

INDUSTRIALISATION AND THE SQUATTER PHENOMENON IN THE KELANG VALLEY:

CASE STUDIES OF MALAY WOMEN FACTORY WORKERS' LIVING CONDITIONS

by

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Introduction

This study is concerned with the growth of the squatter problem in the Kelang Valley, an area which includes Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Shah Alam and Kelang, as a concomitant of industrial development. The emphasis of this study is on the involvement of migrant Malay female workers in the occupation of illegally built dwellings. The majority of the women workers are employed by multinational electronics firms which attempt to provide accommodation for only a limited number of the migrant workers. Left to fend for themselves, the workers usually solve their housing problem by crowding into squatter huts occupied by relatives or friends who migrated earlier to the Kelang Valley.

The relationship between factory employment and squatting raises two crucial issues to be examined in this study:

- (i) To what extent do the earlier waves of migrants settled in squatter areas, subsidize the accommodation needs of female factory workers?
- (ii) Under circumstances which compel the overwhelming majority of female factory workers to become squatters, what are their prospects for raising their living standards and quality of life?

The scope of the present study includes both survey and case study data. Five detailed case studies of women factory workers residing in squatter settlements have been selected from a sample of 100 in-depth interviews, to illuminate the survey findings with respect to the issues that have been set forth above. The in-depth interviews were conducted during 1980-81 for the purpose of obtaining detailed data on the actual living conditions of women

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factory workers. This research was intended to supplement the broader, more general data obtained from HAWA Survey I, an extensive study of 1,066 Malay women workers, carried out in 1980. The in-depth interviews represent a non-random sample of semi-structured interviews based on open-ended questions designed to elicit more specific information than that allowed by the tightly structured, pre-coded questionnaire employed in HAWA Survey I. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled the respondents to spontaneously offer information on important topics and issues which could not be included on the Survey I questionnaire. The in-depth interview sample, from which the case studies to be presented in this study are drawn, and HAWA Survey I both cover the same field sites. The field sites include squatter settlements in Ampang, the Jalan Kelang Lama, and Federal Highway areas of Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam and Kelang, and were selected in accordance with information obtained from personnel managers of multinational firms in the Free Trade Zones, regarding the location of the workers' homes. Residents in these areas assisted in directing the researchers to the workers' huts.

This study is divided into five sections. The first section describes the background and scope of the squatter problem in the Kelang Valley. The housing alternatives available to female factory workers are examined in the second section. The third through fifth sections present case studies examining the process of becoming a squatter, the quality of life in squatter settlements and the values and aspirations of the migrant female workers. The policy implications of this study are discussed in the conclusion.

Industrialisation, Migration And Squatting In The Kelang Valley

Rapid industrialisation and expansion of job opportunities in factories throughout the Kelang Valley have stimulated large scale rural-urban migration for more than a decade. These developments have unfortunately not been accompanied by systematic provision of housing and transportation for factory workers. Malay female factory workers encounter major difficulties with respect to decent housing and reliable public transportation. These workers, along with other rural migrants attracted to factory jobs in the Kelang Valley, contribute to the proliferation of squatter settlements in the vicinity of Free Trade Zones and industrial estates, and to severe overcrowding in other available low cost housing.

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Few manufacturing firms in Malaysia take more than token responsibility for providing migrant workers with accommodation, unlike factories in such countries as Korea and Taiwan. Multinational firms are not required as a condition of operation in Malaysia, to house their workforce. The absence of hostel facilities at many electronics factories, compels female migrant workers to rely on their own friendship and kinship networks to find accommodation. The housing obtained through the workers' personal networks is usually located in squatter settlements.

It will be useful to digress briefly to examine the squatter problem in its historical context. Squatting, that is occupying land without possession of a legal title, developed as a response to economic conditions during British Colonial rule (Friel-Simon and Khoo, 1976). Until the outbreak of World War II, the number of urban squatters was relatively low. The Japanese advance through Asia threatened imports of required food supplies, which were not produced in sufficient quantities in Malaya. The British then encouraged intensive food production throughout the country, even by squatters in urban areas such as Kuala Lumpur. The deterioration of the urban economy and food shortages resulting from the Japanese occupation, gave rise to large numbers of squatters.

Squatters increased rapidly after the British returned to Malaya in 1945. British policy towards squatters oscillated between tacit encouragement and eviction (Friel-Simon and Khoo, 1976). At various times squatters were alternately viewed as obstructions to urban development, threats to internal security or necessary food producers.

