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# Society, Behaviour and Health Essay

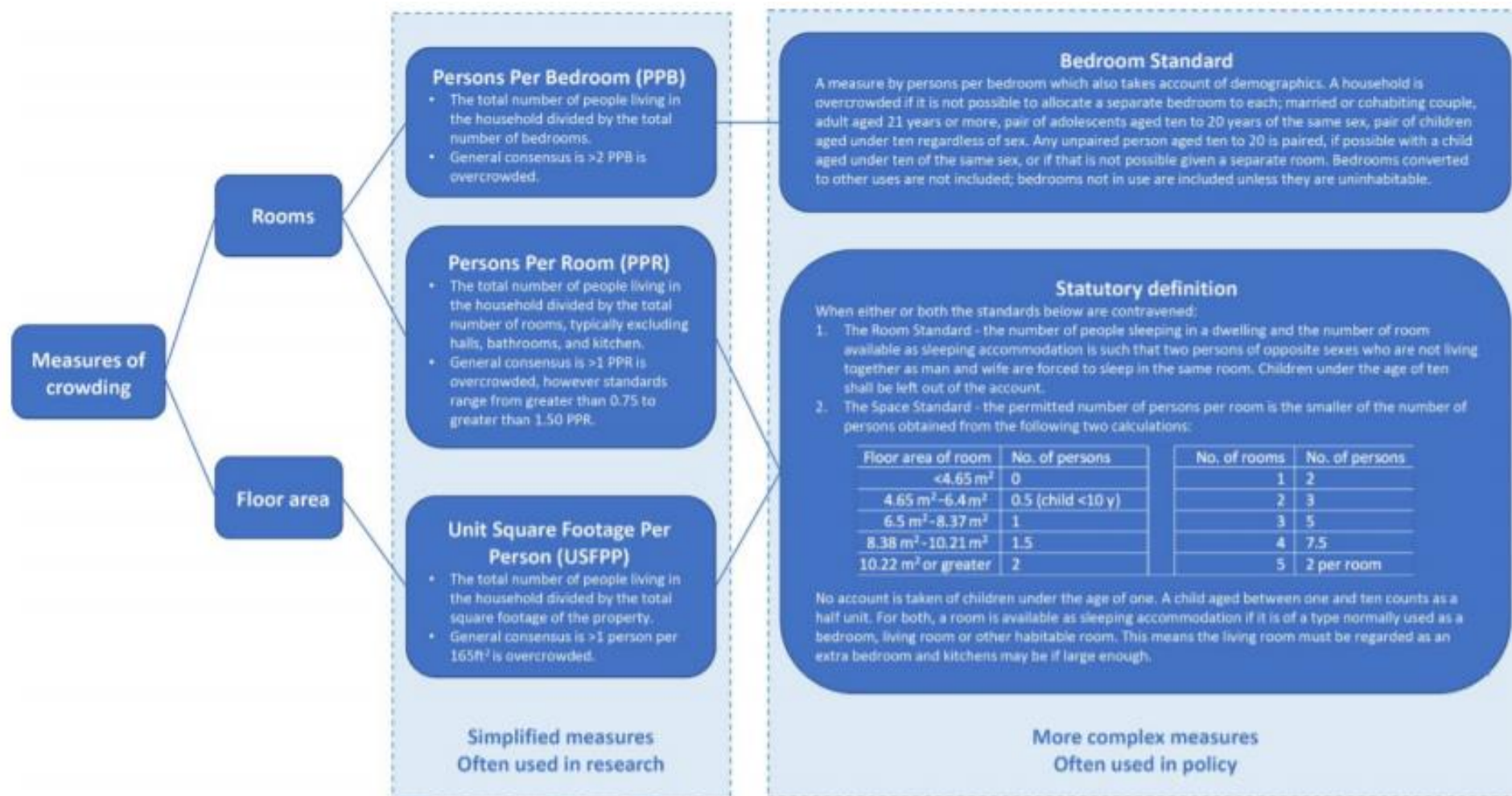
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## **Does household overcrowding affect wellbeing of the children?**

