

A Conceptual Framework on Design Strategies of Women's Shelter for Domestic Violence Survivors in Fostering New Beginning of Life.

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Domestic violence remains a crucial public health issue in Malaysia amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Recently, we have seen the rise of reported abused cases due to various social and financial factors that led to this cause. Shelters are a crucial form of support for the victims as they provide immediate protection to this vulnerable group. However, this essential service is inadequate, and there is no purpose-built facility for domestic violence survivors in Malaysia. In addition, there is a lack of research on built environment design guidelines of a fitted women's shelter. Therefore, this study aims to formulate a conceptual framework of an ideal women's shelter model for domestic violence survivors in fostering a new beginning of life. A qualitative method will be used to conduct interviews with the study group (domestic violence survivors and staff in women's shelters) to obtain the responses that can be applied to this research. The results will explore the needs of the domestic violence survivors in women's shelters to heal from the physical and psychological effects of violence with the integration of a healing environment and sense-sensitive design in the built environment. This study contributes to fortifying guidelines and design recommendations in designing a women's shelter facility, especially to accommodate domestic violence survivors. Future research can further investigate more variables to the existing study on aspects that can enhance the well-being and livelihood of domestic violence survivors in women's shelters.

Keywords: *Conceptual framework, Design strategies, Women shelter, Domestic violence survivors*

1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon in Malaysia; however, it remains an under-reported and under-researched social issue in Malaysia (The Ministry of Home Affairs, 2017). Domestic violence is any behaviour or act that causes physical, psychological, sexual, economic and spiritual harm to those in a relationship (Women's Aids Organization, 2017). World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledged domestic violence as serious public health and human rights issue (WHO, 2005). In Malaysia,

the Domestic Violence Act, founded in 1994, is an action by the government to curb this situation. The Domestic Violence Act 1994 defines domestic violence as,

"an act committed by a person against his or her spouse; his or her former spouse; a child; an incapacitated adult or any other member in the family- which wilfully or knowingly placing or attempting to place, a victim in fear of injury; causing physical injury to

a victim; compelling the victim by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the victim has the right to abstain; confining or detaining the victim against his or her will; causing mischief or destruction or damage to property with intent to cause or knowing that it is likely to cause distress to victim".

Throughout lockdown amid Covid-19 pandemic, the prevalence and awareness of domestic violence and abuse have grown, pushing an already stretched system to breaking point. The abusers became emboldened knowing that their victims' avenues for seeking help have been greatly reduced and even accessing a helpline is getting increasingly difficult as the ability to speak privately has been compromised. This had caused the severity of abuse to rise.

According to a study by Baqutayan et al. (2021), the factors contributing to domestic violence in Malaysia include economic, social and psychological pressure on individuals, families and communities. Covid-19 pandemic had resulted in significant financial hits in the form of the loss of employment, salaries as well as the potential loss of business. This led on to rising tensions and tempers creating a situation in homes heightening the likelihood of abuse. Idris et al. (2018) highlighted that the effects of domestic violence range from physical health impacts to psychological and emotional problems. Children are also found to be vulnerable to the long-term effect of such violence in the family.

1.1 Problem Statement

Shelters are a crucial form of support for the victims as they prevent them from choosing between remaining in an oppressive and abusive relationship or facing the prospect of homelessness and financial uncertainty. Yet, access to this essential service was already inadequate in Malaysia before the pandemic. International Minimum Standards for support services recommended a minimum of one 'family place' in a women's shelter per 10,000 people, but Malaysia only has about one family place per 70,000 people (UNDP, 2020). As of March 2019, there are 43 shelters designated as safe places for women in Malaysia. Of these, 35 are run by the Welfare Department (Jabatan Kebajikan

Masyarakat or JKM), and 7 by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), according to Women's Aid Organization (2019).

Safe places and shelters provide safety and refuge to women and their children fleeing domestic violence and in need. Current shelters are seeing and serving clients with complex profiles, including women with concurrent disorders, addictions, and women who have been trafficked. At the same time, the shelters operate in a neoliberal context where funding constraints result in understaffing and a lack of trained staff (Tanja Samardzic & Mavis Morton, 2020). Domestic violence shelters are expected to operate within an empowerment philosophy, understanding that survivors are self-determining, can identify their needs and know what it takes to meet those needs. Recent research has indicated that as many shelters have become rigid in creating rules that survivors must follow to access and retain free temporary housing, the result has been survivors' feelings of disempowerment, which is the complete opposite of what was initially intended (Katie Gregory, Nkiru Nnawulezi, & Cris M. Sullivan, 2017).