It is important to note that the squatter situation during the colonial period involved mainly working class Chinese. Since Merdeka, however, urban and rural squatters increasingly came to comprise Malays. This trend became particularly evident during the late 1960s. The adoption of the New Economic Policy in the aftermath of the 13 May 1969 crisis which aimed at promoting Malay participation in commerce and industry, accelerated the influx of Malay squatters into Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere in the Kelang Valley.

The new urban Malay working class, similar to its Chinese and Indian counterparts, has resorted to squatting as a solution to the problem of lack of low cost housing. Most squatter areas are highly homogenous in ethnic composition. These areas are often exclusively Malay, Chinese or Indian. Only

10% of Kuala Lumpur's squatters live in ethnically mixed areas (Wehbring, 1976). Predominantly Chinese squatter areas contain 45% of the Federal Territory's squatter population, while the Malay settlements account for 41%, which far exceeds the proportion of Malays, 29%, residing in the city (Wehbring, 1976). Even in mixed squatter areas, ethnic exclusiveness is observed. The various ethnic communities tend to occupy distinct sections of the squatter settlements, usually grouping their huts around a symbol of ethnic identity such as a surau, Hindu temple or a Chinese school. This type of internal ethnic segregation within an ostensibly mixed area is exemplified by the Petaling Tin squatter settlement, located off Jalan Kelang Lama in Petaling Jaya.

According to information obtained from personnel managers of electronics firms located in the Sungai Way Free Trade Zone, about 80% of the women workers employed in the zone reside in squatter areas along the Federal Highway and Jalan Kelang Lama. It is likely that a similar proportion of women workers employed in the Ulu Kelang Free Trade Zone are also living in the numerous, densely populated squatter areas that surround the zone. These estimates are plausible in view of a 1981 study conducted by the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) together with a United Nations Development Programme Consultant, which reported that "the number of squatters in Kuala Lumpur has reached a crisis level of 25% of the city's population" (Natarajan, 1981). An earlier United Nations Consultant who carried out research on squatters in the Federal Territory in 1976 for the Urban Development Authority, found that one-fifth of the population could be classified as squatters (Wehbring, 1976). Within the period of five years between 1976 and 1981 studies of Kuala Lumpur, the squatter situation had become even more urgent.

In view of the situation as described above, this study will emphasize that migrant female factory workers' accommodation problems are for the most part, inseparable from the squatter phenomenon. Efforts on the part of the State and Federal governments to eradicate squatting have not proved equal to the task. The urban squatter population, a large proportion of which includes factory workers, continues to increase rapidly.¹ The next section will examine the various housing alternatives available and the reasons for the relative attractiveness of squatting.

¹ A survey carried out in Shah Alam by the Socio-economic Research and General Planning Unit found that two-thirds of the workers employed on the new industrial estates reside in squatter areas (Undated report).

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Housing Alternatives Available To Female Workers

A limited supply of non-squatter, low cost housing located near to the Free Trade Zones and industrial estates exists. The Selangor State Development Corporation (PKNS) has constructed terrace houses and blocks of flats in these areas which, according to the personnel managers in the Free Trade Zones, meet the accommodation needs of an estimated 20% of the female factory workers. The workers can gain access to PKNS housing through any of the following three channels:

- (i) factory managements allocated flats by PKNS;
- (ii) relatives living in PKNS housing; and
- (iii) PKNS residents who rent out rooms.

The personnel managers of two large electronics firms in the Sungai Way Free Trade Zone explained that since PKNS allocates only a small number of flats to the factories, managements have decided to limit eligibility for flats to workers with at least one year of seniority. Thus factory managements do not attempt to meet the housing needs of newly arrived migrant workers, but rather have adopted the policy of utilizing the flats to reward senior workers, and to encourage a limited degree of worker commitment to the firm. The availability of PKNS flats to factories located in the Free Trade Zones does not contribute to solving the problem of initial accommodation for migrant workers. To alleviate this situation, some of the electronics factories in the Sungai Way Free Trade Zone rent hostels in nearby Sungai Way Village. However, the provision of hostel accommodation is the exception rather than the rule.

Migrant workers whose relatives reside in PKNS flats or terrace houses adjacent to the Ulu Kelang or Sungai Way Free Trade Zones, or Shah Alam Industrial Estate are among the fortunate minority with access to decent, low cost housing near to the factories. Electricity, piped water, and flush toilets are standard features of all PKNS housing units. Workers residing in PKNS housing generally do not complain of problems relating to security, sanitation, difficulties in obtaining water, and transportation to work. The female workers staying with relatives either receive free room and board or contribute a nominal amount of cash to the household. Their domestic labour contributions, however, are usually considerable. They spend most of their non-working hours

helping out in the house with cooking, laundry, cleaning and childcare, finding little time for recreation.

