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FACTORS IMPACTING THE WELLBEING OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN MALAYSIA'S RURAL SETTLEMENTS

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Abstract

A rural development process could have a direct impact on the wellbeing of rural households. This wellbeing assessment needs to be addressed adequately in Malaysia. The aim of this paper is to investigate the factors impacting the wellbeing of rural households in Malaysia's rural settlements. The Iskandar Malaysia region in Johor was selected as a study area because of its diverse settlements, consisting of seven types of rural settlements in Johor. A quantitative approach was adopted by means of a household survey involving 282 heads of households as respondents. The finding reveals that different types of rural settlements were affected by different factors that influence the wellbeing of the rural households. This paper can provide an understanding of the factors that affect wellbeing, specifically income generation and job opportunities for rural households based on different types of rural settlements.

***Keywords**:* Wellbeing, Rural Settlement, Rural Planning, Rural Development

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INTRODUCTION

Wellbeing has been extensively explored across various research fields, often overlapping with concepts such as quality of life, happiness, and life satisfaction. At the community level, wellbeing is described as satisfaction with the local place of residence, considering attachment, social, and physical environment, and available services (Medvedev et al., 2018). Another perspective defines wellbeing as both a state and a process, encompassing social connections, interaction with the natural environment, fulfilment of human needs, pursuit of meaningful goals, and overall life satisfaction (Rashid et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021).

The impact of development on wellbeing is often linked to socioeconomic factors. Rapid developments in both developed and developing countries affect rural areas, leading to new societal needs for public goods and changes in rural territories (Rashid et al., 2019).

Previous studies have shown the importance of wellbeing in rural areas, particularly in developing countries, emphasizing the need for comprehensive approaches to support the wellbeing and overall prosperity of rural communities. Hence, the objective of this paper is to investigate the factors influencing the wellbeing of rural households in Malaysia's rural settlements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural Settlements in Malaysia

Rural areas in Malaysia are defined as regions outside of urban centers. Based on PLANMalaysia (2017), rural encompass villages and communities with populations below 10,000 comprising agricultural and natural landscapes. This classification is based on a rural density level of 150 people per square kilometer and lower across all districts. PLANMalaysia (2017) further categorizes villages into eight types based on various factors such as geographical characteristics, predominant economic activities, settlement patterns, ethnic composition, proximity to urban centers, and population density (see Table 1).

In Malaysia, urbanization and economic development have prompted significant transformations within rural communities (Razali & Rashid, 2021). As societies endeavour to achieve development and economic growth, environmental preservation and wellbeing may not always receive adequate attention or consideration (Shafii & Miskam, 2011). The impact of development on wellbeing is often linked socioeconomic factors. Rapid development in both developed and developing countries affects rural areas such as shifts in land use and the emergence of new societal needs. This leads to demographic shifts due to in-migration and the identification of “excluded groups” facing poverty and social exclusion vulnerabilities (Choon et al., 2011).

Table 2: Types of villages in Malaysia

Types of Villages	Topology	Main Economic	Settlement Pattern	Majority Race	Proximity Urban Area	Density
Traditional Village	Unplanned existence near an urban area	Agriculture	Linear Or Clustered	Malay and Chinese	Near	High
Fishery Village	Natural factors such as rivers, estuaries, and beaches	Fisheries	Scattered	Malay and Chinese	-	High
Planned Village	Village resettlement, land grants and natural disasters	Services sector	Organised	Mixed race	-	Low and Moderate
Aboriginal Village	Settlements that exist unplanned and have their own identity	Agriculture, Forest products, Hunting and Fishing	Scattered	indigenous people	Far From City	Low
New Village	Village settlements that existed during the emergency (1948-1960)	Agriculture or Mining	Concentrated (Grid Iron)	Chinese	Near	Low
Land Settlement Scheme	Planned village due to land development on a large scale (self-contained village)	Agriculture	Concentrated or Clustered	Malay	Far	Moderate
Estate Settlement	Farm worker housing provided by the farm management employer	Agriculture	Concentrated	Indian	Far From City	Low
Water Village	Located on the water, either in rivers, lakes or seas houses are built vertically above the water	Fisheries	Linear	Malay and Chinese	Far From City	Various Densities Based on Location