1.2 Gap

Shelter design and service delivery are critical components toward housing stability, safety and health for domestic violence survivors and their children. Yet, little research is available to meet their unique needs. There is also a lack of literature on the design criteria and guidelines on the built environment of shelter homes that would help the survivors to go through and heal from the trauma they had experienced.

1.3 P.O.D

There is a need to remodel the typology of women's shelters in Malaysia to improve the existing condition of the living environment in order to provide efficient support to rebuild their lives in sustainable ways. Therefore, this research will explore the correlation between domestic violence survivors and the built environment through the healing design approach and its ability to assist the domestic violence survivors to heal from the physical and psychological effects of violence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Healing environment

DuBose et al. (2018) identified six environmental variables that were shown to impact the psychological, self-efficacy, social and functional constructs related to healing: homelike environment, access to and view of nature, light, noise control, barrier-free environment and room layout. Similarly, Iyendo et al. (2016) mentioned that the ideology behind healing is the psychological and spiritual concept of wellness. The identified attributes of a healing-built environment are personal control, social support, positive distractions, engendering feelings, connecting patients to natural views, and eliminating environmental stressors. Designing a healing environment through thoughtful design can alleviate stress and even promote eccentricity and imaginative thinking.

On the other hand, Mazuch and Stephen (2005) stated that combining psychotherapeutic methods with the humanistic architectural design to create a healing architecture environment can enhance and support the care and treatment process. The research highlighted a range of environmental characteristics that have a range of powerful healing and therapeutic benefits for their users. Furthermore, in a study by Mazuch (2017), he explored salutogenic and biophilic design as therapeutic approaches to help repair the body mentally, physically and emotionally. The salutogenic design encourages active health rather than merely treating illness, which establishes a healthy balance of mind, body, and spirit that results in an overall feeling of wellness. In comparison, biophilic design is about the engagement of nature into the built environment to help the healing process. Both researches highlighted a range of environmental characteristics that have a range of powerful healing and therapeutic benefits for their users. These include natural light and artificial light, colour, views, artwork, aroma, modulation of space and form, arrangement of furniture, manipulation of space and form, scale and proportion, sound, texture and material and indoor and outdoor landscapes.

Alt (2017) further argued that sacred space and spirituality have long been used to heal the mind, body and spirit. The researcher developed a design guideline for a healing environment based on the following seven principles: 1) provide a therapeutic environment, 2) create an embracing environment, 3) provide direct connections to nature, 4) design spaces and structures to reflect region and community, 5) be patient-centred, 6) provide a safe and supportive work environment

for staff, and 7) utilise state-of-the-art technologies to enhance the user experience. Such a healing environment will allow a patient to de-stress before the therapy and make the treatment more efficient, resulting in a shorter duration and increased healing efficacy.

Although the studies mentioned above highlighted some design characteristics of a healing environment, they did not specify the application of these characteristics to a women's shelter. Therefore, the current study shall explore the application of healing environment characteristics in a women's shelter to assist domestic violence survivors to heal from the physical and psychological effects of violence.

2.2 Sense-Sensitive Design

Spence (2020) studied the role of human senses in architectural design practice. He found that by designing experiences that engage more of the senses, the quality of life can be enhanced while at the same time creating more immersive, engaging and memorable multi-sensory experiences. Altomonte et al. (2020) highlighted that designing for the experience required the consideration of a broader view of building aesthetics, moving beyond simplistic and static metrics and encompassing an experiential multi-sensory perspective. It refers to how the users experience the lighting, thermal, acoustic and olfactory environment while recognising that the body experiences them simultaneously. Zaredar (2015) described the elements of the five senses and their perception in architecture as follows:

- the olfaction sensory is more active in silence and lack of light;
- the tactility experience through smoothness and roughness, soft and hard, contact and touch, texture, weight and temperature is the sense of closeness, proximity and effect;
- the sense of taste remembers, recall and creates an important part of memory;
- the aural sense contributes in multi-directional perspective;
- the eyesight is the embodied vision that gathers all information through perception and recognition.