Despite the obvious advantages of living with relatives in PKNS housing, some female workers eventually choose to move out and share rented accommodations often in squatter settlements, with their friends in order to enjoy more leisure time and personal freedom. In-depth interviews and observations of female workers' living situations with their relatives revealed that they assume an exhausting double burden of domestic and factory labour. Under such conditions, participation in sports, cultural activities or continuing their education is inhibited. The girls' desire for freedom from the restrictions imposed by domestic duties is not surprising. It is not difficult to understand why some workers, seeking to maximize their leisure time, are willing to accept physically less comfortable accommodations with their friends in squatter areas, rather than to continue living with their relatives in PKNS housing.

Workers without relatives in PKNS housing can also gain access by renting rooms from PKNS residents. The findings of in-depth interviews with workers in PKNS flats indicate that exploitative practices among landlords are common. From one of the interviews, it was learned that the respondent and two other female factory workers rent a room from a family in a PKNS flat in Shah Alam and are charged more for the room than PKNS charges for an entire flat. The family charges M\$105.00 per month for the room which they rent out to the girls, but pay only M\$55.00 per month to PKNS for the entire flat.¹ PKNS housing located near to the Ulu Kelang and Sungai Way Free Trade Zones is in great demand among production operators who want to live within walking distance of work, and do not want to resort to squatter-type housing. Families living in PKNS housing are acutely aware of this situation and are eager to profit from it. The going-rate in 1980-81 for a room in a PKNS flat next to either of the two Free Trade Zones in the Kelang Valley, was over M\$100.00 per month, an amount which represents approximately 50% of an average production operator's monthly earnings.

The excessive rents noted above are consistent with the Malaysian Center for Development Studies' (MCDS) findings in Penang. The MCDS survey of factory

¹ All amounts of money refer to the Malaysian Ringgit

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girls employed in the Bayan Lepas Free Trade Zone in Penang found rents in that area to be "very flexible to the disadvantage of the tenants" (MCDS, undated mimeo). A case in point concerns the sudden increases in rent that coincide with production operators receiving salary increments or bonuses from the factories. Most Bayan Lepas landlords, according to the MCDS study team, do not hesitate to take advantage of any financial gains made by the factory girls.

The housing shortage affecting migrant female workers in the Kelang Valley has encouraged other forms of the pursuit of profit among landlords. The construction of huts and longhouses resembling squatter housing on Malay reserve land for rent to factory workers has become a popular enterprise in some kampungs near to industrial estates. These zinc roofed, wooden structures on Malay reserve land without piped water, electricity, plumbing or drainage provide living conditions equivalent to squatter settlements. Sanitation facilities in this type of housing consist of bucket or pit latrines outside the house which are shared by two or more households. Flooding, stagnant pools of water breeding mosquitos and absence of rubbish disposal are characteristic of 'squatter like' housing on Malay reserve land. In 1980-81, landlords in Kampung Padang Jawa in Shah Alam demanded rents of M\$35.00 for a one room unit of a longhouse, and M\$40.00 - \$60.00 for a detached one room hut. These rents are similar to rents in squatter areas. The housing units for factory workers constructed by Malay reserve landowners differ from bona fide squatter housing only in a formal, legal sense.

Another form of non-squatter living arrangements involves groups of 10-20 factory girls joining together to rent PKNS two and three room terrace houses. The going rent for this type of housing in 1980-81 was M\$250.00 per month, and each girl's share ranged from M\$15.00 - \$25.00, depending on the size of the group. Rotating work shifts allow the girls to intensively utilize space by forming large co-residential groups within a small dwelling unit, since only some members of the group are home at the same time. Though only a small proportion of factory girls live in such groups, this life-style is highly visible and attracts much adverse attention from the surrounding community. Aside from public complaints of immoral behaviour on the part of female workers living with their colleagues in unsupervised settings of this type, such arrangements entail excessive overcrowding that cancels out the improved living conditions offered by PKNS housing.

As the cost of squatter huts is much lower, M\$35.00 - \$60.00 per month, the co-residential groups which share the huts are considerably smaller, usually two to six girls, and more space per person is available. The high cost of non-squatter housing promotes higher density occupation where female factory workers are concerned, resulting in deterioration of living conditions.