Source: PLANMalaysia (2017)

Current policies in Malaysia have established several initiatives and strategies aimed at enhancing the wellbeing of rural areas. Dasar Rancangan Fizikal Desa Negara 2030 and Dasar Pembangunan Luar Bandar 2030 highlight the importance of rural wellbeing and address various aspects such as security, cybercrime, unity, culture, and disaster resilience. district-level plans such as Rancangan Struktur Negeri Johor 2030 prioritize wellbeing, striving for equitable growth, regional development, and the wellbeing of people. Special development plans focusing on economic corridors, such as Pelan Induk ECER 2.0 and Rancangan Pembangunan Wilayah Ekonomi Pantai Timur (WEPT), play a pivotal role in narrowing development disparities and fostering socioeconomic progress in the East Coast Economic Region (ECER).

In Iskandar Malaysia, the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) 2006–2025 incorporates strategies like the Village Enhancement Program to stimulate rural economic activities through infrastructure enhancements and built environment upgrades. These policies collectively underscore Malaysia's dedication to community wellbeing and socioeconomic advancement, contributing significantly to the holistic development of both urban and rural areas in the country.

Framework For Factors Impacting Wellbeing of Rural Community

The focus of studies on community wellbeing, both in urban and rural areas, has shifted from singular concerns to encompassing a variety of aspects. Holtz (1995) and Yusoff et al. (2021) have identified five dimensions of wellbeing: physical, economic, social, emotional, and developmental. Table 2 shows the framework used in this study to analyse factors impacting rural community's wellbeing.

Table 2: Framework for rural community wellbeing

Component	Indicators	References
Social wellbeing		
Interpersonal Relationship/ Relational	Trust in neighbours	Scott et al. (2018)
	No discrimination between the people inside the village	Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014)
Community Involvement/ Organisational	Involved in social organisations inside the village	Roberts & Townsend (2016); Rashid et al. (2023)
	Engaging in Activities and event	Roberts & Townsend (2016). Razali & Rashid (2021)
Economic Wellbeing		
Occupation / Income	Have good income	Roberts & Townsend (2016); Razali & Rashid (2021); Kamarudin et al. (2020)
	Able to support a family well	Rashid et al. (2023); Razali & Rashid (2021); Kamarudin et al. (2020);
	Able to get an additional source of income	Roberts and Townsend (2016)
Housing	Residence environment	Abdullah et al. (2019); Harun & Idris (2012); EPU (2013)
	Road infrastructure	Harun & Idris (2012); Roberts & Townsend (2016)
Meals	Enough food for the family	Abdullah et al. (2019); Katiman et al. (2011)
	Practice a balanced diet	Abdullah et al. (2019); Mohd Harun & Idris (2012)
Transportation	Public transports services	Lättman et al. (2016); EPU (2013)
	Easy to get the goods and services	Lättman et al. (2016); Rashid et al. (2021); EPU (2013)
Security of Job	Stable in occupation	Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014); Musa et al (2018)
Possession	Ownership of electronic equipment	Rosnon et al., (2019)
	Land ownership	Bunkus et al. (2020); Musa et al (2018); Rosnon et al. (2019)
	Vehicle's ownership	Bunkus et al. (2020); Rosnon et al. (2019)
Physical Wellbeing		
Mobility	The ability to move	Schwanen & Ziegler (2011); Smith & Diekmann, (2017)
	Able to do heavy work	Schwanen & Ziegler (2011); Smith & Diekmann, (2017)
Health	Good level of health	Sørensen (2018); EPU (2013)
	Accessible and adequate health Care facilities	Sørensen (2018); EPU (2013)
Personal Safety	Perceived criminality	Musa et al (2018)
Fitness	Healthy lifestyle	Sørensen (2018); Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014);
Emotional Wellbeing		
Satisfaction	Satisfied with life	Smith & Diekmann, (2017)
Fulfilment	Fulfilment of basic needs	Smith & Diekmann, (2017)
Belief/ Religious	Local cultural activities involvement	Rashid et al. (2019)
	Frequency to places of worship	Katiman et al. (2011); Razali & Rashid (2021)

