Baby Care Room in Shopping Malls:
Accessibility to Malaysian Public

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Abstract

A Baby Care Room is a room for the use of carers to attend to personal needs of infants, toddlers, and even younger children. It is a space allocated for nappies change, fluids and solids preparation, feeding, breastfeeding, also breast pumping for mothers. In Malaysia, the numbers of BCR in shopping malls have shown positive growth lately. However, the efficiencies in benefiting its users are still a question raised by many. This paper attempts to review the current design standards of BCR in shopping malls, and its design efficiency to improve the quality of life among Malaysian public.

1. Introduction

In recent years, many noble efforts in upholding the rights of women and children have been taken by Malaysia’s most dedicated women leaders, private bodies, NGOs and support group associations. The Government, in fact, has seriously initiated early childhood education and care project in providing a quality environment for all children starting from young. The history of women’s rights movement was marked in 1993 when breastfeeding policy was developed, followed by the formation of the
Breastfeeding Hospital Initiative Recognition committee in promoting breastfeeding among Malaysian mothers. Ministry of Health Malaysia adopted the WHO-UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative aimed to increase breastfeeding among all women in Malaysia in line with the WHO recommendation of at least six months of exclusive breastfeeding (International Breastfeeding Journal, 2011). According to World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (2011): breastfeeding rates for the recommended period of 6 months is less than 15% in Malaysia compared to the global average of over 30%. It is everyone’s role and responsibility to protect promotes, and support breastfeeding in this country including young people. World Health Organization (2000) has promoted supportive environment and policies as well as providing facilities at the workplace so as to continue breastfeeding among working mothers.

Realizing the importance of breastfeeding especially in providing safe and adequate nutrition among infants, breastfeeding practice should be at any time and any place. Numerous attempts have been made to inculcate the holistic practice among Malaysian mothers through campaigns, prenatal classes, and training intervention within the antenatal care team and child health centre. Malaysian public is now moving towards tolerating the practice of breastfeeding in public even with the existence of many cultures and beliefs. More mothers with infants and children are often seen in public spaces nowadays indicating that it is possible for a mother to breastfeed while out from home. Breastfeeding little infants and care needs of younger children has led shopping mall managers to consider having such facilities for mothers. Breastfeeding room is frequently referred as ‘Lactation Room’ or Nursing Mother’s Room in hospitals, healthcare and office buildings where mothers are facilitate to express milk. However, breastfeeding rooms in shopping malls are often termed as Baby Room, Baby Care Room, Diaper Changing Room and even Mother’s Room, where mothers may also attend to any needs of their younger children besides having a corner to breastfeed their babies.

2. Literature Review

The importance of breastfeeding in most US states now have resulted to the existence of laws. A mother may breastfeed her baby anywhere she is allowed to be. Some commercial establishments do provide breastfeeding rooms although laws specify that mothers may breastfeed anywhere without requiring them to go to another area (L. Kaplan, D., 2010). In Australia, a survey of restaurant and shopping centre managers concerning breastfeeding in their facilities was conducted by McIntyre et al in 1999. The result shows only 37.1% of the shopping centers provided a baby room and almost half 48.1% had no breastfeeding facility at all. McIntyre also suggested that there should be a rule for shopping centers and other public spaces requiring suitable breastfeeding rooms in their facilities.

2.1. Breastfeeding in Public

A media analysis in 1998 clearly shows that British society as a whole is not breastfeeding friendly and breastfeeding in public remains a concern for many women. Therefore, the decision to breastfeed might have social implications for the women, such as fear of disapproval in public and social isolation for the period during which the baby is exclusively breastfed. It is necessary to tackle breastfeeding barriers and provide adequate resources at the individual, institutional, community, and policy levels so as to make breastfeeding a norm (Kaplan, 2010).

Another Australian qualitative study identifies environmental barriers to breastfeeding in a low socio-economic area in Adelaide, and the problem of breastfeeding in public was raised spontaneously by all participants. It transpired that breastfeeding in public was seen as embarrassing for mothers and their partners. Fathers felt uncomfortable about their partner’s breastfeeding in public, but they did not mind
other women doing it. The authors concluded that an environment that enables women to breastfeed is far from being achieved, particularly in relation to breastfeeding in public (McIntyre, 1999).