Squatting As An Adaptive Strategy

The individual decision to occupy squatter housing is influenced by rational economic calculation and by friendship and kinship networks. Non-squatter low cost housing, as noted above is in shorter supply, is more expensive and entails a greater degree of crowding than the alternative of squatter housing. Migrant workers' friends and relatives are more likely to be found residing in squatter settlements rather than in PKNS or other non-squatter housing. For this reason, seeking accommodation with friends or relatives often implies becoming a squatter.

The importance of social networks in finding housing and the effectiveness of squatting as a strategy of adaptation to urban life as a low income wage earner is examined in the following case.

Case 1: J. who is 18 years old and unmarried, was born and raised in Batu Pahat, Johore. She is the eldest child in a large, poor family. Her six younger siblings are still in school; J. is the only child in the family who is working. Although J.'s parents own a small amount of land, they depend on wage labour rather than agricultural production to maintain the family. J.'s mother has been working in a palm oil factory for the past year, while her father works as a labourer. Together, her parents earn a monthly income of M\$260.00. J. completed Form Five and decided to migrate to Kuala Lumpur after hearing about the attractions of urban life from her friends who had already migrated. She obtained her present job as a production operator at Motorola in the Sungai Way Free Trade Zone through the recommendations of a friend from her Kampung. Despite her parents' misgivings, J. migrated to Kuala Lumpur with a friend. She initially found accommodation with her relatives living in Kpg. Jawa, Kelang. J. soon decided to shift from her relatives'

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home to the squatter hut in Kpg. Melor, where she now lives, after quarrelling with her cousin's wife and, moreover, encountering transportation difficulties. Although Motorola provides subsidized bus service for the workers, J. found the bus fare high in relation to her income; M\$20.50 was deducted monthly from her salary for the bus fare. The bus was crowded and J. usually had to stand up, which she disliked. J.'s decision to share a squatter hut with a friend in Kpg. Melor, a settlement on abandoned mining land off the Federal Highway, has enabled J. to reduce her living expenses enough to both remit money back to her parents and to accumulate personal savings. Although her income is very low, J. manages to send her parents M\$50.00 every month as well as to save M\$20.00 monthly in her postal savings account. J. has been employed for the past six months as a quality control worker in the wire bond section at Motorola and earns M\$156.00 per month. Her monthly living expenses consist of the following: M\$17.50 for her share of rent, M\$50.00 for food, and M\$19.50 for miscellaneous expenses. She has no transport expenses since she walks to work. The one room squatter hut which J. rents was obtained through a friend, who is staying in another squatter hut in Kpg. Melor. J. and a friend share the hut and divide the rent of M\$35.00 per month. She and her friend also cook and share food together. J. cooks and eats two meals a day at home and purchases only snacks in the canteen at Motorola, spending 50 cents per day at the canteen. Through frugal living she is able to manage on her small salary. J. is dissatisfied with the lack of electricity and piped water in Kpg. Melor. Water is available only at a standpipe located far from the hut. She tolerates squatter conditions as a means of survival until she can find a better job.

This case shows the economic rationality of squatting for low income factory workers. The respondent earns less than M\$200.00 per month, yet she is able to maintain herself and set aside 44% of her salary as remittances to her parents and personal savings. Squatting has proved to be an effective strategy for the respondent to avoid tensions with her relatives, solve transportation difficulties and moreover to manage on a small income.

In Case 2, the respondent who comes from an economically better-off family, lowers rather than improves her standard of living after migrating to the Kelang Valley. For this respondent, squatting is a means of accumulating sufficient cash to acquire consumer goods.

Case 2: N., a migrant from Tampin, Melaka, is 23 years old and newly married. She is the eldest of nine children and the daughter of a policeman. Her father's income exceeds M\$400.00 monthly. N.'s parents own one-half acre of house land planted with fruit trees and their house is equipped with electricity, piped water, a T.V. set and radio. Employed as a production operator at Motorola for the past one year, N. presently earns M\$200.00 per month on the average. Although N. does not consider her salary sufficient for her needs, she has not resorted to borrowing money as she reduced her living expenses by moving into a one room squatter hut occupied by her husband's brother and his family. Since N.'s husband is in the army, she is temporarily living with his brother in Kpg. Bakti at 8 3/4 mile, Jalan Kelang Lama a squatter settlement located within walking distance of the Sungai Way Free Trade Zone. N.'s brother-in-law who works as a driver at Kontena Nasional, does not charge her any rent. Previously N. stayed in a PKNS flat in Kpg. Kerinci. When N. lived in Kpg. Kerinci, she had to travel to work by bus and spent M\$10.00 monthly on bus fare. She is now able to save on both bus fare and rent. N.'s monthly expenditures include M\$60.00 for food and M\$30.00 for her parents. She puts aside about one-half of her salary into her postal savings account. Once every two months N. buys clothing on which she spends about M\$30.00. During the past year she has purchased a cabinet costing M\$100.00, a wardrobe costing M\$20.00 and a set of dishes costing over M\$100.00. She paid cash for the cabinet and wardrobe. The set of dishes was obtained through a Kutu arrangement (rotating credit association) organized by one of her friends. N. manages her budget cautiously and is able to buy occasional luxuries. To live in reasonable comfort though, according to N., would require an income of somewhat more than M\$300.00 per month. Despite shifting from a PKNS flat to a squatter hut, N. does not regard her present living conditions