Component	Indicators	References
Development Wellbeing		
Competence	Government's Welfare assistance	Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014); Roberts & Townsend (2016)
	Private sector or government in assistant business/agriculture	Rashid et al. (2019)
Job	An additional source of income	Rashid et al. (2019); Razali & Rashid (2021)
Leisure	Distance of recreational area	Mansfield et al. (2020)
Education	Access to basic knowledge	EPU (2013)
	Accessible to school	EPU (2013)

In the social wellbeing dimension, social interactions, social networks, group participation, reciprocity, trust, and civic engagement are some of the fundamental aspects of social capital that have emerged as potential factors that can influence the performance of villages and households (Putnam, 2000). Economic wellbeing has been identified as a fundamental determinant of rural wellbeing performance. Economic wellbeing is important to life satisfaction and can be defined as a monotonic rising function of income (Razali et al., 2022).

Physical wellbeing means having good health and enough energy to run daily errands (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Several components are related to physical wellbeing, i.e. mobility, health, personal safety and fitness. Emotional wellbeing is an overall positive state of emotions, self-esteem, and resilience that leads to self-actualisation (Sørensen, 2018). Positive emotions refer to the expression of feelings of happiness, optimism, and general satisfaction with one's life, as opposed to the expression of negative emotions such as worry, fear, anger, and overall dissatisfaction (World Health Organisation, 2019). Development and activity are concerned with the possession and use of skills in relation to self-determination, competence, or independence. Wellbeing can be related to the development of a person to improve their quality of life (Felce & Perry, 1995).

The framework developed in this study is used to measure wellbeing at household levels. The framework was developed to emphasise the relationships between all the contributory factors within and between the social dimension, the economic dimension, the physical dimension, the emotional dimension, the development dimension and the rural area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research identified rural density level as an appropriate tool to categorise the rurality level as it is significantly related to the changes and development of rural areas (Rashid et al., 2023; Yusoff et al., 2022). This tool is used to categorise the rurality level because the only available data in mukim or subdistrict level in Malaysia is the number of population and acreage. Rural density levels were used to identify rural subdistricts in Johor based on three levels: (1) 0–50 people/km^2 (*low-density level*); (2) 51–100 people/km^2 (*medium-density level*); and (3) 101–150 people/km^2 (*high-density level*). The following four subdistricts were

categorised as a rural level in 2020: Sungai Tiram, Tanjong Kupang, Sedenak and Sungai Karang (Figure 1).