2.2. Breastfeeding Room

Breastfeeding Room is a private, purpose built parent room with change table, wash basin and comfortable seating being incorporated into a local business complex (Cross, C. & Ludford, J, 2004). Such room must be ideally located for easier accessibility by the public. A proper signage in promoting such facilities should be implemented to direct all users. McIntyre (1999) also evaluated the suitability of breastfeeding facilities outside the home and found that those 48.1% shopping malls without baby care rooms were all located in or next to the toilets. While toilets would not be considered a suitable place for eating or drinking, it seems to be acceptable to breastfeed a baby in a toilet. The authors conclude that breastfeeding is viewed as another "form of excretion".

2.3. Baby Care Room

A Baby Care Room, BCR is a room providing facilities for the use of carers to attend to the personal needs of babies or toddlers, such as breastfeeding, feeding fluids and solids, changing of nappies and the like. These rooms need to be purpose considered by the building designer so that they are in an accessible location and are functional (Penrith Council, 2005). The increasing numbers of male partners caring for their babies and young children resulted to more numbers of facilities available for them to change and to feed, as well. A Control Plan was developed Penrith Council Australia to cater for the needs of breastfeeding mothers, breast fed and bottle fed babies with their carers both male and female.

Table 1. Penrith City Council’s minimum requirements for various types of development in Baby Care Room provision (2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of development</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community facilities such as neighbourhood centres and community halls or other types of publicly owned facilities, which are less than 300m² GFA.</td>
<td>Change table in male, female and disabled toilets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All development covered by this Development Control Plan which is less than 1000m² GFA.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants with greater than 30 seats.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community facilities such as neighbourhood centres and community halls or other types of publicly owned facilities which are 300m2 – 1000m² GFA.</td>
<td>10m² Baby Care Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All development covered by this Development Control Plan which is 1001-2000m² GFA.</td>
<td>20m² Baby Care Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All development covered by this Development Control Plan which is greater than 2001m² GFA.</td>
<td>30m² Baby Care Room</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1 illustrates Penrith Australian Council’s minimum requirements for various types of development in Baby Care Room provision. It can be summarized that different development requires a certain standard dimensions of BCR. The range varies from facilitating changing table in washrooms up to providing 10m², 20m² and 30m² BCR, depending on the ground floor area, GFA of each development. Such Development Control Plan shows the local authority’s initiative in promoting breastfeeding to the public besides ensuring hygienic facilities for mothers to care for their young. In Malaysia, such attempts are made by building owners themselves considering the needs of their users and the numbers of such
facilities are currently increasing in shopping malls where mothers most spend their time with their children.

3. Methodology

This report presents case studies to illustrate Baby Care Room’s accessibility in shopping malls. A cross-sectional study was conducted within Klang Valley area which covers some districts of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. Selangor is a Malaysian state with one of the lowest breastfeeding rates (National Health and Morbidity Survey Breastfeeding, 1997). It has the highest population density and has been recognized as one of the most developed states in Malaysia. As for Kuala Lumpur, it is the most urbanized and developed district in the country as it is the capital city of Malaysia. These factors were taken into consideration when selecting the site study.

3.1. Shopping Malls in Selangor

Twenty one main shopping malls were identified from a list of the latest shopping malls providing Baby Care Room facilities within Klang Valley area. Only seventeen were approached and studied thoroughly due to some unavoidable physical constraint. Some malls, however, comprises a few numbers of BCR within the building, and furthermore each BCR offers different design layout and facilities equipment. Each seventeen malls were visited and resulted to twenty three numbers of BCR to be studied.