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as significantly worse. Her brother-in-law's well furnished squatter hut is equipped with a T.V. set, stereo, aquarium, floor lamp, cane furniture and electricity. The walls are decorated with woven handicrafts, paintings, posters of popular entertainers and Quranic verses. These household luxuries and attractive decorations making squatting more acceptable to N., who enjoyed a more comfortable standard of living in Melaka with her parents.

It can be seen in Case 2 that migration to Kuala Lumpur for factory employment makes possible cash savings, remittances to parents and acquisition of consumer goods. However, the attainment of these objectives entailed a lower standard of living than what the respondent had been accustomed to before migrating to Kuala Lumpur. The respondent initially lived in non-squatter low cost housing when she first came to Kuala Lumpur but later became a squatter when she moved in with her husband's relatives. Squatting has also enabled the respondent's brother-in-law to provide his family with consumer luxuries, despite being a low income wage earner.

The significance of kinship ties in migration, in obtaining factory employment and in becoming a squatter, as shown in Case 3, elucidates the social process underlying the growth of squatter settlements in the Kelang Valley.

Case 3: H., who is 18 years old and unmarried, recently migrated from Muar, Johore to Kpg. Kerinci in Kuala Lumpur. She is the fourth of eight children. Two of her elder sisters are working as electronics production operators in Kuala Lumpur. H.'s parents own no land. Her father earns a living as a taxi driver and her mother is a housewife. Her parents' house in Muar is supplied with electricity and piped water. H.'s parents also own a T.V. set, radio and cassette tape recorder. H., who completed Form Three, obtained a job as a production operator at General Instrument, an electronics firm located in the Sungai Way Free Trade Zone, recently through one of her elder sisters. She presently earns M\$230.00 per month and spends money on necessities only, of which food is the major item. H. has been employed for only one month, and has not yet sent any money to her parents. However, she intends to send them M\$50.00 per

month as well as to save money herself in a postal account. Her first month of expenses includes the following: M\$40.00 for food, M\$10.00 for busfare, M\$50.00 for clothing, and M\$16.00 for contribution to rent. H. is living with her two elder sisters in a one room squatter hut in Kpg. Kerinci that is partitioned with low dividers into cooking, sleeping and guest areas. Aside from a bed in the sleeping area, there is no other furniture in the hut. Mats are spread out for guests to sit on. The hut lacks electricity, piped water and plumbing. H. and her sisters together pay M\$50.00 in rent. Each sister pays an equal share of the rent. H.'s sisters occupied the hut for two years. H. is dissatisfied with her present living conditions, as she enjoyed a higher standard of living in Muar at her parents' home. H.'s elder sisters, brother and aunt were already living in Kuala Lumpur before she migrated. The presence of her relatives in Kuala Lumpur was an important factor in her decision to migrate. One of her elder sisters accompanied her to Kuala Lumpur. H. first stayed with her aunt upon arrival at Kpg. Kerinci and then shifted in with her elder sisters who live nearby.

The three cases presented above typify the sample of in-depth interviews as a whole in that the respondents are migrant electronics workers who became squatters in the course of living with friends or relatives. As in the case studies above, the general trend among migrant female workers residing in squatter settlements is to rent huts built by earlier occupants of the settlement or to live with others who own or rent a hut. Rarely do unmarried female migrants build their own huts. Those who are married want to secure more permanent accommodation by purchasing or building their own hut. The unmarried female migrants, less committed to residence in any particular area, are not inclined towards investing in their own huts. Female migrants who rent huts from squatter landlords paid from M\$35.00 - M\$60.00 monthly in 1980-81 for a one room hut, without indoor toilet facilities, electricity or piped water.