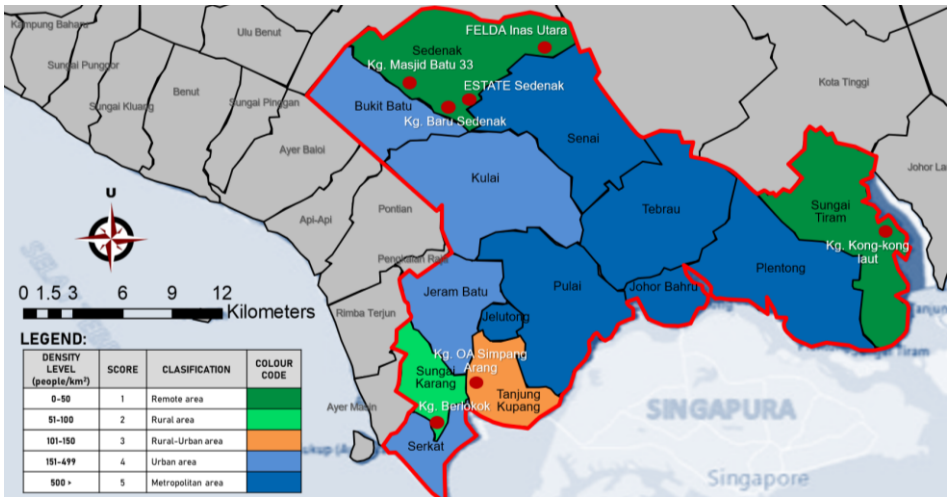

Figure 1: Location of seven (7) villages in Iskandar Malaysia

This research compares the wellbeing performances of the selected villages in Iskandar Malaysia. Primary data were obtained using a questionnaire to assess the wellbeing of households in rural communities. The survey was based on multiple sampling methods selected from four (4) selected subdistricts (Figure 1) and seven types of villages, namely traditional villages, fishery villages, planned villages, aboriginal villages, new villages, land settlement schemes, and estate settlements. In Johor, water villages are not identified in any location. The sample size consisted of 282 heads of households, using average of 4 households in Johor, with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error (Table 3).

Table 3: Selection of study area based on types of settlement.

Types of settlement	Sub-district	Name of village (kampung)	Total of population	Total respondent
Traditional village	Sungai Karang	Belokok	480	32
Land settlement scheme	Sedenak	FELDA Inas Utara	1209	81
Fishery village	Sungai tiram	Kong Kong Laut	224	15
Aboriginal village	Tanjung Kupang	Simpang Arang	738	50
Planned village	Sedenak	Jalan Masjid Batu 33	330	22
New village	Sedenak	Baru Sedenak	1100	74
Estate settlement	Sedenak	Ladang Sedenak	110	8
		Total	**4,191**	**282**

The study assessed the differences in wellbeing using a scale based on mean score analysis. The scale has five levels of overall household wellbeing

satisfaction: 0.00–2.00 (*very low*), 2.01–4.00 (*low*), 4.01– 6.00 (*moderate*), 6.01–8.00 (*high*), and 8.01–10.00 (*very high*). An F-test analysis (ANOVA) was employed to determine whether significant variations were present in wellbeing among different types of villages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic profiling of the respondents indicates that 36.88 percent are under the age group of 60–74 years, and 32.27 percent are under the age group of 45–59 years. In terms of level of education, 42.55 percent of the respondents are in the secondary-school category.

Table 4: Respondent Profiling

Variables	Variables	KSA	KKL	KBL	KLS	KJM	KFU	KBS	Total	%
Age	15-29	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	**5**	**1.77**
	30-44	23	3	10	2	9	16	17	**80**	**28.37**
	45-59	22	9	10	4	8	17	21	**91**	**32.27**
	60-74	4	3	10	0	4	48	35	**104**	**36.88**
	75 & Above	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	**2**	**0.71**
Education	No schooling	10	2	5	0	2	8	8	**35**	**12.41**
	Primary school	16	4	10	3	5	25	45	**108**	**38.30**
	Secondary School	23	8	16	5	14	48	6	**120**	**42.55**
	University and above	1	1	1	0	1	0	15	**19**	**6.74**

KSA (Kampung Simpang Arang), KKL (Kampung Kong Kong Laut), KBL (Kampung Belokok), KLS (Kampung Ladang Sedenak), KJM (Kampung Jalan Masjid Batu 33), KFU (Kampung FELDA Inas Utara), KBS (Kampung Baru Sedenak)

Recognising the differentiation of rural areas is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of any programme aimed at village revitalisation planning. Table 5 shows the findings based on five dimensions of rural community wellbeing in the seven villages.