3.2. Baby Care Room

It can be identified that there are two different categories of BCR in shopping malls; BCR provided by shopping malls itself and BCR provided by anchor tenant, which is normally comprised of well-known departmental stores such as Parkson, Jusco and Metrojaya. There are some attempts made by both parties to corporate nappy changing table in female washrooms, but those are better off known as ‘baby fittings’ compared to a more equipped Baby Care Room. Figure 1 illustrates various BCR design by shopping malls and departmental stores within the case studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Numbers of provision

Many efforts have been shown in providing a family-friendly facility such as Baby Care Room in shopping malls. It is a key measure to provide a sufficient number of BCR based on the total number of visitors to each mall. Approximately 58% of the total number of shopping malls is allocating between 2 to 5 numbers of BCR in each building as shown in Figure 2. It is a positive indication that BCR is as
indispensable as other facilities in shopping malls. While approximately 29% of the case studies comprises of at least 1 number of BCR in each building. This indicates that, in every shopping mall, at least one baby care facility is to be considered for the use of the visitors.

4.2. Location of BCR

BCR is to be easily accessed and sighted for public use. They are to be located within circulation route and not hidden in a back corner. Apart from 23 numbers of BCR, 16 numbers are located next to washroom area while 7 numbers are placed next to kids store or toy shop. Washrooms were viewed as ‘germ-infested’ and many mothers would oppose to breastfeeding in and nearby any washroom area. Some users stated that BCR should be centrally located. Referring to Figure 3, only 9% BCR is said to be poorly sighted, or other words, they can not be seen from the public main circulation area. Locating BCR in remote corners of public places gives a negative message that baby care is an activity that should be done clandestinely. Some BCR is located at the end of a long dark corridor and many female users seem uncomfortable to gain access to any of the BCR facility.

Fig. 3: Efficiency of BCR location in a shopping mall.
4.3. Signage Application

Standard design of signage indicating BCR facilities has not been introduced, but most shopping malls are using six favored symbols as shown in Figure 4a-f. Figure 4a and 4b seems to be widely used throughout the selected case studies, indicating the provision of baby’s nappy changing rooms. Such symbols are also being used internationally by many countries. However, certain regions have standardized a BCR symbol to be used nationwide. For example, Figure 4e is an international symbol of breastfeeding being used throughout US. In some malls, there was only an image of a baby bottle on the door, which users felt was inappropriate whereby other activities are prohibited like changing a diaper and breastfeeding. It is essential to ensure that signage on the door does reflect the purpose of the room. Some malls even used text signage as there are no terms yet to be used widely. Various terms of BCR would mislead other users. Figure 5 indicates the percentage efficiency of signage used to locate BCR in shopping malls.
4.4. Appropriate floor area

Figure 6 illustrates the common floor area of BCR in Kuala Lumpur and Klang Valley shopping malls. 34.7% BCR in shopping malls has less than 5m² per floor area, followed by 34.5% BCR which is built up between 6 – 10m² floor areas. Other words, most BCR in shopping malls have less than 10m² of floor area. Whether such floor area of BCR is sufficient and appropriate to accommodate all users, a standard minimum requirement is essential to ensure a level of comfort is achieved.

![Fig. 6: Various BCR floor areas in shopping malls.](image)

Referring to Table 1 on Penrith City Council’s minimum requirements for various types of development in Baby Care Room provision, any community facilities between 300 – 1000m² ground floor areas is necessary to provide a minimum of 10m² of BCR. Among the community facilities are, neighbourhood centres, community halls or other types of publicly owned facilities. This is applicable to large public spaces like shopping malls, airports and even public transportation stations too. Some BCR are designed to accommodate many users at a time, and most of such approach found in shopping malls providing only one number of BCR.

5. Conclusion

The efforts of Malaysian shopping malls managers in providing Baby Care Room in their premises are increasing every year. The needs among Malaysian society leads to the rising numbers of BCR in many public spaces and shopping malls are most favored by many. This study, however, discovered that, majority BCR in shopping malls within Klang Valley is easily accessible though not considerably design. Many are being provided only as a facility required and far beyond from offering comforts to its user. There are attempts made in promoting BCR facilities in each premise by implementing signage and allocating BCR facility within public circulation area. The accessibility to BCR is to be properly implemented and not to mislead its users. Besides accessibilities, BCR internal spaces should be efficiently designed to offer a family-friendly environment for mothers and carers to attend to their babies needs. This study hopes to contribute to promoting breastfeeding practice among Malaysian mothers. It also hopes to provide basic guidance to practitioners in achieving health goals in relation to breastfeeding and baby care.
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