The entrepreneurs renting huts to migrant factory workers are, in some cases, absentee landlords who began as squatters, invested in materials to build several huts in the area, and moved out after accumulating sufficient capital from renting out the huts. Other squatter landlords have remained in the

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settlement. Newly arrived migrant factory workers provide the previous wave of squatters with an opportunity for profit. In two of the case studies presented above, the respondents rent huts from squatter landlords and share the rent with friends or siblings, while the respondent in one of the case studies was subsidized by her in-laws who own a squatter hut. In meeting their housing needs by resorting to squatting, migrant female workers are usually subsidized by their relatives or exploited by squatter entrepreneurs.

Social Costs Of Squatting

Although squatting has been described as "sensationally successful" in economic terms (Pirie, 1976), the high cost in physical and social well-being must not be overlooked. The type of lands occupied by squatters expose them to the dangers of floods, fires, landslides, drowning in abandoned mining pools and accidents involving trains. Former mining land, the flood plains of rivers and narrow strips bordering railway tracks are the major locations of squatter settlements in the Kelang Valley (Wehbring, 1976). The absence of effective enforcement of trespassing laws encourages occupation of such unsafe sites. Every year disasters befall squatter areas. In 1981, two particularly serious disasters affecting squatters occurred - a conflagration destroying most of Kpg. Paya, and the Puchong landslide burying 18 people and their homes.

It has been noted that generally in past years "squatters have been the first - and often only - victims" whenever torrential rains cause flooding in low lying areas (Star, 1981). Ironically, squatter settlements are often blamed for impeding drainage and flood alleviation projects. The location and irregular layout of these areas, along with the invariably malfunctioning fire hydrant also obstruct the provision of effective fire services during the inevitable blazes that frequently sweep through the clusters of wooden squatter huts. The threat of fire is amplified by careless wiring, often carried out by unqualified workmen, overloaded sockets, and haphazard use of kerosene lamps and stoves, and leaking canisters of cooking gas. Danger from railway tracks affects those who are tempted to take short-cuts by crossing over the lines, and small children playing on the tracks. Some railway officials, until very recently, tacitly encouraged squatting by collecting rent from the people occupying land alongside the tracks. None of these dangers have deterred squatters from settling on unsuitable sites.

The physical dangers to which squatters are exposed most directly affect married female factory workers. In-depth interviews revealed that these women experience great anxiety concerning the safety of their children. They are unable to supervise their children closely enough to ensure that the children do not play on the railway tracks or near to mining pools, favourite play areas of many squatter children. These children often risk their lives when at play as a result of the lack of safe recreational space in the squatter settlements. The effect of these conditions on family life is shown in the following case.

Case 4: M. and her husband are both migrant factory workers from Melaka living in a hut in Kpg. Railway, a squatter settlement along the railroad tracks behind Jalan Kelang Lama. M., 29 years of age, has been married for nine years and has three children. She and her husband have lived in Kpg. Railway continuously since migrating to Kuala Lumpur seven years ago. After renting a hut for three years, they purchased the one room squatter hut in which they presently live, from a friend for M\$700.00. There is no supply of electricity or piped water. The bucket toilet outside of the hut is shared with two other households. M. and her husband occupy the hut alone, as their three children are living with M.'s mother, a rubber small holder in Melaka. M. sent her children to live with their grandmother in her Kampung in Melaka out of concern for their safety after becoming employed as a factory worker two years ago. M. worried about accidents on the railroad tracks. She and her husband regret only being able to see their children five or six times a year on visits lasting two to three days. For M. and her husband disruption of family life has been a high price to pay for living in Kpg. Railway, which is located near to the factories where both are employed.

The issue of obtaining an adequate living situation in which to bring up children is of importance to a significant minority of women factory workers. Among the HAWA Survey I respondents about 22% (N=239) are married, among whom 77% (N=183) have children (Tables I and II).

Migrant workers and their families residing in squatter areas are surrounded by unsanitary conditions that can give rise to disease. Although all of the

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TABLE I: MARITAL STATUS OF HAWA SURVEY I RESPONDENTS

| | N | % |
|--------------|-------------|------------|
| Single | 818 | 76.7 |
| Married | 239 | 22.4 |
| Divorced | 4 | .4 |
| Widowed | 5 | .5 |
| Total | 1066 | 100 |

TABLE II: NUMBER OF CHILDREN OF MARRIED
HAWA SURVEY I RESPONDENTS

| | N | % |
|-------------|-----|------|
| None | 54 | 22.6 |
| 1 | 69 | 28.9 |
| 2 - 3 | 90 | 37.7 |
| 4 - 5 | 19 | 7.9 |
| 6 or more | 5 | 2.1 |
| No response | 2 | .8 |
| Total | 239 | 100 |

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respondents in the squatter areas have the use of either bucket or pit latrines, they do not always encourage young children in the household to use these facilities. Much human excrement can be observed in open view in the public areas of the settlements; this is particularly true of Kpg. Kerinci. Unsatisfactory hygiene, however, is more a reflection of values and attitudes rather than poverty in itself as shown in the following case study.