The world population expands massively throughout this period, increase in number of people indicates the need for housing increases as well. However, spaces available to construct housing area are limited, and based on the law of demand and supply in microeconomics, the lesser the supply of housing and/or the more the demand for housing, selling price to own a housing property will be increased. Therefore, to save costs spent on housing, people are forced to stay in close proximity in packed accommodation, resulting in occurrence of household crowding or overcrowding. Household overcrowding is defined as the condition by which the size of available living area is not sufficient to fulfil the number of occupants, either in rooms, bedrooms or floor area, thus developing detrimental physical and mental health problems. Overcrowding is the outcome of a discrepancy between the residence and the household. (1) Crowding is exacerbated by expanding population, urbanization, and housing inadequacy. (2) Determination of “crowded” household is not just based on the number, but it also depends on the age, relationship and gender of household. The conditions of the residence and available living area it provides also contribute to overcrowding; residents may congest into certain rooms in the home to elude cold or unoccupiable areas of the residence or cut expenditure on heating or other costs. (1)

Quality of housing is now considered as one of the social determinants of health. The most practical measure of crowding is people per room (PPR) since it is continual and often utilized in research. Higher number of PPR can be found in families with lower level of socioeconomic position, in rented residence, as well as in cities. (2) Even though PPR seems act as objective measure, the value which deems the residence as crowded is subjectively decided, and the decision done is unclear whether it is derived from social norms or health basis. PPR has its limitations to determine occupancy rate in a household. Firstly, to decide what is considered as a “room” is troublesome. Presumptions with regards to housing design and setup as well as the usage of space are referred to determine “room”. Moreover, PPR does not make any adjustment for rooms with different size or facilities available for the occupants. Besides that, PPR does not take consideration the requirement for a person to have his/her own private living area, nor does it separate the associations of age and gender with reference to culturally stipulated sleeping order. (3) In addition, to determine overcrowding in a household, definition of bedroom standard (please refer to Figure 1) is often used. (2)

Figure 1 obtained from study done by Marsh et al. in year 2019 perfectly illustrates the summary of measures of crowding and definition of overcrowding. (2)



Most studies done to investigate the effects of crowding whereas adult population is set as the target population. However, the number of studies involving children as the target population is very little when compared to those studies involving adults. Children are peculiarly relied and affected by their home surroundings. (2, 4) Home is the location where children can build socialization, develop skills, and form their own identity, interruption of these processes can occur if home surrounding is affected by overcrowding. Besides household overcrowding, residential neighbourhoods can influence the wellbeing of children since it is the environment where children perform their daily physical and social activities continuously and with close proximity. Nevertheless, due to little research done on influences of neighbourhood crowding on wellbeing of children, there is no conclusive answer can be obtained from the studies. Families tend to influence more on children compared to the neighbours since family members have closer physical and social relationship with the children. (4)

Insufficient space within residence for living, sleeping and household activities can bring detrimental effects to residents especially population in focus: children. By staying in a home crowded with people, a child's wellbeing can be influenced in multiple aspects. Firstly, household overcrowding will affect children's performance in school due to shortage of comfortable, silent study area for them to study and read. Other than that, various schedules practised by other household members can disrupt sleeping patterns for the children due to the lack of space and noise level created during those schedules. With children unable to obtain quality sleeping time in home, they may have problems to concentrate on daytime, thus their mood and behaviour will be influenced in a more negative approach. Besides that, children staying in crowded residence will have a higher possibility being infected by diseases that may disturb their daily activities and schooling. (1, 5, 6)

Deficiency in personal space for all household members in a packed home may cause stress, strenuous social interactions and behavioural issues. (7) Lower responsibilities in parenting are more shown in parents that reside in crowded homes, this in turn decrease parents' engagement in parent-teacher organization in school, supervision of children's academic grades, and assist in children's schoolwork. In school, children in packed homes tend to have more behavioural issues, which can progress to other social circumstances. (8)

Children raised in crowded residence is often ignored and may get hold their educational, behavioural and physical health drawbacks within themselves throughout their lives. By not achieving good performance and obtaining good grades in school, they will have lesser opportunity to enrol higher education and socioeconomic fulfilment. Social wellbeing of the children will be affected

and behavioural issues will cause hindrances having interactions with other people. Pessimistic interactions with teachers, parents, and schoolmates during childhood, can result in subsequent obstacles in formation of personal and professional connections in adulthood. Physical health issues can disrupt the daily activities of the children, thus holding back their progress in school compared to their peers and this trend will continue in the workforce when the children grow up become adults. Eventually, children that grow up in crowded residence are most probably to find themselves in a likewise predicament as their parents, featuring intergenerational relaying of social inequality. (9)