Table 5: Analysis and findings of rural community's wellbeing

Dimension	Villages							F-test
	KSA	KKL	KBL	KLS	KJM	KFU	KBS	
Social Wellbeing	**6.12**	**6.03**	**6.45**	**7.28**	**6.94**	**7.20**	**4.95**	**0.000***
Trust in neighbours	7.72	7.80	7.62	8.25	8.18	8.30	7.35	0.000*
No discrimination between the people inside the village	6.60	7.13	7.87	7.62	7.50	7.69	7.22	0.016*
Involved in social organizations inside the village	5.18	2.93	4.81	6.75	5.95	6.52	1.82	0.000*
Engaging in activities and events	5.00	6.27	5.50	6.50	6.14	6.31	3.42	0.000*
Economic Wellbeing	**5.18**	**6.31**	**5.90**	**5.64**	**6.40**	**7.17**	**5.81**	**0.000***
Have good income	6.26	7.00	6.38	6.25	6.09	7.80	5.55	0.000*
Able to support a family well	5.90	7.20	6.47	6.63	6.59	7.81	5.54	0.000*
Residence environment	4.02	6.80	6.22	6.75	7.14	7.62	7.27	0.000*
Road infrastructure	8.02	8.33	7.41	4.13	8.23	8.70	8.01	0.000*
Have enough food for the family	6.22	7.67	7.06	7.13	7.64	7.89	7.15	0.000*
Practice balance diet	5.18	6.20	5.28	6.13	5.45	6.67	6.73	0.000*

Dimension	Villages							F-test
	KSA	KKL	KBL	KLS	KJM	KFU	KBS	
Public transports services	1.04	1.00	2.75	1.75	3.50	1.00	2.04	0.000*
Easy to get the goods and services	5.95	6.67	6.47	7.00	7.32	7.52	6.77	0.000*
Stable in occupation	5.84	7.00	5.91	6.88	5.95	7.72	5.16	0.000*
Ownership of electronic equipment	6.28	7.40	6.53	7.50	7.77	7.89	6.93	0.000*
Land ownership	1.72	3.20	4.13	1.75	3.68	7.90	2.86	0.000*
Vehicle ownership	5.84	7.27	6.28	5.88	7.50	7.59	5.82	0.000*
Physical Wellbeing	**6.10**	**6.32**	**6.00**	**7.21**	**6.91**	**5.90**	**5.77**	**0.000***
The ability to move	6.26	6.27	6.06	6.88	6.95	5.80	5.15	0.000*
Able to do heavy work	6.18	5.40	4.72	7.13	6.14	4.07	4.16	0.000*
Good level of health	8.50	7.47	6.63	8.38	7.05	6.69	6.93	0.000*
Accessible and adequate healthcare facilities	5.96	5.20	5.84	7.25	7.55	8.11	7.57	0.000*
Perceived criminality	5.54	8.67	7.50	7.25	8.14	4.58	5.84	0.000*
Healthy lifestyle	4.20	4.93	5.25	6.38	5.64	6.17	4.97	0.000*
Emotional Wellbeing	**5.99**	**5.41**	**5.97**	**5.81**	**6.06**	**7.17**	**4.76**	**0.000***
Satisfied with life	6.52	6.33	6.03	6.63	5.77	7.79	5.03	0.000*
Fulfilment of basic needs	6.98	7.73	7.25	7.38	7.36	9.00	7.30	0.000*
Local cultural activities involvement	5.06	1.20	4.22	3.00	5.14	5.11	1.74	0.000*
Frequency to places of worship	5.42	6.40	6.38	6.25	6.00	6.79	4.99	0.000*
Development Wellbeing	**4.86**	**4.13**	**4.09**	**4.77**	**5.24**	**5.86**	**4.19**	**0.000***
Government's welfare assistance	6.30	6.27	6.34	6.25	7.27	6.21	3.72	0.000*
Private sector or government in assistant business/ agriculture	4.22	1.67	1.38	1.00	1.59	3.81	1.39	0.000*
An additional source of income	1.38	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.81	1.39	0.007
Distance of recreational area	5.58	2.60	3.53	6.88	7.77	6.90	5.03	0.000*
The family has complete formal education	5.14	6.40	5.75	5.88	6.64	6.79	5.95	0.000*
Accessible to school	6.58	6.87	6.56	7.62	7.18	7.69	7.69	0.000*
Total	**5.65**	**5.64**	**5.68**	**6.14**	**6.31**	**6.66**	**5.09**	**0.000***

*Significant value at 0.05
KSA (Kampung Simpang Arang), KKL (Kampung Kong Kong Laut), KBL (Kampung Belokok), KLS (Kampung Ladang Sedenak), KJM (Kampung Jalan Masjid Batu 33), KFU (Kampung FELDA Inas Utara), KBS (Kampung Baru Sedenak)

Kampung FELDA Inas Utara, classified as a land settlement scheme village, achieved a score of 6.66. Similarly, Kampung Jalan Masjid Batu 33, categorized as a planned village, received a score of 6.31, while Kampung Ladang Hadapan, designated as an estate settlement, attained a score of 6.14. These scores indicate commendable performance at a very high level. Notably, Kampung FELDA Inas Utara is under land settlement scheme village recorded a high level of wellbeing satisfaction, particularly due to its exceptional performance across multiple dimensions, contributing to a remarkable overall performance index at the village level.