Case 5: S., a young wife and mother is 23 years of age, was born and raised in Kuala Lumpur. S. is a second generation squatter and a child of migrants. Her father is originally from Kedah and her mother from Melaka. S.'s father is employed as a bus driver with Sri Jaya. S., the eldest of nine children, completed Form Three, English medium. She has been employed as a production operator for the past three years at Masyur, a watch factory in the Sungai Way Free Trade Zone. S., her husband and two year old son occupy a one room, zinc roofed, wooden squatter house, which they built three years ago. They have no housing expenses such as rent or rates to pay. The house is attractively furnished and decorated with curtains; colourful vinyl floor mats, matching cane furniture and a cabinet displaying casserole sets and dishes. S. and her husband also own a T.V. set, radio cum cassette tape recorder and speakers. The environment of the house is noisy and untidy. S.'s younger nieces and nephews wandered in and out of the house as the radio blasted at full volume and chickens cackled in the compound. Toilet facilities were observed outside the house in the compound, but S. nevertheless instructed her son to defaecate on the front doorstep. S., who demonstrates no concern with hygiene, expressed satisfaction with her living conditions. What is of importance to her is that her parents live next door and her other relatives also live in Kpg. Kerinci. S. has no difficulties concerning childcare as her mother looks after her son during work hours. The mutual aid made possible by the presence of her kinship network within the settlement compensates for the physical conditions of squatter life.

Casual attitudes and practices concerning human waste disposal as described in Case 5, partially account for the unhealthy environment characteristic of squatter settlements. The habitual flooding and drainage problems of the settlements in interaction with unhygienic practices multiply the health hazards faced by squatters. Frequent flooding increases the possibility of pollution from exposed human excrement. During dry weather, flies are numerous and food is easily contaminated.

In addition to health and safety hazards, migrant females living in squatter housing are subjected to an undesirable social environment. The women factory workers and local leaders in the squatter settlements studied, reported that widespread drug addiction, theft and sexual misconduct are of concern to many of the residents. Some of the UMNO branch leaders in Kpg. Medan and Kpg. Jaya, squatter areas located along Jalan Kelang Lama, related that they have taken active steps to involve UMNO members in anti-crime and vice surveillance, as well as liaising closely with the police. In squatter settlements such as Kpg. Railway, also near to Jalan Kelang Lama, where branches of political parties and other community organizations are weak or non-existent, concerted action against criminal activities usually does not occur. Unorganised squatter settlements provide fertile ground for crime. Although several of the community leaders who were interviewed expressed concern about drug taking and sexual misconduct on the part of female factory workers, no definite data is available regarding the actual extent to which the girls themselves are involved in deviance.

Quality Of Life In Squatter Settlements

Unmarried female factory workers generally live in bare or sparsely furnished quarters decorated with colourful posters of Malay pop singers, and sometimes Quranic verses. Female factory workers living independently with their friends tend to limit their household furnishings to a few makeshift shelves, woven mats and a kerosene cooker. Unmarried girls shift from place to place frequently, and are reluctant to accumulate much household equipment. Married factory workers or single workers staying with relatives usually live in furnished quarters with at least a few household amenities. Female workers who live with parents, siblings or spouses often pool their money with other family members to jointly purchase such amenities as household decorations, electric fans, refrigerators, television sets, stereo equipment and furniture. The high cost of these consumer goods relative to the wages of female factory workers

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makes it difficult for the girls to purchase luxury items as individuals rather than as members of a household.

Migrant female workers perceive improvement in the quality of life in terms of their ability to purchase consumer goods. Squatting is a means of minimizing urban living costs to accumulate sufficient cash for the purchase of consumer goods. Most married workers own a large cabinet displaying expensive but seldom used kitchenware - sets of pyrex casseroles, chinaware, blenders and electric mixers. Ownership of these prestige items represents attainment of a more affluent life style. The goods are usually purchased with annual bonuses, through rotating credit arrangements (kutu), or on hire purchase. It was observed that married workers tend to invest heavily in outfitting their households with consumer amenities. Almost all of the married factory workers in squatter areas who were interviewed had a matched set of cane living room furniture, while the households comprising two or more single workers had no furniture and spread mats for guests.