Besides children' educational performance being affected, household overcrowding also influence children' wellbeing via their physical health. First and foremost, children may be fall ill with infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, gastroenteritis, and diarrhoea through close interactions with family members in the household. Overcrowding is associated with various biological processes that can heighten the possibility of risk and severity of infection. Overcrowding amplifies the chance of multiple infections due to increase in number of possible transmitters, the opportunity of disease transmission due to close interactions and insufficient ventilation in home, the likelihood of infections during childhood which possibly result in more critical conditions, the threat of prolonged exposure to risk factors and severe illnesses, and the hazard of extended adverse repercussions of infections. (3) For those children that have tobacco smoking household members in their crowded home, poor indoor air quality will be expected due to carcinogens and other hazardous compounds, children will have a higher chance to be diagnosed with allergies, respiratory infections, cancer and irritations involving multiple body parts. (1) Children tend to be more affected with the infection compared to adults in same household due to weaker immune system in their bodies. Nevertheless, keep in mind household overcrowding is just one of the contributing factors that leads to spread of infectious diseases in children, other variables such as poor housing conditions, environmental air pollution around the residence, access to unsafe water supply and etcetera should be included as well.

Next, would like discuss about the mental health of children grew in crowded residence. Their mental health will be affected by household overcrowding. As number of people within household increases, social interactions and communications between household members increases, which in turn reduce privacy. Other matters such as parents also will have difficulty in monitor their children' attitudes, restricted access to daily activities for example watching television will infuriate some of household members, and usage of amenities such as bathrooms will need to share between other household members, pressures arise from these circumstances increase prevalence of mental

health disorders such as social aggression, depression, socially deviant behaviour, stress and psychological distress in the household. (3)

To reduce overcrowding in household in aim to improve children' wellbeing, national and local governments would need to draft policies and interventions to help those in need especially families in poverty. Possible solutions to reduce household overcrowding include refurbishment and building of housing, subsidization of public housing, regulation of private rental housing, tax implementation and drafting policies that promote the construction of economical housing, and cooperate with community leaders in informal resolution. These solutions will convince residents that housing is not just available, but also suitable and economical for them, is vital to reduce overcrowding. If the solution requires people to move to new location, it might have counterproductive effects by disconnect them from their social networks, child care assistance, and job or educational options. In the event that new housing is located in low-density or strewn development, it may decrease physical activity in those residents. Supposing new housing is not economical, the residents may have problem spending for basic necessities such as food, water, and healthcare services. Thus, a consolidated policy proposition, aims to reduce household overcrowding are assisted by suitable rehousing that puts thoughts of potentially unplanned outcomes into account, is vital for the principle of equity (based on need). With the simultaneous implementation of policies that encourage employment and raise household incomes, people will have sufficient fund to own residence with sufficient living areas for their families, effectiveness of reduction in household overcrowding will be in its best. A social welfare system such as Social Security Organization (SOSCO) in Malaysia will be helpful for those who loses his/her job or other income loss, the assistance provides by the system is to avoid those people not to move into housing with insufficient living areas in aim to reduce expenditures. When drafting policies to reduce overcrowding, policy makers and technical advisors will require to contemplate the significance of crowding measures to different populations in the country. Based on cultural background, each resident's acknowledgement of an overcrowded residence may differ and definition of sufficient housing area may vary in his/her mind. (1) With larger living areas and more privacy per person in the household, wellbeing of each person improves including the children.

In case of the families unable to move into larger homes, some measures can be implemented to improve children' wellbeing. For instance, parents can bring their children to places that are quiet and comfortable for studying, just like in library or community centre. Absence of noise from surroundings that usually disturb their concentration will allow children to focus on their study, thus improve their performance in school. Parents can also bring their children to outdoors for activities, to improve their physical and mental wellbeing and

build closer relationships with their children whilst reducing the time spent in overcrowded home. Sacrifices have to be made by other household members for the sake of children' wellbeing such as allocation of study area for the children and etcetera. For those household members who have the habits that will endanger the health of the children, they will need to practise the habits outside the residence to reduce exposure to the children. Maintaining harmonious environment among household members in home is fundamental to ensure mental wellbeing of the children kept well, detrimental effects such as behavioural issues and pessimistic interactions with people will be reduced. All of these measures can assure the children can grow up happily and healthy into adulthood.

To conclude, household overcrowding is a global issue that requires to give serious attention onto it since it is proved to be negatively associated with children' wellbeing via various perception. National and local governments would need the assistance from global organizations e.g., World Health Organization in drafting suitable housing plans for the citizens to reduce the effect on household overcrowding, in the aim to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing and Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. (10)

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