The finding implies that the village with the highest level of wellbeing comprises three essential dimensions: social wellbeing, economic wellbeing, and emotional wellbeing. In contrast, the remaining villages, including Kampung

Simpang Arang (5.65), Kampung Kong Kong Laut (5.64), Kampung Belokok (5.68), and Kampung Baru Sedenak (5.09) demonstrated relatively moderate levels of performance. The F-test analysis showed a significant difference between the types of villages in Malaysia through the indicators of economy (0.000*), social (0.000*), people (0.000*), culture (0.000*), and environment (0.000*). Thirty-two indicators were found to contribute to significant differences in the wellbeing of rural communities in different villages. The following key findings were based on five indicators of wellbeing:

a) Social Wellbeing Dimension

The involvement of household in social organisations within Kampung Kong Kong Laut (2.93) and Kampung Baru Sedenak (1.82) is notably low. This due to the absence of actively established social organizations in these villages, such as youth associations, women's groups, village councils, and others. Additionally, the low score in social activities at Kampung Baru Sedenak (3.42) could be attributed to the lack of active organizations that typically organize community events.

b) Economic Wellbeing Dimension

Economic wellbeing in Kampung Simpang Arang (5.18) is moderate due to the primary economic sector is fisheries. According to Tok Batin, the fish catch is uncertain due to developments around the village, such as sea embankments and high-impact projects. 20 percent of respondents work in the industrial sector show improvement in job opportunity. Electronic appliances also show improvement in rural communities, with all villages scoring moderately. Most houses have washing machines, televisions, refrigerators, and cell phones.

c) Physical Wellbeing Dimension

Physical wellbeing in both Kampung FELDA Inas Utara and Kampung Baru Sedenak is rated as moderate. A significant proportion of respondents, 70 percent in Kampung FELDA Inas Utara and seventy 3 percent in Kampung Baru Sedenak, are aged 45 years and above. This demographic profile suggests that there may be various physical challenges and health-related issues affecting their wellbeing. The higher proportion of older residents in these villages might contribute to a moderate score in physical wellbeing due to the potential presence of age-related health concerns.

d) Emotional Wellbeing Dimension

Kampung Baru Sedenak shows a lack of cultural activities within their community, as indicated by a low score of 1.75 in the local cultural

activities involvement indicator. In contrast, other villages actively preserve and promote their cultural heritage through various activities, including traditional music, attire, and wedding ceremonies.

e) Development Wellbeing Dimension

A significant majority of respondents, approximately 95 percent, receive government welfare assistance such as "*Bantuan Sara Hidup*" (cost of living aid). Furthermore, the agricultural sector benefits from support provided by the Department of Agriculture Malaysia, which aims to enhance productivity and create income opportunities for farmers. Registered fishermen also receive essential financial aid through the "*Elaun Sara Hidup Nelayan*" program by the Department of Fisheries Malaysia to sustain their livelihoods. However, despite these welfare efforts, nearby high-impact development projects have not translated into additional income for rural communities across all types of villages.

CONCLUSION

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the wellbeing of rural communities who were impacted by regional economic growth corridors is of utmost importance. There is differentiation in factors impacting household wellbeing based on different types of rural areas due to different locations, main economic activities and infrastructure. By addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by these communities, the goal is to contribute significantly to an improved quality of life and overall wellbeing because each village has its unique strengths, challenges, and development needs. This endeavour has the potential to create positive and sustainable impacts on the lives of the rural community due to achieving the aims of the policy.

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