Savings are allocated mainly for the purchase of consumer goods for display. Rarely do the factory workers' households buy books, or build improved bathing or toilet facilities. Despite no improvement, or in some cases deterioration of their housing conditions after migration, the respondents nevertheless perceive themselves as 'better-off' in that they are able to accumulate cash for remittances to their parents and to eventually acquire consumer goods.

To what extent do migrant female factory workers succeed in realizing their aspirations to acquire household amenities and enjoy a sense of improved quality of life? The findings of HAWA Survey I indicate that these aspirations are not easily attained.

In Table III it can be seen that wrist watches, radios, pyrex casserole sets and furniture are the most commonly owned consumer goods. Aside from wrist watches, fewer than one-half of the HAWA Survey I respondents own any of the other most commonly owned items. Only a minority of the respondents have acquired cassette tape recorders, or electrical goods such as T.V. sets, fans or refrigerators. From these findings, it can be seen that women factory workers find great difficulty in accumulating sufficient savings to purchase most of the household amenities listed in Table III, even the less expensive items such as radios and pyrex sets.

**TABLE III: PER CENT OWNERSHIP OF HOUSEHOLD ITEMS,
HAWA SURVEY I, 1980**

| Household Items | N | % |
|--|--------------|------|
| Wrist watch | 761 | 71.4 |
| Radio | 438 | 41.1 |
| Pyrex Casserole Set | 332 | 31.1 |
| Furniture | 377 | 35.4 |
| Cassette Tape Recorder | 276 | 25.9 |
| T.V. Set | 278 | 26.1 |
| Electric Fan | 168 | 15.8 |
| Refrigerator | 150 | 14.1 |
| Motorcycle | 51 | 4.8 |
| Total Respondents (thousands) | 1,066 | |

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The limited success of women factory workers' attempts to improve their standard of living is shown even more clearly in comparing HAWA Survey I's findings concerning ownership of consumer goods with those of the Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, 1980 (Table IV).

Female factory workers in the Kelang Valley lag far behind the general population of Peninsular Malaysia in ownership of household amenities. Their quality of life reflects minimal benefits from industrial development in the Kelang Valley. As squatters with limited access to consumer goods, migrant female workers experience little or no tangible evidence of the higher living standards which industrialisation promises.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the failure of factory managements and public agencies to take responsibility for migrant workers' housing needs, has thrown the burden to the surrounding squatter communities. The earlier waves of migrants both subsidize and exploit the more recently arrived migrant workers. Relatives and friends among the earlier waves of migrants often subsidize the accommodation needs of female factory workers by absorbing the girls into their usually overcrowded households. Female factory workers without relatives to rely upon in the Kelang Valley or who choose not to live with their relatives are often exploited by landlords eager to profit from the housing shortage. Entrepreneurs among the earlier arrived migrants view the female factory workers as a lucrative source of income, demanding excessive rents for illegally constructed huts lacking water, electricity and sanitation.

In migrating to the Kelang Valley for factory employment, female workers do not necessarily improve their living conditions. In some cases, migrant female workers find that the housing in the Kelang Valley available to them entails a lower standard of living than in the rural kampungs from where they have migrated. Although the girls are willing to subject themselves to squatter housing conditions in order to accumulate enough savings to remit money to their parents and to purchase consumer goods, their ability to acquire these goods is in actuality extremely limited. As consumers, the girls lag far behind the general population of Peninsular Malaysia. Their aspirations for higher living standards cannot be accomplished as individual wage earners, but rather as supplemental wage earners within a family household.

**TABLE IV: PER CENT OF HOUSEHOLDS POSSESSING SELECTED
HOUSEHOLD ITEMS, PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1980**

| Household Items | % |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| Radio | 73 |
| T.V. Set | 53 |
| Electric Fan | 39 |
| Refrigerator | 28 |
| Motorcycle | 35 |
| Total Households (thousands) | 2,104.6 |

Source:

Population and housing census of Malaysia, 1980.
Department of Statistics Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

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The provision of hostels for factory girls would alleviate the strain on the local housing supply in the vicinity of the Free Trade Zones and would also relieve the extreme overcrowding in the homes of the girls' relatives. It appears that the poorest section of the urban community is absorbing the cost of providing female factory workers with shelter. Protection from exploitative landlords, undesirable social influences and, health and safety hazards is another important need that hostels for factory workers could meet.

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