent in the flats. It could be seen clearly the youth staying in Desa Mentari low cost housing flats are so keen in joining gangs as the means to escape poverty. *“Most of the children and teenagers in flats view by joining gangs they could make easy money and does not need to suffer like the parents” (M1)*. Since the youths are joining this gangs there two adverse effects. One of it is the crime that is occurring in the area due to gang activities. *“Recently there was a gang fight that occurred between Malays and Indians in the community that somewhere in ending of March where “parangs” were used in the fight and a lot of people ended up hurt” (M2)*. *“Stealing bikes are part of the initiation into some of the gangs. As far as I know 10 motorbikes were stolen in just one month” (F1)*.

Another effect was the increase in the number of dropouts as the youth do not want to study anymore thus this creates a society of uneducated and illiterates’ Indian youths

who are bent on violence as the key to solving problems. *“The security placed at the community is fearful of these teenagers who are in gangs as they would resort to violence the moment people advise or scold them. They do this to show they are in power and no one should interfere with them” (F2)*. Besides that small children who see their older brothers or fathers who are involved in this gang also start to follow in their footsteps at a very young age thus destroying their life in the process. *“Nowadays you can see a group of 10 year old boys buying cheap alcohol; Taisong and drink in broad daylight in the playground of the community and you cannot do advise them for they will use vulgar words to scold you” (F3)*.

#### **4.3 Politics**

According to the respondents the only help they received was the discount of RM 10,000 for the Desa Mentari Hardcore Poor Housing Scheme from the government and also during election times they receive goodies such as rice, oil and sugar from the government. However it is to be noted that according to all the respondents opposition party has never visited them or offered them any help in any way. *“The help government that I received was moving from the squatters was by giving me discount and currently the help in getting nationality for me and my family” (M3)*

#### **5. Discussion**

As Ramachandran (1994) said the PLI in the 70's states that any family that earns below RM 500 is considered to be in poverty for rural (estate) and RM 700 for urban but as the years pass on in the 90's the PLI for the rural changed to RM700 but however the wages earned by the workers did not increase which lead to immigration of estate workers to urban areas. And according to the findings this was indeed the major factor for the people to move to Kampung Gandhi and Kampung Medan squatters as they all felt that they were underpaid in the estates. Their pay was RM8 minimum and maximum RM9.50 per day which would total up to RM240 minimum per month and RM285 maximum per month. Earning such low income it would be no surprise that the people would want to move to establish a better lifestyle for them.

Their move to urban areas can be viewed as something that is ill prepared. This is because they do not have the required skills or capital to survive in urban areas as the skill they know is all related to plantation and in urban areas that skill is useless thus becomes a contributing factor for urban poverty (Rupasingha & Goetz, 2007). The respondents said that due to their lack of skills and knowledge in other job sectors they could not find good jobs but rather jobs that demanded manual labor. This is all due the fact that they have been in the plantation sector for their entire lifetime so when they make this drastic transition they cannot display the skills that are required to survive in the urban area. Hence since they do not have the proper skills to obtain high paying jobs they will be forced to resort to taking up jobs that use their physical strength (loading and unloading boxes) or basic skills (cleaning/taking care of children).

Once the respondents shifted to Desa Mentari Hardcore Poor Housing Scheme they obtained new jobs but is still considered to be low class job but it was progress nonetheless. They could achieve this progress because they already start too adept to the urban lifestyle as well as due to them gaining contacts with people thus improving their chance of getting better jobs. However, even with these new jobs they still fall

under poverty category. What would be the reason for this? Scholars such as Siwar and Kasim (1997) say that low level of education, lack of job opportunities, large family size, and lack of access to social facilities are the factors that urban poverty occurs.

Just as the scholar mentioned the respondents who finds it difficult to manage the high living costs all have big families. Besides that due to the respondents low level of education they could only get jobs such as electrician, contractor, security guard, packaging operator, cleaner and flower vendor. Besides that Musalmah a scholar says that “low levels of education or skills, lack of employment opportunities, low wages, large family size and lack of basic amenities are among the factors causing urban poverty” (Musalmah, 2006). Since that is the only job that they could find thus they have low income. The respondents mentioned about facing problems such as no electricity connection, no proper water supply, rubbish were not collected and the roads where not built until a certain period of time. This coincides with Srinivas (2012) as he says “infrastructure have minimum services in squatters such as water supply, electricity, sanitation system, proper roads”. The reason for this would be since the land is occupied illegally the government does not take heed in providing these services.

Based on the findings it can be seen that lack of education and gangsterism is prevalent in their community. The reason for this would be:

- 1) The gangsterism culture that was formed back in the squatters’ area has evolved.
- 2) Teenagers in the community refuse to be in poverty anymore so they choose the easy way out, which is gangsterism.
- 3) As more teenagers start to join the gangs, the number of school dropouts increase thus less educated people is around.
- 4) Parents who are too busy working do make due with high cost of living, leaving children unsupervised.

It can be seen clearly that the government, once moved them to low cost flats did not bother to supervise them or care for the needs of this people. Manikam (2012) mentioned that the government particularly MIC are just warming their seats instead of sending various associations to help this people. In the end Indians are the ones who are caught up in the quagmire when it comes to issues such as housing education, employment, wages and social problems.

## **6. Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the Indian community had to face a life full of struggles not only when they stayed in the squatters but also in the Desa Mentari Hardcore Poor Housing Scheme housing areas. It is undeniable that the government did some effort to provide a better life by moving the people from the squatters to housing areas but it is not sufficient as the people are still struggling to cope with daily expenses and high living costs.

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