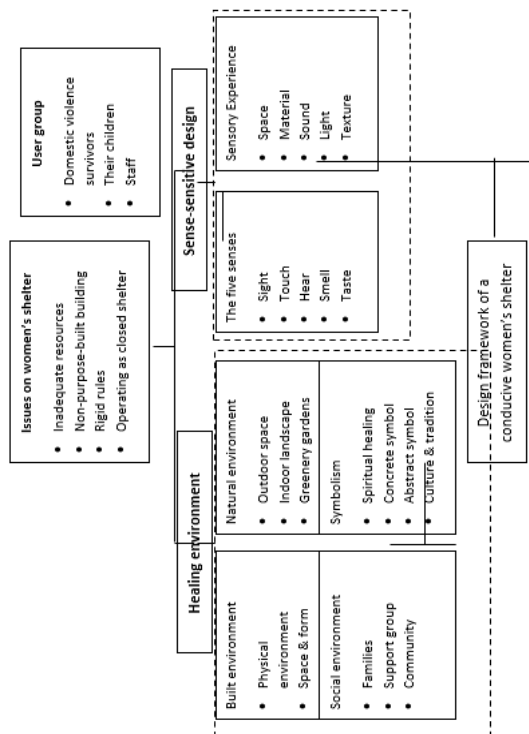
Keeling et al. (2012) analysed the interaction between physical environment and the senses towards contributing to well-being and productivity. They argued that the perception of

space, volume and depth is a mixture of sight, hearing and touch. They further highlighted that it is challenging to generalise sensory design characteristics because designing for well-being requires a more situationist approach based on specific organisations, their social norms and building inhabitants.

Osei (2014) suggested that sensory design emphasises the role of a total sensory experience through space and material, light and shadow, sound and texture in influencing our attitudes, behaviours and well-being. Sensory design is an approach that focuses on the occupant and how the composition of sensory stimuli in built environments are arranged to lift the quality of life and experience for the occupants for a healthier mind and body.

All studies mentioned earlier show how sense-sensitive design enhances the experience and perception of users. However, they do not explore how sense-sensitive designs can create a healing environment for domestic violence survivors. Therefore, the current study will further investigate the correlation of healing environment and sense-sensitive design to the functional experience of the domestic violence survivors in the women's shelter design.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



4. CONCLUSION

The intention of the research study and the development of the design guideline is to demonstrate the positive influence of healing environment approach integrated with sense-sensitive design on domestic violence survivors in women's shelter and to introduce design framework that support user experiences, well-being, and treatment. Understanding the ways in which healing environments in the context of rehabilitation facilities can support the domestic violence survivors with purposeful needs, particularly individuals with traumatic experiences and mental health disorders as the result of violence, is essential to the improvement of social support and inclusion. The literature review and research study support the application of healing environment and sensory features throughout a building to positively impact mental health, behaviour, social connection, concentration, access to information, and confidence.

5. CONTRIBUTIONS AND BENEFITS OF RESEARCH.

5.1 Contribution

This research contributes to enriching the body of knowledge on domestic violence issues and the needs of the survivors in the shelter home. This research may also contribute to fortifying guidelines and regulation of architectural requirements in designing a conducive women's shelter structure and facility in Malaysia on correlation between healing design approach and fulfilling the needs of the domestic violence survivors. This healing design approach will consist of several design elements that will help to develop the theory based on the study of evidence-based design research while instigating the suitable architectural theory. Thus, the new model of women's shelter integrated with a healing environment approach will assist the domestic violence survivors in healing from the physical and psychological effects of violence.

5.2 Benefits of research

The high rate of domestic violence justifies the need for effective methods to improve their quality of life, especially in the women's shelter to foster the new beginning of life. This study will explore the well-being and livelihood of survivors of domestic violence in fostering a new beginning

of life through a shelter facility designed in a healing environment approach. This research can benefit the Department of Social Welfare in assisting the local authority and the policymakers in providing a conducive social home environment for the domestic survivors.

6. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst taking the context of Malaysia as the general location of the study area, the needs of the domestic violence survivors and society's mentality towards the same approach may be different. Future research can further investigate more variables to the existing study on aspects that can enhance the well-being and livelihood of domestic violence survivors in women's shelters. Quantitative research may also be conducted on community participation as social support to the livelihood of domestic violence survivors.

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